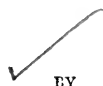


# THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*



BY

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# THE FOURTH BOOK OF MOSES

*CONTINUED.*

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## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we need thee ; our hearts cry out for thee as for the living God. Sometimes we do not care for thee, nor think of thee, much less seek thee with earnest determination ; but again we feel that without thee we are nothing and can do nothing, and that we need thee above all other needs ; then thou art our Father, Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend. These are the better times in the soul's history : they are full of joy and tenderness ; and though the great gladness sometimes touches tears, yet the very tears help the gladness which they endeavour to express. We need thee now ; we would see a light above the brightness of the sun ; we would stand very near to God and feel his breathing upon our hearts and his gentle touch upon our whole life ; and we would answer that conscious nearness by new vows of service and new oaths of loyalty. We would say again, with new strength of words and thought, that the Lord shall have all we are : for we are his : not our own, but bought with a price ; therefore, to glorify God shall be our one work, our one delight,—the immediate beginning of heaven. We bless thee that we can say this with our hearts. Once it would have been a strange tongue to us, and we should not have understood any one of the terms ; but now, being born not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, these words have become the tongue of our second nativity ; we speak them with the familiarity of love ; they express the soul's desire, they utter the inmost wish of the life. Sometimes we are tempted away, but it is only to return with more eager haste to the life we have deserted. There is no house like thine—so large, so secure, so full of light ; the very air a living song. We would feel its nearness and warmth and comfort now ; we would see written upon it everywhere—our Father's house—great welcomes of love bidding us eat and drink abundantly at our Father's table, that we may forget the weariness of the week and prepare for the battle of to-morrow. We bless thee for the first day of the week, when Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, came to see the sepulchre. We have come to see the risen Christ ; we have filled up the sepulchre with our joy, and gladness, and triumph : it is a garden of flowers. We would with our heart's vision see the risen Christ, throned now, King of kings, Lord of lords, with the wounds in his

hands, but his hands the mightier for the wounds. Grant us this vision, O Lord! Let us see heaven open. We know it is there; our faith sees it, our hope hovers around it like a bird that would enter into its nest; but we want to see heaven open,—just one rent, one glimpse, one gleam of light; then we shall be glad: we shall laugh in the valley, climb the mountain steeps with young feet, and there shall be no difficulty in our way that shall not tempt us to nobler strife and yield us deeper joy. We bless thee for those who have gone up nearer the light, nearer the throne, nearer the love that casts no one out who will put forth one trembling hand towards its great security. May we follow them as they followed Christ; may we have no fear of death: may we welcome it; though clothed in black and coming stealthily at midnight, yet may we know that the blackness and the stealth are but parts of the great plan written down in the ink of heaven. We are here but for a little time: we shall soon be told to go up into the mountain of Abarim, and there look and wait, and there fall back on the breast of God and die. May we so live that we may be missed: that people will look round for us, and say,—Where is the smile? where the strong hand? where the tender ministry? where the noble prayer? And yet may we so live as to ascend into nobler service and leave behind so strong an assurance of this ascension that friends will rise from their inquiry to complete their praise, giving thanks unto God for his crowned ones who have escaped the river of trouble. We thank thee for all tender comfort; though others may not seize it with gladness, we rejoice to be of the number of those who count such comfort necessary to the strength and the peace of life. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her iniquity is pardoned.” This voice we would hear. We could hear it only at the Cross; and at the Cross we now delight to find ourselves. O Saviour, have mercy on us! Risen Christ, pray for us! Advocate with the Father, forget not the name of the least of these little ones! May we hear thy prayer in our hearts; then shall we receive the Father’s answer. Let thy blessing be round about us, a morning within a morning, a morning above a morning,—a light that makes all other glory pale. Amen.

### Numbers xxvii. 1.

“Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.”

### MAHLAH, NOAH, HOGLAH, MILCAH, AND TIRZAH.

THESE are the names of five women; the five women were five sisters; the five sisters were daughters of a man called Zelophehad. This man had five girls, but no boys. He was a quiet man, and took no part in a certain great rebellion against the Lord, in which Korah and his company justly perished

This man Zelophehad died in his own bed; he had committed no public sins; he had only sinned in the usual way, and died in the usual way, and so far there was an end of him. One day these five women put their heads together on a family subject. There was something that disturbed them, took away their sleep, and made them grievously discontented. The result of their deliberation was that they determined to make a public speech, and a great audience they had, viz., Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and the princes, and all the congregation of Israel, and they stood by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and made their statement. They said, with wonderful conciseness of manner, keeping themselves strictly to facts, and coming to the point with admirable brevity:—Our father died in the wilderness: he was not one of those who took part in the sin of Korah; he died quietly, not tragically; he had no sons, and according to the present law of Israel the name of our father dies, and it is just as if he had never lived, though he has left five girls who bear his name and love his memory; now we ask you to look at this case; it is peculiar; see if anything can be done under such extraordinary circumstances; and give us, women though we be, give us a possession in Israel, give us property in the land, create a legal status for us amongst the brethren of our father. It was a practical speech, and, as our judges say, it started quite a novel point. It was for Moses to say what should be done, but he could not speak on the spur of the moment, so he took time to consider, and “brought their cause before the Lord.” The answer from heaven was,—Certainly: the women ask only for that which is right; thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them, and out of this particular instance there shall arise a new law of succession in Israel, “If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter, and if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren, and if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father’s brethren, and if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the Lord commanded Moses.” These are the circumstances which furnish us with our subject, and it will be

for us now to discover what there is in them to instruct and comfort us.

1. The rectification of things that are wrong sometimes seems to come from man and not from God. Look at this case. It was the women themselves who began the reform. Providence did not stir first. The five women gave this reform to the economy of Israel. So it would seem on the face of the story, and many people look at the face and go no farther, and so they blunder and lie. Suggestions are from God. The very idea which we think our own is not our own, but God's. "Every good gift and every perfect gift . . . cometh down from the Father of lights." He inspires the prayer which he means to answer. He says, Arise, when he is prepared to meet us. An idea occurs to you, and you think it admirable, and call it your own; you will change your policy; enlarge your business; go to another town; strike out another line: you will alter the machinery, patent an invention, introduce yourself to a firm, and you think this is all your own doing. That is the fatal error. "We are fellow-workers with God." "He is Lord of all,"—of all good ideas, noble impulses, holy inspirations, sudden movements of the soul upward into higher life and broader liberty. This is his plan of training men. He seems to stand aside, and to take no part in some obviously good movements, and men say, "This is a human movement, a political movement, a non-religious movement," not knowing what they are talking about,—forgetting that the very idea out of which it all sprang, came down from the Father of lights, that the very eloquence by which it is supported is divinely taught, that the very gold which is its sinew is his: they do not go far enough back in their investigation into the origin of things, or they would find God in movements which are often credited to human genius alone. We do not see all. The finest threadlets are hidden from us. Now and again, in a dream, we may catch a sight of the ladder connecting heaven and earth, but it is always there, the highway of angels, the path into the skies.

2. Everywhere the Bible is full of the very spirit of justice. It is the Magna Charta of the civilised world. This is the spirit that gives the Bible such a wonderful hold upon the confidence of mankind. Look at this case as an example. The applicants were women. All the precedents of Israel might have been

pointed to as the answer to their appeal. Why create a special law for women? Why universalise a very exceptional case? Why not put these people down as sensational reformers? Yet, the case was heard with patience, and answered with dignity. O women, you should love the Bible! It is your friend. It has done more for you than all other books put together. Wherever it goes it claims liberty for you, justice for you, honour for you. Repay its service by noble endeavour to make it everywhere known. Not only were the applicants women, they were *orphans*. Their father dead, no brother to take their part, nothing left them but the memory of a man dead and gone. Yet the God of the Bible is their friend. He says, "They are right." He will not break the bruised reed. The weak are as the strong before him, and the friendless as those who are set in families. A God so just, so pitiful, so mindful of individual cases and special desires, is the God who will save the world! This God of justice is the God of love. We shall see more of him as we go from page to page of his book; one day we may see him on a Cross dying for man! Give any nation the Bible, and let that nation make the Bible its statute book, and every class in the community will have justice: masters will be just to their servants; servants will be just to their masters; family peace will be protected; social relations will be purified; common progress will be guaranteed. This spirit of justice is the social strength of the Bible. No life is to be tampered with; the small cause as well as the great is to be heard; no kid is to be seethed in its mother's milk; no fruit tree is to be cut down even in time of war; no bird's nest is to be wantonly destroyed; all men are to be honoured, helped, and saved. A book with a tone like this should be protected from the sneers of persons who have never actually studied its ennobling pages.

3. Every question should become the subject of social sympathy and matter of religious reference. These women were heard patiently. It is something to get a hearing for our grievances. Sometimes those grievances perish in the very telling; sometimes the statement of them brings unexpected help to our assistance. This case is what may be called a secular one; it is about land and name and inheritance; and even that question was made in Israel simply a religious one. It



was not political. It was not an outside question. The Lord was King of Israel, and to the King the appeal must be made. Is Christianity farther from God than was Judaism? Are there some questions which we now take into our own hands? Does God take no interest in our merchandise, in our land, in our professions? Can he not still tell the physician what to do, the merchant what to buy, the mariner how to go, the lawyer how to plead? In ancient Israel, with its priestly system, men had to go to the leader and the priest first; in Christianity we can go straight to God; we have no priesthood but Christ; the way to the throne is open night and day. O wronged and suffering woman, tell thy case to the Father! O man, carrying a burden too heavy for thy declining strength, speak to God about the weight, and he will help thee with his great power.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

In no history can there be found, save in the Bible, an equal number of charming female portraits. But the formative influence of female character as seen in the Bible must be referred to the pure and lofty religious ideas which the Biblical books in general present. If woman there appears as the companion and friend of man, if she rises above the condition of being a bearer of children to that noble position which is held by the mother of a family, she owes her elevation in the main to the religion of Moses and that of Jesus. . . . Bringing to bear on the domestic ties his own doctrine of immortality, our Lord made the marriage bond co-existent with the undying soul, only teaching that the connection would be refined with the refinement of our affections and our liberation from these tenements of clay in which we now dwell (Matt. v. 32; xix. 3, *seq.*; xxii. 23, *seq.*). With views so elevated as these, and with affections of the tenderest benignity, the Saviour may well have won the warm and gentle hearts of Jewish women. Accordingly, the purest and richest human light that lies on the pages of the New Testament comes from the band of high-minded, faithful, and affectionate women who are found in connection with Christ from his cradle to his cross, his tomb, and his resurrection. These ennobling influences have operated on society with equal benefit and power. Woman, in the better portions of society, is now a new being. And yet her angelic career is only just begun. She sees what she may be, and what under the gospel she ought to be; and ere very long, we trust, a way will be found to employ in purposes of good energies of the finest nature, which now waste away from want of scope, in the ease and refinements of affluence, if not in the degradations of luxury—a most precious offering made to the Moloch of fashion, but which ought to be consecrated to the service of that God who gave these endowments, and of that Saviour who has brought to light the rich capabilities, and exhibited the high and holy vocation, of the female sex.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God**, teach us that a man must first come to himself before he can come to thee. Give us a considering mind. Help each of us to look at himself as he really is, and to spare no searching into his condition, so that he may come to know that from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot all is wrong. We are only driven to prayer by hunger; we are turned towards heaven by pain and sharpness of discipline; for wherein we tread green pastures and rich wheatfields we soon become foolish, waxing fat and kicking against God. We are arrested by poverty; we are made to think by sickness; when the pain and fear of solitude seize the soul, then we begin to grope for thee. All this has meaning in it. Thou hast many servants; thy ministry is an incalculable host; fire, and sword, and vapour, and hail, and thick cloud, and all the beasts of the field are thine, and the stars in their courses fight against evil men, and the whole creation sets itself upon thy side. Thou hast made all things to wound the evil-doer. Thy universe becomes a serpent to bite the man who thrusts himself through a hedge. This is glorious;—it is security; it is a proof of eternal defence. Thy throne is set in verity and judgment, and cannot be overturned; and they who set themselves against thee shall at last be flung down in mortal defeat. No man can fight against God and conquer. Thou art the Lord of hosts, the God of battle,—a man of war; and to thy thunder there is no reply. But how good thou art to those that show themselves towards thee as children! Then thy grace is higher than heaven, more beautiful than summer, more persuasive than all we have ever known of music; then all things support and comfort them, and promise them immortality and heaven. May we be found in Christ; may we be found at the Cross; may our attitude be one of adoration and expectancy; and may our souls be satisfied with the words of heaven. We bless thee for a hunger which earth cannot appease, for a thirst which can drink up the rivers, and still be mad with the sensation of fire. This is our immortality; this is the declared image and likeness of God. Pity us wherein we are weak and foolish, and vain and self-considering; and pardon us wherein we are guilty before God of the breach of the whole law, and let the ministry of the Cross avail to redeem and reinstate, and to rekindle in the heart the lamp of hope. Be merciful unto us—yea, so condescending as to touch us, to sit beside us, to breathe upon us, to explain secretly the word to our attentive hearts; and may we know of a surety that the Lord is near by a burning heart, a glowing love, an irrepressible desire to ascend into heavenly places, and a deep and sacred contempt for everything that would draw us downward, and fix our vision on perishable things. Amen.

### Numbers xxvii. 12-23.

12. And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel.

13. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.

14. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.

15. And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying,

16. Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

17. Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

18. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

19. And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.

20. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

21. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

22. And Moses did as the Lord commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation:

23. And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

### MOSES ORDERED TO ABARIM.

**H**ERE is a man receiving notice to prepare for death. We need not stumble at this reading as if it involved any impossibility, for if we were keener in vision, and more sensitive in response to providential intimations, we ourselves should know that it is quite common on the part of God to give men notice to quit this dark and narrow scene. The notice comes in various ways; but it certainly does come. We have the condemnation of death in ourselves. We know what we cannot always tell to other people. We are conscious of influences and actions which point in the direction of decay. Some men begin very early to die. That is wise. Dying should not be an act of closing the eyes in one little moment which is beyond the range of our reckoning. We may begin so soon to

die as not to die at all. We should be familiar with death, and so reverently and religiously familiar with it as to abolish it. Marvellous wonders can be done by expectation, by preparation, by accustoming the mind to certain issues and facts, so that when they transpire in the one critical moment which marks our history, we shall be superior to the event; the event which was expected to strike us on the head will sweep beneath our feet and pass on without leaving mark of wound or defeat upon us.

When we read these words we could amend the providence. It is marvellous how God exposes himself in Providence to adverse criticism. Only he could do this. Wooden gods make mechanical arrangements, and in their clockwork no flaw must be found, or down goes their deity. Never was any government so open to adverse comment as the government of the human family. Where is there a man so dull of mind that he could not amend the ways of God? God lets little children die before they can speak—poor little speechless things that can only look their pain or smile their love. He allows good lives to pass away in the night time, so that in the morning they cannot be found. He permits vice for a time to ascend the highest places in the State, and to exercise the largest influence in human affairs, when he knows all the time that virtue is standing outside shivering with cold, wet with the dews of night,—homeless, breadless, friendless. We cannot improve the sky, but who could not improve the earth? We cannot paint a lily without spoiling its beauty, but who could not raise into finer expressiveness of strength almost any human life? Things are so roughly huddled together. The men that ought to live a thousand years die before they touch the maturity of their strength; and gates that creak, creak on for ever, and lives destitute of fire and genius and nobleness, seem to be immortal. Why should Moses die? How we shall miss that man! It will be a sunset full of trouble. We do not want *him* to go,—let Balaam die, if the heavens must needs look down on death. Balaam is a mighty man, a man of genius, of avarice and sensuality, combining the passions,—why should not *he* die? He has been slain with the sword; but why might not he have been taken up to a mountain and made a specimen of in some grander way?

Not only does the Lord expose himself to adverse criticism, but he offends us morally. "For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin" (v. 14). This makes us impatient. The punishment is out of proportion to the sin. These are little words; they take out of the occasion all its dignity. We are shocked. If the sin was so great, it should have been visited at the time. We ourselves being witnesses are bound to say Moses has deserved any Canaan under heaven. We must not allow our brother man to be run thus to earth. How, then, can we rid ourselves of the moral offence—the pain of soul—which afflicts us? By remembering that the fourteenth verse is really not in the history at all. The *Speaker's Commentary* very justly says this appears like a gloss. Even those who are not scholars feel that these words have no right to be here. We read on as if God were about to crown the man and to give him rest, saying,—Noble soldier! thou hast done valiantly: come home and partake of the feast and enjoy the security of the immortals;—instead of which, we begin to read about rebellion that happened long ago, and passions that had died out of the human heart, if ever they raged there. The words were written on the margin. We go back to find reasons for things, and with our blundering pens we often write on the margin our own condemnation. We will insert marginalia; we like to account for events. So, when some scribe had heard that Moses had been ordered into the mount of Abarim to see the land and hear the message of God, he began to wonder why; and then, going back in history, he found out the occasion of the rebellion in the desert of Zin, at the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, and accounted for the order to Abarim by that historical event. Do not let us attempt to account for everything. It is unprofitable work. Our great sphere of service, duty, and suffering is in the future. We shall find, in the long run, that those things, even in the divinest books, which have shaken our confidence, or offended our conscience, were only scribblings on the margin made by some ill-guided hand. Yet Moses himself might have written those very words,—as we ourselves have done, on lower scales and on

meaner occasions. When we have been driven into isolation, or had some heavy loss imposed upon us, or have been brought into very critical and bewildering situations, we have sat down to find the reason why, and in many a diary we have written this spiritual nonsense. We have thought of reasons, and magnified them, and fixed dates for events and causes for effects; and in the midst of our wisdom we have played the fool. The way of the Lord is right, and his judgment is good; verity and grace are the pillars of his throne.

All these things, which we mourn as untimely events, suggest that this life cannot be all. We are driven to that conclusion by events when we endeavour to resist it by logic. When the great preacher died at thirty-seven years of age, in the very act of retranslating the Bible into the latest speech of religious civilisation, we said,—This is very hard. When the great missionary was just about to put on the top-stone of the temple he had built, and was taken away before he saw it finished, we said,—This is cruelty, whoever did it. When the great leader has been smitten down just when the occasion became insufferably critical, and he alone seemed to have the power to overcome every difficulty, our hearts have sunk within us, and we have been too sorrowful to pray. Then we have had forced upon us the suggestion that this life cannot be all: there must be a place of explanation, there must be a time of enlightenment, there must be a heaven of reconciliation.

See how much out of place the fourteenth verse appears to be when Moses himself speaks:—"And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (vv. 15-17). That prayer vindicates the character of Moses,—a shepherdly prayer, an unselfish desire. He will not appoint one of his own family; he will have nothing to do with the thing personally and directly; it shall be God's action—for it is God's Church, and he alone can make the bishop, the minister, and the guardian of the redeemed. In this very prayer Moses shows how appreciative he was of the difficulties of the situation. The only man who could undertake

the work must be a divinely-selected and a divinely-appointed man. We cannot raise our leaders out of the ground: we must receive them from the opening heavens. If they can pray, they are God's gift to us; if they can speak the Word in small syllables so that little children may pick up somewhat of heavenly wisdom, they are God's great donations to the race. Herein is that word true,—“I proceeded forth and came from God”; and herein, also, is that word true of the lesser servant,—“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” Moses held his office from the Lord. Every man must hold his appointment from the same hands, or he will be a hireling, tiring very early in the day, discontented with the service, stung by its disappointments, and overwhelmed by its responsibilities. Only Omnipotence can sustain a ministry of redemption.

Look for the consolations. They are abundant, but they can only be indicated by one or two examples. This interview took place between the Lord and Moses. Even if the sin was mentioned, it was mentioned in a whisper. Moses is not dragged forth before the whole congregation of Israel and condemned as an evil-doer. It was a secret interview. Jesus Christ had a secret interview with Simon Peter, who had denied him; they talked together on the lonely sea-shore, and what they said no man can tell. Moses was then honoured in the sight of Israel. “The Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him” (v. 18). This does not read as if the sin were the active cause in the premature removal of Moses. The Lord recognises the whole ministry of his servant, and connects him with the past and with the future of Israel. “And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation” (v. 19). Joshua was not called as Moses was called. Moses had his commission direct from the Most High; he was priest before Aaron prayed; but all other leaders are to be appointed otherwise, and have to pass the priestly recognition and receive the priestly touch. The Lord adds: “and give him a charge in their sight.” This is not pouring contempt upon Moses; this is not visiting a sin upon the great and chivalrous leader;—this is giving him crown upon crown, honour upon honour. This is the reading that the heart answers; the spirit of man says,—This is the work of God. “And thou shalt put

some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord" (vv. 20, 21). So Moses was still the leader of Israel. Good men are not cut off ruthlessly. Such a sun as this is not allowed to set amid thunder-clouds and tokens of trouble. The man who thus closed his history did not die;—let him go with his Lord somewhere, and let him pass upward without first going downward. It was the right end. The very mystery was part of the goodness; the concealment enlarged the dignity. They go well together, these two—even the Lord and Moses; it is right that Moses should thus pass away. Do we ever hear of him again? We read of him in the account of the Transfiguration of Christ in another mountain. Moses and Elias appeared unto the Son of God to talk of the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem—another Exodus. Moses had written one Exodus,—Christ was to accomplish the spiritual decess or outgoing—leading forth into liberty those who were held in the bondage of death. Do we ever hear of him at a remoter period of history? You will find the answer in the Revelation of John the Divine. When the seer listened to what was proceeding in heaven, he heard there the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. There is no speech about the sin in the desert of Zin, or the waters of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." God does not name their sins to his servants when they are about to die; He speaks to them of immortality, of heaven and higher service, of perfect and imperturbable rest. There is only one kind of forgiveness impossible, and that is self-forgiveness. God can forgive, but man cannot forgive himself; and it will be no wonder if in the dying time even what may be called the least sins should blot out the light of heaven: they will appear to be so great when looked at in contrast with the purity of God. Moses may have written the fourteenth verse, some scribe may have written it,—it is not in the flow of the text, it is upon the margin of the book—a suggested reason, rather than a divine visitation. If God were to mark our sins in this way, who could live? If man were to die for one sin, what man would be



living? Read the whole passage together in its noble scope, its broad and urgent flow of thought and sentiment and sacred consolation, and you will find how God dismisses his servants: he gives them honour in the sight of the people; he crowns them on earth before he crowns them in heaven; the testimony they are enabled to leave behind them is an ascription of praise to him who sustained their life and energy. "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." We wanted Moses to remain; we would have made him king of Canaan; we would have had a glad day when we touched the promised land together; the old man should still have been chief: we would have chaired him and throned him and gathered round him, and shouted acclaims of recognition and thankfulness and delight. That is the little heaven we would have made for him; and because God meant him for a greener Canaan, a fairer paradise, a larger sphere of service and worship, we complain, or wonder, or suspect. Have we lost dear friends? Let us weep for ourselves, not for them. Have we stood at the grave, wondering how deep it is and how dark and awful? Let us rather look up into the blue heavens, rich with morning glory, and say concerning dearest loved ones,—They are not in the grave, they are risen. "Risen" is a height which has no measurement, an altitude that may go up for ever,—a word of poetry rather than of literal definition. Risen!—always rising—still ascending. Inquire for the liberated soul at any moment, go back to the point where last you left him, and some angel will say,—“He is not here. he is risen”;—a speech worthy of an angel.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast called us to the tent of meeting. We heard thy voice in the night time, and it spake of morning—morning life, and morning hope, and morning hymns of praise. We were not disobedient to the heavenly trumpet; we heard its call, we answered its peal; we are here in the appointed place, and we wait the revelation of thy presence. Thou wilt not disappoint the expectation of love; thou wilt hasten to meet us; and whilst we are crying for thee to come, thou wilt prove by some touch, or glance, or odour of unknown flowers, that thou wert in the place before us, and waiting for those who supposed they were crying for thee. Thou art the first alway; no man may be in front of God. Thou art in the tent of meeting night and day; our coming is thy coming. Thou knowest our thought afar off, and before it is shaped into a purpose, behold, thou art standing at the altar. Thou hast called us all our life long: sometimes suddenly, always graciously, yea, though it has been along thorny ways, and up steep roads, and down amongst the stony places. Judging by these things, we have said,—Surely the Lord hath not called us to these difficulties and burdens; he hath no pleasure in tears, and can find no delight in the distress of weakness. So our ignorance spake; we knew not what we said: how could we? We know nothing; we are affrighted at the sound of our own voices: we feel as if in the company of someone unknown, when our own voice smites the ear. But we have lived to know that thy trumpet calls in all directions: to festival, to battle, to wedding banquets, and to mournful scenes. The trumpet is God's, the tone is God's, the tone is full of meaning—varied according to thy purpose. We know all the meaning, though we cannot put it into words: we know the thunder, and have no pleasure in the sullen storm; we know the falling of the rain, and we bless thee that thou givest drink to the thirsty land; we know the sound of young voices, and take heart again under their silvery music. Speak, Lord, thy servants hear. If thou hast aught to say that the mid-day may not hear, and only the midnight can receive, call us up, that in the silence of eternity we may learn some lesson for the days of time. If thou canst speak to us in the great city, amidst tumult and roar, thy voice shall find its way to our heart, and we shall learn lessons of wisdom in the place of tumult and noise. We want to hear no other voice; we know thine by wisdom of our heart; we answer it as we answer none other—with a glowing love, a spontaneous and vehement affection and trust. In this response we know that the joy of heaven begins. To answer thee is to gather strength for the duty which is imposed; to put forth the withered hand at thy bidding is to see it fully restored. We would do all thy bidding;

we would carry out thine instructions to the letter; in all our ways we would acknowledge God, that our paths may be directed. We bless thee for this consciousness that thou art always speaking to us. We will listen for thee; we will hush almost the beating of our heart, lest we miss one tone of thy gospel. When we do not know which way to go, let us hear a voice in our ear saying,—This is the way, walk ye in it. And when the roads are many in number, crossing one another in thick perplexity, let a light shine upon the road we ought to take, and we shall know that light to be the finger of God. We have walked upon wrong roads, but thou hast brought us back again. The wrong road is the heavy one; there is no rest in it: it does not go towards gardens, and still waters, and green pastures; but towards widening deserts, great wildernesses, and mockeries of stone. But thou hast called us home, and thy call has been an infinite persuasion. In obedience to it we stand before thee, claiming the name of Christ, trusting in the Cross of Christ, cleansed by the blood of Christ, made free by the Spirit of Christ. This is not our own doing; that we are here at all is God's miracle. Our hearts love the darkness and the tumult, and the altar of self-idolatry; and now that we find ourselves in God's house, and at Christ's Cross, we know that the victory is Heaven's. Regard all for whom we ought to pray. Thou needest not to be reminded of them, but by allowing us to think of them in prayer, thou dost ennoble and refine our love. Be with those who are in difficult places. Look pitifully upon men who cannot find the key of the high iron gate, or scale that gate—who are standing outside barred against progress and liberty. Look upon those who are fighting ill-fated battles, to whom the morning brings no hope and the night no rest—baffled, disappointed, sorely stricken. The Lord grant unto the soldier in the day of battle, and of fear, and of death too certain, confidence in right and truth and God. Pity those whose homes are battle-fields, though the war be fought many a mile away, for at home men die over again, and still worse death is died because of distance, imagination, and aggravated trouble. Comfort those to whom men may not speak, because of the sacredness of sorrow. Regard those who are on the sea, as if pursued by the winds, as if the storm were wreaking vengeance upon them, and tearing their frail ship to pieces; the Lord plant his footsteps on the sea, and make the storm a trumpet softening into gospel tones and filled with meaning which the heart alone can comprehend. Bring back the traveller; make his face radiant with joy; take the age out of his limbs, and let him run with the vigour of youth. Speak to the dying, and they shall not die. Touch the old man, and he will forget his earth-age in the hope of heavenly youth. Pardon our sin; it will make thy heaven higher if thou dost pardon penitent men—yea, thine own Sabbath shall have a deeper calm because of this miracle of love. Bind our hearts together—man and wife, parent and child, employer and employed, friend and friend; consolidate the people; fill them with the Spirit of Christ, in which Spirit there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, circumcised nor uncircumcised; but an infinite life of pureness, and love and hope. Amen.

## Numbers xxxii. 1-5.

1. Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle;

2. The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying,

3. Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon,

4. Even the country which the Lord smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle:

5. Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.

## REUBEN AND GAD.

THIS is too often the prayer of prosperous men. They find upon the earth what they regard as heaven enough. Having found plenty of pasturage and deep wells of water, they say,—This is enough,—why not build here, and here remain during the rest of our lives? This has, sometimes, quite a religious look; it seems to breathe the spirit and to bear the image of a serene and pious content. They would leave whatever is beyond Jordan to other people; they are quite willing to let well alone; give them grass enough, cattle enough, water enough, and who will may pass beyond the river and realise the mystery of the unseen. Is it not so written in the history of nearly every man to whom a considerable measure of prosperity has been accorded? Yet how he soliloquises and lets out the bitter truth in his mournful talk! Says he,—If I could be rid of this pain, I should be quite content to toil year after year and age after age upon the green and sunny earth;—if I could extract the sting of this one disappointment, I should be in all the heaven I need;—if I could see the prodigal return, and so complete the circle of the family, so that there might be no vacant chair in the house, I should order music and dancing and fatted calf, and enter into the inheritance of all the joy I shall ever require. So, when he talks over the *matériel* of his estate, we find everywhere the slimy line, the touch of weakness, the signature of guilt; and the whole speech, which was meant to be so musical, is broken up, to the ear

which can hear its inner sounds, into dissonances that distress the soul. We will not let God alone: we will punctuate him by our mischievous suggestions. He is writing a long book,—there are hundreds of pages yet to be added to it; yet, when we come to some little amusing paragraph, or some grand and solemn period, we arrest the divine pen and practically say,—Write no more: put the full stop here. This is so profoundly human as to constitute a continual temptation to many men. If they could but double their income, they would sigh for no bluer heaven;—if they could but have health without increasing the income—simply increase of physical energy,—they would desire no better paradise than they can find on earth. Who likes to cross the Jordan that lies before every man? It is a black river, so deep and so cold, and altogether so mysterious;—better be content even with a little hut on this side than plunge into that awful stream. There is a point at which it becomes very difficult to say to God,—We are still ready to go on; whatever next may come—great wilderness, or cold river, or high stony mountain,—we are still ready to go on; thy will be done, and thy way be carried out to its last inch. Yet, until we reach the resignation which becomes triumph and the triumph which expresses itself—not in loud sentiment, but in quiet and deep obedience, we have not begun to realise the meaning of the kingdom of heaven.

What was the answer of Moses?—"Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" (v. 6). It was a soldier's taunt; it was a tremendous retort to those who could read between the lines and to those who understood the lower tones of human suggestion and reproof. It was not a question put for consideration; it was a question and an answer in one—an interrogative tone, a query,—long, sharp, terrible as a sword forged in heaven. The matter was not put before Reuben and Gad for purposes of consideration and debate and the statement of reasons on the one side or the other. "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" What suggestion there is in the colour of every tone! What sublime mockery! What a hint of cowardice! What an infliction of judgment upon meanness! Sometimes the only way in which we can put a rational rebuke is in the form of an inquiry. We remit the case to its original pro-

pounders, and by putting the case into the form of an interrogation we confound their counsels. It is well to hear how other men can put our case. We may talk ourselves into sophistical conclusions ; we may become so accustomed to our own voice as to be quite enamoured with it, and to regard it as the dual voice of the plaintiff and the defendant. It is good to hear how other men take up our words and send them back with new accent and new colouring. The answer of Moses was instantaneous ; it was a quick, sudden spark ; it was a question which revealed his own mettle, as well as tested the quality of Reuben and Gad ; it never occurred to his martial soul that any man could sit down whilst a battle was to be fought—whilst a conquest was to be won ; so, he expressed his amazement, and perhaps his contempt, in the form of a martial inquiry.

But there was more to be considered. "And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?" (v. 7). Take the word "discourage" in any sense, and it is full of meaning. Perhaps a stronger word might have been inserted here—a word amounting to aversion and utter dislike to the idea of going forward. Our actions have social effects. There are no literal individualities now ; we are not separate and independent pillars ;—we are parts of a sum-total ; we are members one of another. Consider the social effects of certain actions. It is possible for men to say,—We will not go to church ; we have really outgrown the whole idea represented by the Church ;—not that it is a vicious idea, but by culture, by reading, by progress of every kind, we have practically outgrown the Church ;—we will sit down outside in the wood where the birds sing, by the stream where the wild flowers grow, clear out in the blue morning ; and there we will be glad with a kind of mute religiousness. Does the matter end there ? Finding you sitting outside, what are those who have not outgrown the Church to do ? It is easy for you to say they should go on ; but you have miscalculated your own influence : you have undervalued your own social importance. When men like you do certain things, your doing of them must have an effect upon inferior minds. It might be well, perhaps, to sacrifice yourselves somewhat, lest you discourage other men, or avert their attention from those

things to which you, may be, owe more of your own manhood than you are at first disposed to acknowledge. A great deal is assumed in this reasoning—namely, that a man *can* outgrow the Church. Personally, I have never known a man outgrow the sublimity of prayer; I have never seen a man who need no longer sing God's praise; but for purposes of argument, assuming that outside the Church you can find room for your cattle, pasture for your flocks, water enough for all the purposes of your life, remember that you are not all Israel or the sum-total of humanity, and that sometimes even persons who have outgrown the Church—at least, in their own estimation—would show the better side of their nature by sacrificing themselves and passing through a process which may amount to tedium, rather than repel, discourage, or avert men who have not yet attained that sublimity of mental altitude or moral compass. The answer of Moses was not only military but shepherdly. At first, he taunted Reuben and Gad with being cowards, and then, with a shepherd's solicitude, thinking of the larger Israel, he said,—How can ye discourage the hearts of your brethren, and hinder them morally from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?

Then Moses utilised history. Beginning at the eighth verse, and going to the thirteenth, Moses brings to bear upon Reuben and Gad a tremendous historical impeachment, commencing—“Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land” (v. 8). They belonged, therefore, to an ancestry not only physically but morally akin. Who can tell the origin of the desires, ambitions, propositions, and programmes of his life? The past speaks in the present. Our fathers come up in a kind of resurrection in our own thinking and our own propositions. Meanness of soul is handed down; disobedience is not buried in the grave with the man who disobeyed. This is a broad law; were it rightly understood and applied, many a man's conduct would be explained which to-day appears to be quite inexplicable. Appetites descend from generation to generation; diseases may sleep through one generation, and arise in the next with aggravated violence. Men should take care what they do. The great scheme of life—whether it be a scheme invented by chance or originated and governed by God—asserts, in the soul of it, a principle of criticism and judgment and

penalty, which makes the strongest men afraid. Argument is, of course, lost where the heart is predisposed to evil. There are men who would drink wine if they knew by a writing of heaven that all their progeny would through that act go to the devil; argument has no relation to such men: the fire that is within them consumes all reasoning, as the open volcano might consume a shower of rain. Still, there may be some who have not gone so far along that ruinous line, and to them this word of caution may be fittingly addressed: What you do will reappear in your posterity. No man liveth unto himself; no man dieth unto himself. In the name of an unborn generation; in the name of children who may be born and may live to curse you, beware, be wise; you are sowing seed which will bring forth a disastrous harvest.

Then Reuben and Gad said they would fight:—they would build sheepfolds for their cattle, and cities for their little ones: but they themselves would go ready-armed before the children of Israel, until they had brought them unto their place: and then their little ones should dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. They said, in these plain words,—“We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward” (vv. 18, 19). Moses said, in effect,—So be it: if you complete the battle, you shall locate yourselves here: but you must complete the battle, and when the conquest is won, you may return and enjoy what you can here of green things and flowing water; but, let me tell you, “if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord;” this is not a covenant between you and me—between man and man; but your sin will be against the Lord, “and be sure your sin will find you out.” The matter was not easily arranged; Heaven was invoked, tones of judgment were employed, a covenant was entered into which bore the seal eternal. That law still continues. Supposing there to be no Bible, no altar, no invisible judgment-seat, no white throne,—as has been conceived by sacred poetry—there is still, somehow, at work, in this mysterious scheme of things, a law of a constabulary kind, which arrests the evil-doer, which makes the



glutton sick, which makes the voluptuary weak, which stings the plotter in the very time which he had planned for his special joy. There is—account for it as we may—a ghostliness that looks upon us through the cloud, so that we feel the blood receding from the face, or feel it returning in violent torrents, making the face red with shame. But there is the law, give it what name we may, shuffle out of religious definitions as we like: the wrong-doer lays his head on a hard pillow; the bad man stores his property in unsafe places. This may not seem to be so to-day, or to-morrow, or the third day; but that it is so in the long run and summation of things, history has too clearly testified to leave the matter open to wordy disputation.

The relations were thus settled; Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh would locate themselves as inhabitants of cis-Jordan, Israel might become inhabitants of trans-Jordan. We remember Lot having made a very fortunate choice. With a sharp keen commercial eye he saw the country was well-watered; so he said he would locate himself there, and his uncle Abram might go where he pleased. Lot seemed to have the best of it. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh seem to have escaped very considerable possibilities of misadventure,—they had a bird in the hand, and they thought that bird better than any two that might be in the trans-Jordan bush. There was no mistake about the land—its greenness, its fruitfulness, its plentiful supply of water and its favourable conditions generally. It was indeed a very excellent bargain. As to fighting, by this time they had become so accustomed to it that fighting itself was a kind of recreation; they would soon complete what was required in the way of battle; then they would come back to the cis-Jordan heaven. Listen! Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were among the very first that were taken captives by the king of Assyria! Separate not yourselves from the Father; do not set up little heavens of your own; fall into the great harmony of things; be part of “the whole family, in heaven and on earth;” and the end will justify the wisdom of the choice. “Wisdom is justified of all her children.” What is God’s plan? Where would he have me located? If I can receive an answer to that inquiry, that answer shall determine my policy and course. There may be no

individual reply; we may have to study the history of the Church and acquaint ourselves with the direction of a certain grand historical line, and we may have to learn to hold our tongues in moments of temptation and to keep down our ambition, when we think we see the throne which we could easily seize and permanently occupy. The solemn lesson—yet a lesson full of sacred and tender joy—is, that the bounds of our habitation are fixed; the place of our feet is appointed: the very ground in which the grave shall be dug is already outlined. We have nothing to do with things which offend, vex, and harass our attention and our noblest faculties. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” We have one business; and when we are consecrated to it, devoted to it; when we have settled down to it with concentrated energy, and men ask us to explain our “fanaticism,” our reply is prepared, our reply is divine,—“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

The Reubenites, like their relatives and neighbours on the journey, the Gadites, had maintained through the march to Canaan, the ancient calling of their forefathers. The patriarchs were “feeding their flocks” at Shechem when Joseph was sold into Egypt. It was as men whose “trade had been about cattle from their youth” that they were presented to Pharaoh, and in the land of Goshen they settled “with their flocks and herds and all that they had.” Their cattle accompanied them in their flight from Egypt, not a hoof was left behind. The tribes who were destined to settle in the confined territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan had, during the journey through the wilderness, fortunately relinquished their taste for the possession of cattle, which they could not have maintained after their settlement at a distance from the wide pastures of the wilderness. Thus the cattle had come into the hands of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manassch, and it followed naturally that when the nation arrived on the open downs east of the Jordan, the three tribes just named should prefer a request to their leader to be allowed to remain in a place so perfectly suited to their requirements. When the Reubenites and their fellows approach Moses with their request, his main objection is that by what they propose they will discourage the hearts of the children of Israel from going over Jordan into the land which Jehovah had given them. It is only on their undertaking to fulfil their part in the conquest of the western country, the land of Canaan proper, and thus satisfying him that their proposal was grounded in no selfish desire to escape a full share of the difficulties of the conquest, that Moses will consent to their proposal.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD,** thou art the God of our life. Our life is hidden with God in Christ. In God we live and move and have our being. Without Christ, we can do nothing: we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can we bear fruit except we abide in Christ. Did he not say,—“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman”? We are but branches,—thank God, we are branches. No man can pluck away the branch; it abides by its fruitfulness, and, being fruitful, it is eternal. Prune us, if thou wilt, that we may bring forth more fruit. Do with us as thou pleasest, for we are not husbandmen; we will submit intelligently, lovingly, hopefully. We know thy purpose: thou dost not wound even the branch merely to give pain: thou dost cut that we may be improved; thine object is purification, enlargement, health, immortality. God’s will be done; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Then shall we be fruitful branches, and the Lord shall have pleasure in our abundance. We thank thee for this life. Now and again we find a fountain in it, and we sing gladly. Sometimes we find no well, and there is nothing but hot sand, and a disappointing sky without cloud or hint of rain; and then we are gloomy, sad of heart, and apt to be rebellious of will. Then the old man dies, and we say,—The head of Israel is cut off, and the remainder must decay. So, we are led on from station to station, from point to point, in all the curious way;—may we ever see the lamp of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud by day; then no matter where we are, we are still on the right road, under God’s guidance, and, at last, we shall find house and home and welcome in heaven. The Lord’s light be on us a perpetual summer, our Father’s blessing be upon us a continual delight, and the Cross of Christ ever magnify itself above our sin, and the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son ever show its preciousness as applied to the sins of the soul.

This is our prayer, our psalm of adoration and thankfulness, our anthem of triumph and hope; whilst we say, on earth, Amen, do thou, in heaven, say Amen.

### Numbers xxxiii. 1-49.

1. These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

2. And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord: and these are their journeys according to their goings out.

**THE JOURNEYS OF ISRAEL.**

THIS chapter gives a very graphic and instructive picture of a much larger scheme of journeying. The local names may mean nothing to us now, but the words "departed," "removed," "encamped," have meanings that abide for ever. We are doing in our way, and according to the measure of our opportunity, exactly what Israel did in this chapter of hard names and places mostly now forgotten. Observe, this is a written account:—"And Moses wrote their goings out." The life is all written. It is not a sentiment spoken without consideration and forgotten without regret: it is a record—a detailed and critical writing, condescending to geography, locality, daily movement, position in society and in the world. It is, therefore, to be regarded as a story that has been proved, and that will bear to be written and rewritten. Who would write again a mere dream? Who would spend ink upon so vapoury a thing as a nightmare? If Israel had passed through the Red Sea in some distorted dream, would Moses have cared to make actual history of it—at least, in form and expression, for there is no hint in all the story that the man is parabolising or drawing upon a vivid and masterful imagination? The whole experience has been long past, and here it is recalled and set down with a firm hand, without hesitancy or staggering. Here it stands like stern history, plain fact,—something that did actually and positively occur. Men may write about miracles so frequently as to divest them of the element which first touched surprise and awakened suspicion through the medium of the imagination. We may read of miracles until we lose their pomp and their meaning. But life is a miracle: every day is a sign from heaven. We have outgrown the infantile mind which could only see miracles in form and hear them in noise and be amazed at them in tumult and earthquake and varied violence, and now we see the meant-miracle, the ever-intended wonder, of life coming out of death, light springing upon darkness and chasing it away with victorious power, as if one bright beam could slay a million nights. So now, in the absence of startling phenomenon and tumult and vision apocalyptic, we see in quiet-

ness itself a miracle, in light a token, in summer the wonder-working power of the loving God. Life is twice written. We have amongst us what are termed, by some stretch of imagination occasionally encroaching upon the impossible, "biographers." It is a complimentary term. Biography is, in the deepest and truest sense, impossible. A man cannot write his own life: he can but hint at it, and the only surprise he can feel, when he has finished the page, is amazement at its emptiness. Yet it is good for a man to put down the facts of his life. His birthplace should be dear to him, as also the place where he fought his early battles, and won his first victories, and opened his first gates, and saw his first chances, and struggled in the agony of his first prayers, and seized with the hand of faith the first blessings of heaven meant for his soul's nurture and strengthening; and it is good to continue the page, fill it up, turn it over, and to go on to the new page, and charge the whole book with memories intended to express amazement and thankfulness. The one perfect Biographer is God. Every life is written in the book that is kept in the secret places of the heavens. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Nothing is omitted. The writing is plain—so plain that the blind man may read the story which God has written for his perusal. Who would like to see the book? Who could not write a book about his brother that would please that brother? Without being false, it might yet be highly eulogistic and comforting. But who would like to see his life as sketched by the hand of God? "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

What a monotony there is in this thirty-third chapter. This will be evident to the eye. The reader sees but two words or three, and all the rest are difficult terms or polysyllables unrelated to his life. The terms are "departed," "removed," "went." It is almost pathetic to see how the writer tries to vary his expressions and cannot. Verse after verse he uses the word "departed;" then verse after verse he uses the word

“removed;” here and there he said “they went,” but back again he comes to “departed,” and then to “removed,” and back to “went.” “They removed . . . and pitched,”—that is the little story. Is it not so with us too? How dull the days are. How full of tedious similitude is the succession of events. We want variety; we cry for amusement; we sigh for change; we propose re-arrangements and re-combinations that we may at least please the eye with what seems to be a varying picture. Very few words are needed for the record of most lives; as to outward and actual event, very few words are needed at all. If you have in any language, say, five thousand words, you can really conduct the business of life upon about five hundred of them. There are great stores of words that are locked up in the prisons of lexicons: they are only wanted now and then, and they are, therefore, but occasionally liberated. The language of actual life is a narrow language which may be learned in a very brief time. So with our daily life: we rise, we sit, we retire; we eat and drink, and bless one another in the name of God; and go round the little circle, until sometimes we say,—Can we not vary all that—and add to it some more vivid line? Has no friend of ours the power of flushing this pale monotony into some tint of blood? Then we fall back into the old lines: we “depart” and “remove” and “pitch;” we “pitch” and “depart” and “remove;”—we come and go and settle and return; until there comes almost unconsciously into the strain of our speech some expressive and mournful sigh. “Few and evil have been the days of thy servant.”

Yet, not to dwell too much upon this well-ascertained fact, we may regard the record of the journeys of Israel as showing somewhat of the variety of life. Here and there a new departure sets in, or some new circumstance brightens the history. For example, in the ninth verse we read—“And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim: and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees.” Sweet entry is that! It occurs in our own secret diaries. Do we not dwell with thankfulness upon the places where we find the waters, the wells, the running streams, the beautiful trees, and the trees beautiful with luscious fruitage? It is a dull life that has nothing in it about the fountain, and the palm tree, and the beautiful day

that seemed to throw its radiance upon a hundred other days and give them some glint of celestial beauty. The pleasant lines are not many, but when they do come they are the more pleasant because of their infrequency. We all remember the beautiful garden in the May-time, when the whole scene was one blossom. How we hastened home to write the story of the garden-day, when everything seemed to be in vernal glee, in high spirits,—bird outvying bird in sparkles of music,—note after note shot out like star after star into the willing and hospitable space ;—and the birth-day and the wedding-day, and some holy time, quiet like an anticipated Sabbath ; and the time of victory in prayer, when we received the answers in the very act of offering the supplications,—times of enlargement and vital communion with God. Then comes the fourteenth verse :—“ And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water.” Such are the changes in life. We have passed through precisely the transitions here indicated. No water ; nothing to satisfy even the best appetences of the mind and spirit ; all heaven one sheet of darkness, and the night so black upon the earth that even the altar-stairs could not be found in the horrid gloom ; if there was water, it had no effect upon the thirst ; if there was bread, it was bitter ; if there was a pillow, it was filled with pricking thorn. When we were at Elim, we said we should always be glad : the splash of the fountain and the shade of the palm tree would accompany us evermore ; and yet, behold, at Rephidim there “ was no water for the people to drink.” How singular is Providence !—apparently, so contradictory ; apparently, so wanting in consistency. Why is there not one great deep river flowing all the globe around—a belt of blessing ? Why these arid places—the wildernesses without fountains, these deserts unblest with a flower ?—Why ? In that “ Why ” there is no suspicion, nor is there one accent of distrust, but there certainly is an expression of wonder. It is so in all departments of life—say, even, in life intellectual. Sometimes the mind has it all its own way ; it can see heaven opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God ; as for language, it knows all the languages of the earth—claims them, absorbs them, repeats them so as to astound every man with the music of the tongue in which he was born. At other times,

that same life seems nothing, has no language, no vision, no touch of God's presence or hint of God's blessing. We go from Elim to Rephidim in that department of life. There is another variety of the story; the thirty-eighth verse presents it:—"And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the Lord, and died there." Is that line wanting in our story? All men do not die on mountains. Would God we may die upon some high hill! It seems to our imagination nearer heaven to die away up on the mountain peaks than to die in the low damp valleys. Granted, that it is but an imagination. We need such helps: we are so made that symbol and hint and parable assist the soul in its sublimest realisation of things divine and of things to come. There is a black margin upon every man's diary,—here a child died, there a sweet mother said good-bye, there a strong father—the man who was never tired, the tower of strength—said he must go home.

This, also, presents a focalised life: all the lines are tending to one point. So it is in our own story. What is that point? the modern teacher might say. It is a grave. That is only intermediately so; that is but atheistically so. We are moving to the tomb—to the one black gate that keeps us out of the city of light; and we will, in God's strength, unlock it, break it, triumph over it and all the strength it represents, and join the blood-washed throng of holy victors on the other side. We will not finish the song with the word "tomb," it is no poetry whose ultimate syllable is in the grave. We are moving—if in Christ, washed by his blood, pardoned through his propitiation, to the land of light and summer and blissful immortality. "Every beating pulse we tell leaves the number less;" every night we "pitch our moving tent a day's march nearer home." Whilst we look at the various localities and their relation to one another upon the map—now moving north, now south, now east, now west, we say,—What is the meaning of this tumultuous movement? It is only so broken up within a small compass; measured by heaven's meridian, the direction is in one line, at the end of which burns all the warmth and light of heaven.

And yet, there is an unwritten life. This cannot be all: there must be some reading between the lines. Life was never an affair of such grim and unfamiliar polysyllables: between the



lines, there must have been loving, praying, weeping, suffering, rejoicing, wedding, dying, fierce word, and word of benediction. This is but a river-map: all the cities have to be filled in and all the city-life to be created. Still, wherein it is but an outline it is like our own story as we ought to tell it or represent it to others. No man knoweth the spirit of a man but the spirit itself that is within the man, and that spirit has revelations for which there is no language—visions that cannot be syllabled and printed to the eye and apprehension of outside observers and critics.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

A visit to Mount Hor (*Jebel Harûn*, "Mount of Aaron"), or at least a distant view of its wild precipices and ravines, helps to make the visit to Petra memorable. Here it was that Aaron, the priest laden with years and weary with the toil of the desert-wandering, was "gathered to his people." Even Scripture has few more solemn and majestic pictures than this of the two aged men—brothers in heart and sacred service—ascending with the youthful Eleazar to this wild mountain-top. "In his full priestly dress" walked Aaron to his burial. He knew it; and so did all in that camp, who now, for the last time, reverently and silently looked upon the venerable figure of him who these forty years had ministered unto them in holy things. There were no farewells. In that typical priesthood, all depended on the unbroken continuance of the office, not of the person. And hence on the mountain-top, Aaron was first unclathed of his priestly robes, and Eleazar his son formally invested with them. Thus the priesthood had not for a moment ceased when Aaron died. Then, not as a priest, but simply as one of God's Israel, was he "gathered unto his people." But over that which passed between the three on the mount has the hand of God drawn the veil of silence. And so the new priest Eleazar came down from the solemn scene on Mount Hor to minister amidst a hushed and awe-stricken congregation. "And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel." The traditionary tomb of the high-priest is shown to visitors in a vault below a small chapel, which evidently occupies the place of a more imposing structure, and is built out of its ruins. The Bedawin still holds the name of Aaron in great veneration. A singular custom of theirs is to sacrifice a kid or sheep to his memory, in sight of Mount Hor, raising a heap of stones where the blood of the animal has fallen. These heaps are seen all through the neighbouring valley.—*Pictures from Bible Lands*, by Samuel G. Green, D.D.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, kindle a light in our hearts that can never go out: the light of Christian confidence, the glory of Christian hope; may we walk amidst its beauty, and enjoy its nourishment and warmth. We need the comfort of heaven: we pine for a blessing from on high; we shall know it when we receive it, for none can resemble it in all-tenderness and sufficiency and inspiration. Withhold not thy regard from us, and let thine attention be the outlook of love. We may not say this in our own name, for it is valueless in heaven. We have fallen: we have done the things we ought not to have done; we have forfeited all right of speech with the throne. But Jesus is our Daysman: he is able to lay his hands upon both of us, and to bring us together in happy communion. There is one Advocate with the Father, and he is the Son of man. He pleads our cause; he bears our name as well as thine; and he will plead for us with all the agony of blood, and with all the tenderness of love. He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. We are strong in confidence: we are bold at the Cross. The Cross has turned the throne of judgment into a throne of mercy, and now we come before the King, clothed with the righteousness of his Son, and there plead for such blessing as our poor life continually needs. We thank thee for the sacred Book, and that it is written in many places in our mother-tongue. We know it here and there; sometimes we are quite familiar with it: it falls upon us like a remembered song of youth, which made us glad and hopeful in the early time. Here it is a mountain we cannot climb, a cloud we cannot penetrate, a deep river we dare not touch; but oftentimes it is a hill covered with flowers, a cloud bright with chastened light, and a screen that makes glad the city of our life. Help us to read it with the heart, to answer it with the will, and to be found always commenting upon it with the eloquence of an obedient life. Pity us wherein we are weak; have mercy upon us wherein we have forfeited our lives; continue thy blessing unto us wherein we have begun to do right under the guidance of thy Spirit; and, at last, give us an abundant entrance among the heroic band who fought thy fight, O Christ, in thy strength, and won their every victory in thy name. Amen.

### Numbers xxxiii. 50-56.

50. And the Lord spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,

51. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

52. Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before

you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places :

53. And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein : for I have given you the land to possess it.

54. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families : and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance : every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth ; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.

55. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you ; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

56. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.

### THOROUGHNESS.

THE subject is evidently *thoroughness*. Do the work completely—root and branch, in and out, so that there may be no mistake as to earnestness ; and the result shall be security, peace, contentment ;—Do the work partially—half and half, perfunctorily ; and the end shall be disappointment, vexation, and ruin. Causes have effects ; work is followed by consequences. Do not suppose that you can turn away the law of causation and consequence. Things are settled and decreed before you begin the work. There is no cloud upon the covenant, no ambiguity in its terms. He is faithful who hath promised—faithful to give blessing, and faithful to inflict penalty. Faithfulness in God is not a one-sided quality or virtue. Do not fear to call God "Judge." We mistake and misapply the term when we think of it only in its vengeful aspect. To "judge" is to do right. God will "judge the fatherless and the widow," God will "judge" every worker. He will come into the Canaan which he has appointed to us, and see whether we have done the work thoroughly or only partially ; if thoroughly, Canaan will be as heaven ; if partially and selfishly, then the very land of promise shall become the land of disappointment. It is well the words were spoken before the work began. There is no after-thought with God. Hell is not a recent invention of Omnipotence : it is as old as right and wrong. Let us have no affectation of surprise, no falling-back as from uncalculated violence ; the covenant is

written in plain ink, uttered in distinct terms—so written, so uttered, that the wayfaring man need not err.

There was so much to be undone in the Canaan that was promised. It is this negative work which tries our patience, and puts our faith to severe tests. We meet it everywhere. The colonist has to subdue the country, take down much that is already put up, root out the trees, destroy the beasts of prey, and do much that is of a merely negative kind, before he begins to sow corn, to reap harvests, and to build a secure homestead. This is the case in all the relations of life. The weed is not the green thing on the surface; that is only the signal that the weed is underneath. The work that has to be done is a work of eradication. The weed must be torn up by its every fibre. We are apt to lop off the top, and think we have completed the work of destruction. We must learn the meaning of the word eradication—the getting out of the root, the sinking right down to the very farthest point of residence, and then having no pity, but pulling out the weed, not for the sake of destruction, but to make room for a flower that shall please the very vision of God. But the colonist is a character of whom we know little. The illustration by being so remote does not immediately touch our life; but an illustration can be drawn from our own experience and conduct. In the work of education, for example, how much has to be undone! When the first thing the teacher has to do is to destroy a man's supposed wisdom, he encounters the most obstinate hostility of the man. The student comes with lines that have pleased him, with conclusions which he thinks established, and with processes of accomplishing results which he regards as perfect. Solemn is the work of the teacher, even to pathos and tears, when the first thing he has to do with the young man is to tell him that he cannot speak his mother-tongue. At home he was quite an idol in the family; they considered him a paragon; they called upon him to recite his poems and to display his talents, and he answered the challenge in gay response; and now some learned chief in the temple of wisdom tells him that he does not know how to utter the alphabet of his mother-tongue; he battles with him over the very first letter: he will not have it so pronounced but quite otherwise; he will have the alphabet reconstructed as to tone,

colour, fire; and, in the end, he who thought himself so excellent in speech will deliver himself in a tongue which will be foreign to those at home. This holds good in nearly every department of education. There is so much to be undone: so many prejudices have to be conquered, so many evil habits have to be eradicated, like the weed we would not spare; so that, at the end of a few months, when idolatrous friends ask how the young student is advancing, they find that he is actually worse at the end of six months than he was when he went to be taught. So he is, in a certain sense. But we must not punctuate processes by our impatience: we must await the issue; and when the educator says, "It is finished," we may pronounce the word of judgment.

The theory of the Bible is that it has to encounter a human nature that is altogether wrong. It is not our business, at this point, to ask how far that theory is true. The Bible itself proceeds upon the assumption that "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" "There is none righteous, no, not one;" "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions;" there is none that doeth good, no, not one; the whole head and the whole heart are not righteous or true before God. That being the theory of the Bible, see what it proposes to do. What iconoclasm it must first accomplish! How it must swing its terrific arms in the temples of our idolatry and in the whole circuit of our life, breaking, destroying, burning, casting out, overturning, overturning! What is it doing? It is preparing; it is doing the work of a pioneer; it is uttering the voice of a herald. Mark the audacity of the Book! It speaks no flattering word, never uncovers before any man, bids every man go wash and be clean. A book coming before society with so bold a proposition must expect to be encountered with resolute obstinacy. If we suppose we are ready-made to the hand of God, to be turned in any direction he is pleased to adopt, we begin upon a false basis; our theory is wrong, and our conception will lead us to proportionate disappointment. God has to do with a fallen intelligence, an apostate heart, a selfish will; and, therefore, he undertakes much negative work before he can begin constructive processes.

What a temptation there is, however, to reserve something. Point to one instance in all the Biblical history in which a man actually and perfectly accomplished the divine will in this matter of destruction. A good deal of destruction was accomplished, unquestionably; but was there nothing left? "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The temptation to reserve something is very strong. Take it as a matter of old companionship. It does seem to be ruthless to cut off the old comrades as with the blow of a sword. They do not understand the process of excision; they say,—We can still be friends; you have changed your theological convictions and your religious standpoint: you attend church, you pay respect to the altar, you read the Bible with a new attentiveness,—let it all be granted; but surely there is neutral ground: there are occupations that are not directly touched by the religious sanctities; surely we need not wholly separate one from another, as if we had never seen each other's face? Such a plea is not without tenderness: there is a touch of humanity in it; but to the man who is earnestly religious before God there is no neutral ground, there is no secular occupation, there is no non-religious relation; the dew of the heavenly baptism has fallen upon all life, all duty, all suffering. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." We cannot clutch time with one hand and eternity with the other, in any sense of dividing them into secular and religious; we cannot serve God and Mammon. Then take the thought in relation to old places, where we used to spend the happy evening, where the recreation was innocent and, in a sense, helpful, reinvigorating jaded faculties, and giving a new start to weary or exhausted impulses. Why not look in just once more, or now and then, —say, annually, on particular occasions, when the men are at their best and the institution is in state? It will look friendly; in fact, we may do good by some such arrangement, because we shall show that we are not Pharisees and pedants; we have not betaken ourselves to a monastic life, but we can return to old places and old associations, and breathe upon them a new spirit. The reasoning is specious: there is no doubt about its plausibility; but take care how you carry a naked candle into a high

wind; take care lest the battle should go the other way. It is dangerous for immature experience to expose itself to rooted prejudices and established habits. There is a time in the growth of some lives when a loud laugh may blow out the trembling light of a young profession. Our language, therefore, must be that of caution; the exhortation, charged with tenderness, must begin with the words, "My son," and flow out in most sacred and persuasive emotion. It is not enough to adjure, to hurl the bolt of avenging judgment: we must wrestle and reason and pray.

The words of the text are complete in their force and range. In many a life, great improvement takes place without eradication being perfected. We are not called in the Bible merely to make great improvement. That is what we have been trying to do by our own strength and wit, and which we have always failed in doing. Nowhere do the sacred writers encourage us to make considerable advance upon our old selves. The exhortation of the Bible is vital. Suppose a man should have been addicted to the meanest of all vices—the vice of lying, the vice that God can hardly cure,—that last deep dye that the blood of God's own Christ's heart can hardly get at, that defies the very detergents of heaven;—suppose such a man should lie less, is he less a liar? Suppose he should cease the vulgarity of falsehood and betake himself to the refinement of deceit, has he improved? Rather, he has aggravated the first offence—multiplied by infinite aggravations the conditions which first constituted his character. Suppose he should neither lie nor deceive on any great scale, but should betake himself to the act of speaking ambiguously—that is to say, using words in two senses, meaning the hearer to accept the words in one sense, whilst he construes them in another; he then becomes a verbal trickster, a conjurer in speech; he has mental reservations; he has a secret or esoteric backway by which he interprets to his own conscience the language which he uses in public and which he intends to be construed by public lexicography. Has he improved? He has gone to a deeper depth of evil. The vulgar criminal may be hopefully encountered; but the man who has twisted language, coloured and flushed with new significance terms which ought to have been pure in their meaning and direct in their intent; the

man who trifles with the conscience and intelligence of his fellow-creatures, and does so in cold blood, is no black criminal : he is a skilled artist in the devil's pay, and so far in that the divine finger can hardly touch his supposed security. So, we are not called to great improvements, to marvellous changes of a superficial kind : we are called to newness of birth, regeneration, the washing of the Holy Ghost, the renewal—the re-creation of the inner man. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” There is a great work of destruction to be done which we dare not undertake. You can never reason down many of the institutions of Christian countries which are at this moment mocking the sanctuary, and secretly laughing with jeers and bitterest sarcasm at Christianity. We must use force in relation to some institutions—not the force of the arm, which is the poorest of all strength, but the force of reasoned law, righteous legislation, laws made at the altar and sanctified by the very spirit of prayer. There are institutions in every nominally Christian city that can burn up any number of tracts, blow away any force of eloquence, turn aside any dart of argument. Nothing can touch them but the mighty arm of rational—that is to say, intelligent and righteous—legislation.

Thoroughness gives confidence in all things. Take it in the matter of language. How many men know just enough of any language not to dare to speak it ! How many persons know the first syllables of a word, but dare not commit themselves to a precise termination ! The grammar lies where the sting lies, at the tail of the word. So, how we huddle up our terminations, broaden, or sharpen, or blur the final vowels, so that men may not know whether we have used the one vowel or the other, coming out with tremendous emphasis on the syllables about which there is no doubt. Thoroughness gives confidence. The man who understands the language in and out, through and through, speaks off-handedly, freely, with dignified carelessness ; he knows that he is fully master of the language, and can speak it with a master's ease. That is true in theology. If we do not believe our theology, we cannot preach it ; if we do not believe the Gospel, we can only preach *about* the Gospel,—make complimentary references to it, set it in a very dignified place in the



lyceum of intellect ; but knowing it, we breathe it like a great healing, purifying wind over the whole earth, saying,—"One thing I know : once I was blind,—now I see." Where are the Pharisees that can frighten us, or the critics that can displace our crown ? Do not go beyond your own knowledge ; keep strictly within the line of experience and living testimony ; and then you will be Herculean in strength, Job-like in patience, Paul-like in heroism and courage.

If not, punishments will come. If you will not do this, "those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell ;"—they will tease you, excite you, irritate you ; they will watch for the moments of your weakness, and tempt you into apostasy. What keen eyes the spared enemies have ! Looking upon our life, they say,—Now a malign suggestion might be effected—try it ; behold, he halts,—Now speak to him, and tell him that just near at hand is a place to which he may resort for the recruiting of his strength ; listen ! the old emphasis has gone out of his voice : he does not speak as he used to speak : his convictions are halting, faltering,—now say unto him, but gently,—"Where is thy God ?" Take him up to an exceeding high mountain : show what he might be under given conditions. Lift him to the pinnacle of the temple, and show that it is possible for a man to hold churches and temples under his feet—to stand above them and to be more than they ;—but speak it quietly, softly, as if you had *his* interest at heart, and, who knows ? you may prevail. Has it, then, come to a battle of skill against skill, faculty against faculty ? Nothing of the kind. On the Christian side it comes to a question of character. How is that character created and established ? By the Spirit of the living God. We cannot explain the process. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit." If we are to meet temptation by cleverness, it is impossible for any cleverness to rival the ingenuity of the devil ; whenever it was a battle of words, the devil won ; he is mighty in conversation, he is most excellent in speech. We can only oppose him by the higher Spirit—the divine Spirit, living in the heart, breathing in the soul, established in the character ; so that

when he cometh, he findeth nothing in us,—altar everywhere, prayer in all the spirit, righteousness at the foundations, and the whole man burning with the presence of the unconsuming fire. When Satan cometh, may he have nothing in us! Let us begin the work of destruction—tear the enemy out, cut him in pieces, and never repeat the habit. Do not say you will touch with the tips of your fingers the Old Canaanitish idols and temptations: say,—Lord of heaven and earth, make me a sword, and give me an arm to wield it; may I go forth as thy warrior, sparing nothing that is impure and unlike thyself. Do not attempt to build a Christian character upon rotten foundations. That is a miracle you cannot accomplish. Do not suppose you can heap up a great pile of noble theological dogmas upon rottenness and bog. The work is foundation work, vital work, work in the heart; and until that negative, iconoclastic work is done, we cannot begin to build. Overturn! overturn! overturn!—then He will come whose right it is.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

The Israelites were delivered from Egypt by Moses, in order that they might take possession of the land which God had promised to their fathers. This country was then inhabited by the descendants of Canaan, who were divided into six or seven distinct nations. These nations the Israelites were commanded to dispossess and utterly to destroy. The destruction, however, was not to be accomplished at once. The promise on the part of God was that he would “put out those nations by little and little,” and the command to the Israelites corresponded with it; the reason given being, “lest the beast of the field increase upon thee.”

The destructive war commenced with an attack on the Israelites, by Arad, king of the Canaanites, which issued in the destruction of several cities in the extreme south of Palestine, to which the name of Hormah was given (Num. xxi. 1-3). The Israelites, however, did not follow up this victory, which was simply the consequence of an unprovoked assault on them; but, turning back, and compassing the land of Edom, they attempted to pass through the country on the other side of the Jordan, inhabited by a tribe of the Amorites. Their passage being refused, and an attack made on them by Sihon, king of the Amorites, they not only forced their way through his land, but destroyed its inhabitants, and proceeding onwards toward the adjoining kingdom of Bashan, they in like manner destroyed the inhabitants of that district, and slew Og, their king, who was the last of the Rephaim, or giants. The tract of which they thus became possessed was subsequently allotted to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD**, thou hast set us in our places, and we would not change them but at thy bidding. We want to sit, when we are ambitious and left to our vain selves, one on the right hand and the other on the left; but now, being taught of the Spirit and being chastened by daily providence and touched into new sacredness of service and hope by grace divine, we are willing to go as thou dost point the way,—to run, to stand, to serve, to wait;—only give us some foothold within the living circle. Thou wilt not thrust us out into the darkness immeasurable. God is light, God is love; his eyes are full of tears; his hands are loaded with gifts for men. Comfort us with these words, for our hearts sometimes give way, and we think the lamp of our hope is going quite out, and we never can light it again. We know we are wayward, for we are of the earth: we are rooted in the soil; we carry the clay in our whole form, and every feature is charged with the dulness of the dust. Yet we carry something more: we are filled with the presence of God: we have the divine treasure in an earthen vessel, and the divine treasure burns through the crust and makes it glow with immortal flame. We are made in the image and likeness of God. Sometimes we are all but in heaven: now and again the life-tide rises within us so high that it splashes against the very throne of God; sometimes we say we cannot be kept out of the inner places much longer. Then we come down again to darkness, and strife, and disappointment, and weariness; but, though we may sigh our impatience, we cannot utter our unbelief, for our hearts are still saying, each in its own way,—Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. So, we are still on the right side: our life is still lifted up in prayer, our souls are not without hope. So, we can bear the jeer and folly of frivolous men; they know not what they say, and they say it for no purpose. We would be found in the tabernacle, in the holy place—just on the borderland that hardly separates earth from heaven; and, being there, we catch occasional warmth and occasional glimpses of better things, and we hear voices that touch our inmost spirit by their subtle music; and we hope, nor spend our hope in unprofitable sentiment, but receive it as an inspiration, and return to heal the sick and help the blind across a busy thoroughfare, and teach ignorance its alphabet, and break bread to the hungry; this is the proof of our hope; were it a merely coloured vapour, we should cast it away, but it is an inspiration: it rouses us to endeavour, it compels us to transfer ourselves into other people, and to carry, where we may, part, at least, of their heavy burdens. We bless thee for this Christian hope; it lives when all things fail; it goes upstairs with us when we go for the last time—never to come down again until we are borne out by devout men; it is the Christian's inheritance, his

immediate and blessed paradise. Help us all according to our need. Speak to the aged pilgrim, and say the last mile is the very sunniest of all the road—quite an eventide blessing resting upon it, a tenderness of light, a kind of opening door in the sky, showing how grand the prospect is. Help the young to measure their days, count them and allot them, setting them down in columns and adding them up, and dividing them wisely, to see which is day and which is night, which is the young time, with all its blood, and which is the old time when the blood becomes pale and languid; and then let them set themselves to work out, like wise economists and devotees of God, the whole purpose of life's little day. As for the prodigal, we send after him; our letters are left unanswered—perhaps our prayers may be responded to. We will still think and love and hope, not knowing but the next knock on the door may be the announcement of return. Comfort the sick; they are very ailing and frail and all but breathless; may we give their looks large interpretations of love: may we spare them the trouble of speaking by knowing in looking at them just what they want;—for we, too, shall be sick, and must be waited on. The Lord's blessing be upon all families: unite them in the holy fear of God; upon all business: purify it from all evil and meanness, and pitiable selfishness. Look upon all kinds of honest life, giving them force and breadth, daily reinvigoration and continual blessing.

We speak our prayer in the sweet name of Jesus, crucified once, crowned for evermore. He died for us—the just for the unjust; he rose again for us to show that death can snatch but a momentary triumph, the final and eternal victory being on the side of life. God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us; and in the shining of that face, we shall forget all the pale and mocking glory which once made us glad. Amen.

### Numbers xxxiv. 1-12.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2. Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof:)

3. Then your south quarter shall be from the wilderness of Zin along by the coast of Edom, and your south border shall be the outmost coast of the salt sea eastward:

4. And your border shall turn from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim, and pass on to Zin: and the going forth thereof shall be from the south to Kadesh-barnea, and shall go on to Hazar-addar, and pass on to Azmon:

5. And the border shall fetch a compass from Azmon unto the river of Egypt, and the goings out of it shall be at the sea.

6. And as for the western border, ye shall even have the great sea for a border: this shall be your west border.

7. And this shall be your north border: from the great sea ye shall point out for you mount Hor:

8. From mount Hor ye shall point out your border unto the entrance of Hamath and the goings forth of the border shall be to Zedad:

9. And the border shall go on to Ziphron, and the goings out of it shall be at Hazar-enan : this shall be your north border.

10. And ye shall point out your east border from Hazar-enan to Shepham :

11. And the coast shall go down from Shepham to Riblah, on the east side of Ain ; and the border shall descend, and shall reach unto the side of the sea of Chinnereth eastward :

12. And the border shall go down to Jordan, and the goings out of it shall be at the salt sea : this shall be your land with the coasts thereof round about.

### BOUNDARIES.

LIFE is marked all over with boundary lines. Two different views may be taken of such lines,—that is to say, in the first place they may be regarded as limitations and partial impoverishments, or, in the next place, they may be regarded as defining rights and liberties, possessions and authorities. Thus, the low view or the high view may be taken of everything in life. Men will work according to their imagination—their noblest faculty. Where that is dull, everything will be dull ; even God could not sow stars in the leaden firmament of a dull imagination. Where that noblest faculty is alive, bright, daring, devout, all labour will be rest, all pain will be a pledge of reward nobly won. So, we may make the boundaries of life cages, prisons,—very serious and depressing limitations ; or we may accept those boundaries as a pledge, a seal of inheritance,—standards and lines to be appealed to when our claim to stand in the lineal sonship of God is questioned or disputed. Very subtle and delicate things are boundaries oftentimes. They are invisible. Are not all the greatest things invisible, as well as the best and most delicate and tender ? Show the line of love. There is no line to show. It is at this point that conscience comes into active play. Where the conscience is dull, or imperfectly educated, or selfish, there will be much dispute about boundaries ; but where the conscience is sanctified by the power of the Cross and is alive with the righteousness of God, there will be no controversy, but large concession, noble interpretation, willingness to give, to take, to arrange and settle, without the severity of the law or the cruelty of the sword. Sometimes we say,—Let a certain line be imagined. We put imaginary lines upon the very globe itself ; the points of the compass cannot touch the lines, yet they are there, present to the spiritual sight, quite

open and intelligible to the sanctified conscience. And rights of an imperial and enduring kind are based upon what may be called imaginary lines. Sometimes we are brought very near to the territories of others ; it requires more than the naked eye to distinguish between *mine* and *thine* in some cases ; the approach is very close ; the naked eye could see no difference. There are men who have nothing but a naked eye, nothing but a naked hand ; they have not the lens of heaven, or the touch that breaks the few loaves into a great feast ; rough, heartless men, seizing everything, but enjoying nothing,—slaves of their own cupidity. Many a controversy may arise as to boundary in this matter, because the lines do appear to run into one another : a sword could not divide them ; the finest edge ever made by most skilled workers in iron could not part them asunder ; but there is a sword that can do so—not iron or steel, but the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, written in the book and set in the heart,—a wonderful tone that gives vision to conscience, the marvellous perception which is a miracle of God in the intellectual and moral constitution of human nature.

What differences there are in boundaries ! We read of one, in the seventh verse, whose boundary was “from the great sea” ; in the twelfth verse, “the goings out of it shall be at the salt sea.” There is so much sea in some people’s limited possession. What a boundary is the inhospitable sea ! We cannot cut it up into acres, and lay it out ; we cannot sow it with wheat, and reap the harvest, and enjoy the bread ; it is to most of us but a spectacle—great, melancholy, unresponsive, pitiless ; a liquid emblem of cruel death. Is not this the case with many men ? They know they have great possessions, but their greatness is not the measure of their value. A little garden-plot would be to some men more valuable, for purposes of living, than the freehold of the Atlantic. Sometimes men are born to great estates that have nothing in them—boundless nothings ; a proprietorship of infinite bogs and wastes and unanswering sterilities ; sand that cannot be ploughed, water that cannot be sown with seed, and bogs that cannot be built upon. Contrast with such allotments the words of music which you find in the fifteenth verse : “toward the sunrising.” That is an inheritance worth having ! The morning sun blesses it : early in the morning all heaven’s glory

is poured out upon it with the hospitality of God ; whatever is planted in it grows almost instantly ; the flowers love to be planted there ; all the roots of the earth would say,—Put us in this place of the morning sun, and we will show you what we can do in growth and fruitfulness ; give us the chance of the sun, and then say what we really are. We cannot all have our estates “toward the sunrising” ; we cannot wholly cut off the north and the north-east—the shady side of the hill : somebody must be there. Does God plant a tabernacle in such sunless districts ? Is there any temple of God in the north-lands, where the storm blows with a will and the tempests seem to have it all their own way, rioting in their tumultuous strength, and, as it were, accosting one another in reduplications of infinite thunderings and roarings of whirlwinds ? Even there God’s footprint may be found. Even a little may be so held as to be much. Quite a small garden may grow stuff enough for a whole household. Gardens like to be cunningly handled, lovingly arranged, quite embraced with love ;—then the least plot of land looks up smilingly, and says,—You have treated me to the best of your ability ; if there had been more sun, we should have been as good as any other land in the world ; still, let us be friends ; till me, culture me, sow me with seed,—do what you can for me, and my answer shall be the brightest answer of love that is in my power to return. Yield not to dejection. Some must live in the north ; some must be towards the bleak quarter. Is it not possible for us to have joy in the recollection of the fact, that brothers of ours are living in the south, and that on their gardens, if not on ours, the morning looks with benediction and heavenliness and approbation ?

We cannot get rid of boundaries. Never listen to those who talk about equality—simply because you have no time to waste. Equality is impossible. If we were all equal one day, we should all be unequal before the sun went down. Let us listen only to the truly reasonable in this matter. There is something better than outward and nominal equality, and that is an intelligent appreciation of the fact that there must be differences of personality and allotment and responsibility, and that in the end the judgment will be divine in its righteousness. We find boundaries in gifts of all kinds. “Why do you not paint a

picture for the Royal Academy?" Suppose a great artist put this inquiry to me, I should reply,—“Nothing would give me much greater pleasure than that of an intellectual kind.” Then the artist may say,—“Why do you not realise your ideal of high enjoyment?” I answer interrogatively,—“How can I?” He replies cordially,—“I will find the canvas, I will mix the colours, I will supply the brushes—now what hinders you to be baptised, and to rise an artist?” Why talk about equality? I would rise an artist in a moment, if I could, but it is impossible; my brother must be artist: enough for me I may be but preacher. So I say to him,—“Why do you not preach?” He says,—“I would like to.” “Then why do you not? I will find the church and a pulpit and a Bible—why not be baptised, and rise a Voice?” He cannot: it is not born in him; another good gift of God is his, and it is a great gift; and it is not becoming in us that we should put our gifts in hostile opposition to one another, as if one were a gift of God and another a gift of some lower power. All boundaries and divisions and distributions are divine, and the acceptance of them is itself a religion. Why not write a book of exactly the same quality as *Paradise Lost*?—here is ink enough; what hindereth me to be baptised for poetic honours and Miltonic renown? I have as much right to the six-and-twenty letters of the alphabet as any poet whose brows were ever covered with bays and coronals. That is true. The poorest man is born to own as much of the sun as he can get hold of; the feeblest cripple may wave his crutch in the face of the heavens, and claim all the landscape; but we are limited, distributed, set in our places. One star differeth from another star in glory: one man differeth from another man in mental scope and force. Why rebel? Why call God’s attention to the fact that my boundary on the one side is nothing but a great sea, and I have not a piece of south-looking land in all my little estate? And why aggravate my discontent by pointing to the largeness of my brother’s inheritance, and the sunniness of the aspect which his dwelling-house commands? There is a better policy—a noble and devout emotion—which says,—Not my will, thou great boundary-maker, thou God of allotment and distribution, but thine be done. The tortoise may beat the hare; the poor widow may do more excellently than all the rich men in the city. As for being little,



Jesus took a "little child," and set him in the midst of the disciples and said,—This is the standard of greatness; it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Look for the bright spots; add up all the excellences; totalise the attractions of the situation; and it is wonderful how things add up when you know how to add them.

So we have boundaries in general character. Sometimes, one man is *nearly* as good as another. Sometimes the son is almost mistaken for the father, in point of genuine excellence, benevolence, and thorough goodness of soul; still, he is not his father; he never will be so princely and so good, because there is not so much of him to work upon; he is a less man altogether. Why are not men equal in good, equal in power of prayer, equal in willingness in the direction of self-sacrifice? Why is it hard for some men to pray? Why do they fall down in some pitiable fit if they try to pray aloud and in the hearing of others? That miracle never can be wrought. Suggest to some men that they should pray in public, and instantly they reply in expressions of wonder too profound for words. Who made these differences? Are all these things indications of chance, haphazard, mere experiment, without reason for a centre or probability for an issue? What if the attentive eye should see the divine hand in all these appointments, and, recognising that hand, should touch it reverently and say to it,—O hand of the Lord, arrange everything for me: be my hand: when I write, take hold of my hand with thine, and let us write together; and when war comes upon me, let thine hand be outstretched in my protection and defence!

Boundary is disciplinary. Who would not like to add just one more shelf to his library, and could do it if he were at liberty to take the books from another man's study? Who does not desire to have just the corner plot to make the estate geometrically complete, and would do it if the owner of the plot were not looking? But to retire within your own boundary!—to have nothing but a ditch between you and the vineyard you covet! Who is stopped by a ditch? To have nothing but one thin, green hedge between proprietorship actual and proprietorship desired! Why not burn the hedge, or transfer it?

“Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him,”—saith the proverbs of Solomon. To be kept within our own lines, to build our altar steadily there, and to bow down at that altar, and confess that “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” and that, whether a man has much or little, he may be God’s child, God’s servant, and Christ’s apostle;—that is the highest discipline, and it is possible to every man.

Boundaries are suggestive. Every boundary, rightly-interpreted, means: Your last estate will be a very little one—a grave in the cemetery, a tomb in the silent place. Does it come to this, that the man who wanted acres a thousand in number doubled lies down in six feet, or seven, by four? Can a carpenter measure him for his last house? Does there come a time when a man steals quietly upstairs with a two-foot measure, and afterwards hurries out to build for him in the eventide his last dwelling-place? It is impossible to exclude this thought from all our best reasoning. There is no need to be mawkish, sentimental, foolishly melancholy about it; but there is the fact, that there is an appointed time to man upon the earth, as well as an appointed place to man upon the earth, and that he is the wise man who looks at that certain fact and conducts himself wisely in relation to it. Men have the power of closing their eyes and not seeing the end, but to close the eyes is not to destroy the inevitable boundary. Even the grave can be made beautiful. A man may so live that when he is laid in his grave other men may go to see the tomb, and bedew it with tears, and even stoop down and touch it with a loving hand as if it were a living thing.

Then comes the other thought immediately upon this gloomy one, saying,—The man is not there: he is risen; he has entered the boundless land, where every man may have as much as he can receive, and still feel that he has not begun to realise the infinite possibilities of immortal life. Our Christian contention is, that any man who lives under the inspiration of all these thoughts is living a wise life; he can defend himself by reasoning without a flaw, by eloquence noble, persuasive, dignified. There is the difficulty of living up to this ideal;—there is the blessed satisfaction of knowing that we never can live up to it. Let us take comfort in our inability as well as in our ability.

Who can overtake his prayers? When the mocker says,— Could the suppliant live his prayers, he would be a noble man,— it is he, not the suppliant, who talks irrationally and foolishly. Our prayers are our impossible selves: our prayers are the selves we would be if we could. To have our life set in their direction is itself a conquest; and that conquest is possible to all of us. Poor life! Some seem to have nothing; they wonder why they live; their bread is bitter; and as for the water they drink, there is hardly enough of it to touch the fire of their thirst; they think they do not want much, and they suppose they could do with a good deal more than they have. Who is right—the distributing God or the receiving man? In whose hand does all this business lie? The Christian doctrine is, that it lies in the hands of God, and that he will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly; and the motto he has written upon his broad heavens is this: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you;” and they are the mighty preachers—voices sent from eternity—who can read that writing, pronounce it accurately, and so utter it as to bring men to thought, to reason, to prayer.

## “HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,” FOR ALL GLEANERS.

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*“In the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation.”—*  
NUM. i. 1.

The wonderful conjunction of names and situations in life.—Here we have “wilderness” and “tabernacle.”—We cannot be blind to the “wilderness”; sometimes a teacher is required to point out the “tabernacle.”—The “tabernacle” is always to be found by the earnest searcher.—The wilderness, as to mere space is incomparably larger than the tabernacle, but the tabernacle as to its quality and radiance destroys the unhappiest aspects and influences of the wilderness.—The wilderness may represent what nature can do for man; the tabernacle is the peculiar and distinctive work of God, showing how the supernatural subdues and glorifies everything with which it comes in contact.—Sometimes the tabernacle is in the man’s heart; if indeed its spirit is not there no outside building can supply its place or offer such security as either reason or feeling can really enjoy.—Be afraid of no wilderness in which there is a tabernacle.—By setting up his tabernacle God means to make the wilderness blossom as the rose.—Life itself may often assume the desolation of a wilderness; this it must do in the absence of supernatural influences; decorate it as we may, scatter upon it all the wild

flowers that hands can gather, it is a wilderness still: in such circumstances the traveller must cry out for the living God, and yearn for a dwelling place not made with hands.—The tabernacle may be some quickening thought, or sacred memory, or inspiring promise, or the companionship of a kindred soul; the tabernacle of God has a thousand aspects, and is consequently different in its representation according to the circumstances in which every man looks upon it.—The tabernacle is never so beautiful as when seen in contrast with the wilderness.—As the weary night makes the dawn doubly welcome, so the great wilderness develops in the tabernacle a beauty and a splendour which would be otherwise unrecognised.—As in darkness we see the stars, so in the wilderness we ought to see the spiritual glory of the tabernacle.

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*“Able to go forth to war.”—*NUM. i. 3.

Then there are differences amongst men; some being able, and others unable to go forth to war.—Forgetfulness of these differences leads to indiscriminate and cruel criticism.—There is always a war in life.—Sometimes a real battle is only known to the man himself.—In all solitary conflicts the man himself is of course alone responsible.—Even in such conflicts the

warrior needs inspiration and encouragement from without.—There is a solitude that leads to despair, and in the darkness of that solitude the war goes against the soul.—The words of the text refer to open or public battle, in which every man is expected to appear in the fulness of his strength.—The statistics of the army are kept in heaven.—The spirit of this text forbids every man to look only at his weakness.—Every man is called upon to make the most of himself in the presence of the enemy.—Sometimes the very going forth to war develops the power of battle.—Let every man take a *hopeful* view of his capacity.—The wars to which men are called in this day may be of the nature of controversy, testimony under difficult circumstances, consistency in the midst of subtle and persistent temptation; because we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, it does not follow that we have no conflict with principalities and powers and innumerable enemies out of sight.—The spirit of Christianity is a spirit of war.—The Christian is at war with every form and action of evil.—There can be no doubt as to the side which the Christian will take in every moral conflict.—The suggestion of the text is that some men are not called upon to engage in public strife.—They may be soldiers, nevertheless, suffering heroically, illustrating the majesty of patience, and proving by joyful resignation how possible it is to wait without complaining, and to sing in the darkness and weariness of night.—Cowardice is nowhere commended in the Bible.—The distinguishing feature of Christianity in relation to all the forces of life is heroism.—Let imagination picture the scene; the Christian is not afraid to go forth where ignorance is densest, where rebellion is most violent, where cruelty is most desperate, and even where in-

fection is most contagious; the picture is always vivid with heroic colour, and expressive of consecration, which can neither be daunted or discouraged.—“The Son of God goes forth to war.”—It is too commonly supposed that Christianity is a bed of roses, a new variety of luxury, a sentiment which, while it excuses, also aggravates the natural selfishness of the heart.—Every man should put to himself the question, Why am I not at the war?—Every wound that testifies to honourable battle is a sign of true soldiership.—Do not be ashamed of wounds and scars that tell of suffering only see that they are on the breast, and thereby indicate fearlessness, and not on the back, and thereby prove fear and faithlessness.

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 “Every man . . . shall pitch by his own standard.”—NUM. ii. 2.

Order is necessary to success.—Men cannot be allowed to run from standard to standard.—Obedience to this precept would reconstruct the Christian army.—There is a natural fondness in the human heart in the matter of changing standards.—Such changing represents action without progress.—It is to be especially noticed that there is a standard for every man.—Individuality is the gift of God.—Individuality does not destroy the social bond; while contributing to its strength it adds much to its variety.—Denominationalism in the Church has its uses.—As no one standard is the army, so no one denomination is the Church.

There is a psychology of denominationalism.—Moral or intellectual constitution renders it impossible that all men should be content with the same ecclesiastical conditions.—Every temperament has its own standard.—No man should say that another is not in the army because he does not belong

to some particular standard.—Loose-mindedness which supposes that it is a matter of indifference as to whether any special standard should be chosen is strongly discouraged by the spirit of this text.—Observe, every man is not called upon to direct the army.—Some men have simply to pitch by their standard, and wait for orders.—“Blessed is that servant who, when his Lord cometh, shall be found watching.”—“Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.”—Enemies of Christ are sometimes bolder in the avowal of their standard, than his friends.—Boldness in the faith when regulated by intelligence and chastened by patience is a sign of progress in the highest life.

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 “Every one to his service and to his burden.”—NUM. iv. 19.

Another aspect of individuality.—This is the individuality of endurance as the former was the individuality of service.—As a matter of fact every man has a burden of his own.—“Bear ye one another’s burdens.”—The burden is adapted to the man who bears it.—It is easy to exhort another man to carry his burden, but here as everywhere example is better than precept.—There is no limit to the influence of example in this matter.—People are looking on and drawing their conclusions as to what can be done under circumstances of distress, and sometimes they are shamed into greater resoluteness by the bravery which they note in others.—A difference is always to be marked between the burdens which we make for ourselves, and the burdens which are appointed by God. It is profane to create a burden by our own wickedness and then to speak of the mysteries of divine providence.—Let a man examine himself carefully: to live is to

endure trial; to be in the world is to feel somewhat of its cruel pressure; but besides this there may be the special burden of infirmity, temper, appetite, or some form of selfishness.—How jealous are some hearts! how peevish are some spirits! how narrow in conception are some minds! how resentful are some tempers! Every man must examine himself in the light of such suggestions and determine the magnitude and weight of his own burden.—But the text speaks not only of burden but of service.—Every man has his own gift of God.—The service is one, although the servants have different work to do.—Each man must find out what he can do best.—For want of this definiteness of conception much energy is misspent or utterly wasted.—Infinite mischief arises from the supposition that all men should serve alike.—“Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”—The doorkeeper will not be blamed because he was not high-priest; the least of the brethren will not be overlooked because he did not hold high office.—The spirit of the Bible is thus just to human nature in all its variety of gifts and opportunity.—There is no indiscriminateness or confusion in Bible judgments.—Of one it was said, “She hath done what she could.”—This is the spirit by which the judgment of all workers will be determined.

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 “Is the Lord’s hand waxed short?”—  
 NUM. xi. 23.

The question which will bring all other inquiries into right relation.—The inquiry is based on history. The history of the world is the history of the divine hand.—The question points to the fact that the Lord’s hand has hitherto always been equal to the occasion.—If the hand of the Lord could

wax short the throne of God would be destroyed by that very fact.—Providence continues only so long as God-head continues; to be God is to be Almighty; to be other than Almighty is to be less than God.—The person making the inquiry is supposed to have had personal experience of the power of the divine hand.—Let every devout man put this inquiry to himself in all the varying circumstances of life; in perplexity, in extremity, in the agony of doubt, in the experience of bereavement, and, in short, at every point in the circle of life.

To be strong theologically, that is to say, to have a clear conception of God's presence and action in life, is to be strong morally and socially.—The inquiry certainly suggests that some circumstances wear the appearance which justifies the very solemn and awful fear.—We gain nothing by ignoring such circumstances.—The wicked are often highly exalted and invested with disastrous influence; the righteous often seem to be left to themselves, and made to feel that their godliness is the reason of their poverty or pain.—The bad man may put this inquiry in a tone of mocking and contempt, and may have some justification for his tone.—Take the case of Jesus Christ himself when he suffered upon the cross: bad men challenged God to appear on behalf of their victim, and no response was made from the darkening heavens.—From this great case of agony lessons may be drawn suitable to every form of unhappy experience.—“Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.”

“*Enviest thou for my sake?*”—NUM.  
xi. 29.

We often justify our worst actions by pleading that they are done on

account of others.—The thief may say that he steals in order to save life with the money.—We may claim to be so jealous for the Lord of hosts as utterly to misrepresent his Spirit.—We may be so anxious to honour the institutions of Christianity as to violate all its charities and benedictions.—Infidelity may be opposed in an unchristian spirit.—The great leaders of the Church never feared what is termed competition, simply because their power is not merely official, but is personal and ennobling.—Instead of desiring that the voices of prophesying should be silent Moses expressed a desire that all the Lord's people were prophets.—Greatness does not depend upon surrounding littleness where moral influence is in question.—Mont Blanc may be the greater because of the depressions which surround it, but this can afford no analogy in the estimate of moral majesty.—When other people become prophets they will more appreciate the prophetic dignity of Moses.—Envy of the kind which is deprecated is a subtle expression of selfishness.—The men who burned with this envy wished their leader to suffer no loss of official supremacy, not knowing that Moses was part only of the great commonwealth, and that the prophetic power of others illustrated and confirmed the prophetic energy which had marked the great legislator.—It is indeed part of the function of a great prophet to make prophets of other people.—Not only was Christ the Light of the world, he invested his disciples with the same character.—Instead of deprecating any possible increase of their light he called upon them to let that light shine before men, and demanded that no light, even though but the glimmer of a candle should be hidden under a bushel.—It is right to protect the authority of great men, but this is best done by

excluding every hurtful passion.—Make great men standards of measurement, not discouragements to holy ambition.—Christ, we may reverently say, may put the same inquiry to his Church when men arise with proposals to help the world.—They may call themselves philosophers, reformers, rationalists, or what they please, Jesus Christ is willing that they should work out all their purposes and that they should be tested by the results of their action.—The Church should be generous to all competitors.—Let every man do what he can and he will find in the long run that experience is his best teacher.—There are of course ameliorations which teach the service of influence and which are on no account to be undervalued; in so far as they are helpful Christ will accept the service, and in the degree in which they are genuine they will point to influences beyond themselves.—Call down fire upon no man who does not walk with you.—Instead of envying on account of God’s supremacy, acknowledge the good that is in every man and exhort him to increase it.—Moses would not be an idol to be superstitiously regarded; he would be a leader to be followed, a teacher to be obeyed, an example to be imitated; let us be careful lest our religion amounts to no more than an expression of official envy; when new lights arise let us give them scope; when new voices are heard speaking good things let us listen attentively; our duty is to try the spirits whether they be of God.

“*And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.*”—NUM. xiii. 30.

“The Lord said to Moses, Send thou men that they may search the land of

Canaan which I give unto the children of Israel.”—Men were accordingly sent, being told to “see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds.”—In a word, they were to make a full survey of the land and its inhabitants, and to report to Moses.—“So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath.”—After forty days’ search they returned, bringing with them a branch with one cluster of grapes, and also a specimen of the pomegranates and the figs.—On the whole, their report was very gloomy.—They had, of course, some good things to say about the productiveness of the land, but they gave a very alarming account of the people: “All the people that we saw in it are men of great stature—we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”—Caleb was a man of another spirit: he stilled the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.”

This incident sets forth vividly some of the difficulties which lie in the way of the higher kingdom, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ; and it is in this view that we shall regard the graphic narrative.

1. *The kingdom of heaven challenges the inquiry of all men.*—It addresses an appeal to human reason, and to human trust.—Though itself a revelation, and therefore not to be handled as a common thing, nor to be tested by common instruments, yet Christianity invites the most careful inquest.—It does not seek to rest upon the human intellect as a burden, but to shine upon it as a light; it does not fasten itself upon the



human heart as an excrescence, but blesses and enriches it with a new and mightier life.—If Christianity may be represented under the image of a land, such as ancient Canaan, then it is fair to say of it, that it offers right of way over its hills and through its valleys, that its fruits and flowers are placed at the disposal of all travellers, and that he who complains that the land is shut against him speaks not only ungratefully but most falsely.

There are not wanting men who say that Christianity forbids inquiry.

The kingdom of heaven is the highest revelation of the mind of God to the mind of man.—The mind must be at its highest possible point of energy in order to lay hold of the doctrines which constitute that revelation.—To get the mind to this point requires the excitement of the *heart*; for mind is never fully alive whilst the moral powers are dormant.—When the heart is moved in its deepest passions, and the mind is set in its highest key, the man is prepared to enter upon the great studies to which he is invited by the Gospel.

It is certainly true, and ought to be taken account of in this connection, that some people have peculiar notions of what is meant by inquiry.—In the first instance, they dismiss everything like reverence; in the next place, they make themselves the standard and measure of all truth; and in the third place, they seek to materialise and debase everything that is spiritual and heavenly.—This is not inquiry, it is insolent self-sufficiency; it is not the spirit of a student seeking light; it is the spirit of a braggart who thinks the sun inferior to his spark.—The tone of mind must be in harmony with the subject considered; in every department of intellectual life it is required that a student be self-controlled, patient, docile; that his temper be subdued, and that his conclusions be

reached through long and earnest watching of processes.—This is required in all sciences, why not in the science of sciences—the knowledge and worship of the true God?

2. *Different reports will, of course, be brought by the inquirers.*—It was so in the case of the spies: it will be so in all inquiry.—The result of the survey will be according to the peculiarities of the surveyors.—As streams are impregnated by the soils over which they flow, so subjects are affected by the individualism of the minds through which they pass.—Thus Christianity may be said to be different things to different minds.—To the speculative man it is a great attempt to solve deep problems in theology; to the controversialist it is a challenge to debate profound subjects on new ground; to the poet it is a dream, a wondrous vision many-coloured as the rainbow, a revelation many-voiced as the tunes of the wind or the harmonies of the sea.—Each inquirer will have his own way of reporting the result of his inquiry.—Christian testimony is not of one unchanging sort.—One Christian will report his experiences in highly intellectual phraseology, as if God had entered his heart through the shining chambers of his mind; another will show that he has reached peace through many a stormy conflict with doubt; another will speak the language of music as though he had been taught it in intercourse with the angels; another will stammer by reason of sobs and tears.—Yet the subject is the same, the result is the same—this is the diversity that is unity—

“ Ten thousand tongues are their tongues,  
But all their joys are one.”

(1) Some inquirers will see *all the hindrances*.—(2) All will confess that there is *something good* in the land.—(3) Those who hold back by reason of

the difficulties will come to a miserable end.

(a) We don't escape by *false reasoning*.—(b) We don't escape by *fear*.

Application :—1. Some have shown the spirit of Caleb—*what is your testimony?*—2. Will you resolve, in divine strength, to follow the Lord fully?

Observe that it is the *spirit* of Caleb which is commended.

“*As truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*”

—NUM. xiv. 21.

No bolder word was ever uttered even by a Christian apostle.—This prediction is founded upon the philosophy of the principles which it represented; that is to say such is the adaptation of divine thought to human need, that it must in the long run put down all competition, and prove itself to be the one thought which is full of rational satisfaction.—It is not to be supposed that one set of principles is to get the better of some other set, as the result of a kind of pitched battle in which the one side has been cleverer than the other.—Christianity is to triumph by virtue of its adaptation to every necessity of human need.—By addressing itself to the experience of mankind, by waiting with long patience for a full reception into the heart, and an honest trial in the life, by answering questions which no other religion can settle, and in every way to the ministry of thought, Christianity will show itself to be the one religion which abundantly covers the whole space of human necessity.—Other religions address themselves to races or kingdoms, to particular climates and modes of life; Christianity looks abroad upon the whole earth and proposes one blessing, the blessing of adoption and pardon for every member of the human race.—The promise

seems to be founded upon the very constitution of God: the terms are, “As truly as I live”; this is not a mere exclamation, or a varied form of oath, least of all is it a rhetorical embellishment; it would seem to be that the filling of the whole earth with the glory of God is a necessity of the very nature of God.—God is love; God is light; love and light have undertaken to fill the whole earth with beauty and splendour.—This is not the God of a mechanic who does so much work for so much reward, and who is willing to do a directly opposite work for higher compensation; it is the ministry of love, the energy of light, and the pressure of eternity.—God will have all things like himself.—He is holy, he is good, he is wise, and what he is he means all responsible creatures to be in their degree.—The Christian worker is to conduct his service under the inspiration of this prediction.—He is not to look at temporary discouragements, or vexatious details, or personal infirmity, or the supposed strength of an enemy; he is to stand upon the rock of divine promise, and daily sustain his confidence by the pledge of God.—Love and light must always succeed.—They are the forces which give energy to the Christian ministry in all its forms and activities, and because they are of the very nature and quality of God they cannot ultimately fail of their purpose.

“*How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?*”—NUM. xiv. 27.

This is really a parental inquiry.—The proof of this is in the very agony of the terms.—A tyrant could have crushed the difficulty, a mere ruler might have been haughtily indifferent to it, but where tyrants and rulers are exhausted fatherhood begins to put its

most anxious inquiries.—God has never been readily received into the human heart.—His rejection has in some cases been grounded upon the mystery of his nature; in others, on the difficulties of his providence; and in others upon the love of self-indulgence which characterises all human affections.—The terms of the inquiry assume that the forbearance has been long continued.—God does not ask such a question at an early period of his attempts to subdue the heart and will of man.—The inquiry, which is here put as to a congregation, is addressed to every human creature in his individuality.—Every man has justified the inquiry.—No man can satisfactorily answer the inquiry.—Every man is witness in his own case that the forbearance of God has been continuous and tender.—It is evident that forbearance has only been equal to the occasion created by human rebellion.—This circumstance having been amply proved, we come upon the discovery that forbearance has been completed by redemption.—The cross is not only an expression of forbearing love, it is the mystery of pardon wrought by righteousness.—If the cross should fail, God has no other resources so far as revelation can guide us.—Our forbearance expresses our love.—Where there is little love there will be little forbearance.—Where there is much love the anxious inquiry will often arise, How can I give thee up?—This is the inquiry which is culminated in the cross of Christ.

“Consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.”—NUM. xvi. 35.

No man is indispensable to God.—Better that incense be not offered than that the censer beswung with unworthy hands.—Officialism does not necessarily

involve personal fitness.—Incense does not disinfect corrupt hearts.—The man, not the censer, is the standard of determination.—Officialism in the Church often destroys the sensitiveness of the heart.—What is true of officialism is true of any repetition that ends in familiarity.—Mechanical religion is easily acquired; it is merely a trick of the hand, it is not the sacrifice of the heart.—God’s anger burns most hotly against unfaithful leaders.—He may be more angry with parents than with children, with preachers than with hearers, with the experienced than with the inexperienced.—God relies not upon the number but upon the character of his servants.—The removal of two hundred and fifty men was a serious numerical loss, but as to character, quality, and spiritual effectiveness, there was no loss whatever.—The tree is the better for the cutting off of the dead branches.—That which has ceased to be useful should cease to be cumbersome.—When God looks through all his hosts that he may number and value them, he will cut off no man whose spirit is true, whose purpose is noble, and whose thought is steadfast.—An awful picture presents itself to the imagination as we look back upon blighted ministries, unworthy characters, dishonoured servants, and the whole line of disaster and wreckage.—Many who started well have brought upon themselves the consuming anger of God.—The comforting thought is that in all this judgment and desolation God reveals his kingdom as a kingdom of righteousness, truth, and purity.—“Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.”

“Sinners against their own souls.”—NUM. xvi. 38.

This is the tremendous hold which God has upon us, namely that we can-

not sin against God without committing direct wrong upon ourselves.—All experience proves this to be the case. All the lower analogies tend to the confirmation of this doctrine: he who sins against cleanliness sins against his own health; he who sins against social honesty sins against his own advancement; he who sins against social truth deposes himself from the seat of honour and divests himself from all healthy influence.—We are physically so constituted that a bad thought lowers the health of the brain; and unregulated passion devastates the nature in which it rages; neglect of discipline means loss of force.—Carry up these analogies to the highest level; to cease to pray is to contract the outlook of the soul; to cease to do good is to diminish the power of doing it; to turn away from the heights of heaven is to impoverish the veneration which did homage to old age and bowed itself in the presence of genius and worth.—To go down religiously is to go down in every point and line of life.—If a man can resist God and yet maintain health of soul, without wound or scar, he would in effect be God himself.—If the branch could bear fruit without the vine it would in reality be the vine.—If mortality could overcome death it would prove itself to be immortality.—It is necessary to the unity of all things that Right should be the fountain of health, harmony, and all that is necessary to spiritual progress.—Following the line of this thought, Christians should be living exemplifications of the law which is exceeding broad; they should be men of lofty mind, able to take wide and generous views of all questions, willing to pardon offences and render assistance to weakness; their souls being right with God, their hands should be outstretched in every form of charity.—Christianity is infinitely more than a

set of theological particulars; it educates the soul, it strengthens the mind, it ennobles all impulses, it increases and consolidates all the forces of manhood.—The soul that sins is in a state of ill-health.—Sin is a positive wrong done to the quality and function of the soul.—It is an insult to the better nature.—It is as if a man should strike loveliness in the face, or lay his hand upon the throat of living music.—Sin is murder.—We must not look upon sin as a mere mistake for which ample apology can be made; it is blasphemy against all right, health, beauty, music.—It is all this because it is an offence against God.—When night descends upon the earth, it does not darken one room only, it fills the whole house with darkness. So when sin is committed it is not simply one faculty that is impaired, or one impulse that is discouraged; the whole man goes down and is made the slave of conquering evil.—The prodigal son was made to feel that in leaving his father he lost his property, his companions, his brother, his friends; and all these he lost because he first lost himself.

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 "I am thy part and thine inheritance  
 among the children of Israel."—  
 NUM. xviii. 20.

The reference is to Aaron and the priesthood.—The priests were not to be landed proprietors, or in any sense a territorial aristocracy.—Aaron had his position in spiritual enlightenment and spiritual honour.—"Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."—This spiritual allotment is symbolical.—The idea is that the last result of education will be comparative contempt for all material things.—Material things must of course be owned and governed and turned to good uses; still whatever is material is of neces-

sity temporary; and that which is temporary should never engross the attention of men who are immaterial.—He lives the great life who lives in thought, high feeling, and beneficence.—The expression of high intellectual passion is marked by the truest disregard of all things related to time and space.—The Son of man had not where to lay his head; yet he had bread to eat that the world knew not of.—He who lives this inner life does not see when drought cometh, neither can famine threaten his strength.—No matter what inheritance a man has, it is only valuable in so far as it is made the means of helping spiritual culture.—“Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.”—How ennobling the thought that we may have our inheritance in God!—This is the distinct promise of the text, and it applies not only to priests but to all who live and move and have their being in God.—The humblest Christian can say, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.”—Even in the midst of distresses of the acutest kind, the prophet was enabled to exclaim, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.”—This text will, as to its spirit and sublimest meaning, be addressed to the Christian in the hour and article of death, and the soul, answering the promise in the spirit of thankfulness and assurance, will exclaim, “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

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*“And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshing floor, and as the fulness of the wine-press.”—NUM. xviii. 27.*

Thus does love magnify all human offerings.—Love does not content itself

with the letter, or with weights and measures; it looks at spiritual intention, and according to the purity and scope of that intention is its recognition.—The two mites were valuable beyond gold because of the motive which prompted the gift.—The cup of cold water is to be regarded as a cup of choice wine.—The purpose of David to build the temple was accepted as if the temple had been actually built.—Not the work of the hand which may be imperfect, but the purpose of the heart is recognised and accepted by the loving God.—Interpret all the service of life in the light of this method, and see how the first may become last and the last may become first.—Work is not to be estimated by mere bulk, but by the motive which constrained its performance.—What is easy to one man may be difficult to another; it is easy to some men to give, to serve, and to pray; all these signs may be performed without their being spiritual miracles.—He who has great ideas concerning the kingdom of Christ, but who cannot carry them out for want of strength or opportunity, will be accounted to have done the very things which he intended.—Our life is what we most solemnly mean it to be.—If any man can accept this suggestion as warranting release from toil and sacrifice, he is not entitled to the comfort and inspiration of this holy doctrine.—The divine magnifying of our acts is never meant to discourage our efforts, but rather to increase and ennoble them.—Many who are not now recognised as great workers may in the end be honoured with bright crowns.

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*“A serpent of brass.”—NUM. xxi. 9.*

Physical objects may be made the medium of spiritual suggestion.—The true use of material objects is to find

out their spiritual suggestions.—The sown seed, the growing corn, the fields white unto the harvest, are all instances which may be turned to spiritual advantage.—So may all growth, all life, all beauty, all force.—It is very significant that the word “serpent” should be identified in the Bible with its sublimest remedial activities.—It would seem as if God intended even in this way to humble and punish the tempter who ruined our first parents.—It was the “serpent” that was more subtle than any beast of the field.—In the last book of the New Testament the enemy is referred to as “the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”—Images and relics are to be strictly limited in their use.—Nothing is to stand between the soul and God but the priesthood of Jesus Christ.—Hezekiah “brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made.”—Why did Hezekiah take this course?—Because the children of Israel had become image-worshippers, and had a superstitious veneration for an institution which had served its purpose and was no longer needed.—The only eternal institution is the work of Jesus Christ himself.—It is nothing less than wickedness to go back to the symbol when the reality is before us.—Men are not at liberty to judge themselves by the commandments when they can adopt the more penetrating criticism of the Beatitudes.—The whole meaning of the serpent of brass was realised in the uplifting of the Son of man.—The proof of this is found in John iii. 14, 15.—The uplifting is an action as remarkable as is the name of the serpent.—Jesus Christ referred to it repeatedly, thus: “Even so must the Son of man be lifted up”;—again: “When ye have lifted up the Son of

man.” The lifting up is an act equivalent to manifestation; the lifting up is highly symbolic; it means separation, elevation, exposure to the whole world, welcome to all mankind. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

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 “*Am I not able to promote thee to honour?*”—NUM. xxii. 37.

Balak had no other inspiration than worldly honour to offer.—He could not understand any man being unmoved by such an offer.—Herein Balak fitly represents the spirit of the whole world.—Who can resist gold? or distinction? or influence? or a throne? The whole spirit of this temptation culminated in the attempt of the devil to win the homage of Jesus Christ by offering him the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.—The world is making this very speech to every young man to-day.—This, too, is the speech which many a man is addressing to the woman who is unworthy of his love.—He will give her a name, a social status, and abundance of domestic comfort; he addresses no appeal to the companionship of the heart, the masonry of the mind, the desire for mutual growth in all sacred life and power.—The man who can accept a bribe for his service proves that he will oppose that very service if a higher bribe be offered.—He who will accept a bribe will give one.—He who will tell lies for you will also tell lies to you.—The spirit of Balak was reproduced in Simon Magus.—He offered the apostles money if they would give unto him the Holy Ghost.—There is no relation between material gifts and spiritual powers. They belong to different spheres.—Even when material treasure is offered in recognition of spiritual benefit it must cover itself

with contempt in the presence of the majesty it seeks to recognise.—Ministers ought not to be bought for money.—The poet should not abandon his harp because the money-spender is not listening to him.—The princes of this world are never so thoroughly humbled as by the citizens of heaven.—Alexander could do nothing for Diogenes.—Abram would receive nothing from the King of Sodom, lest the king should put a wrong construction upon the deed.—The living water is to be had without money and without price.—True honour cometh from God only.—“Them that honour me I will honour.”—To receive honour from men is to blind the understanding, and shut out the true judgment.—“How can ye believe which receive honour from one another?”—If we are in quest of spiritual light and security we must bring a broken and a contrite heart, a spirit bowed down with humbleness, and a self-disposing soul.—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“*My covenant of peace.*”—NUM. xxv. 12.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, was a type of Christ.—The covenant of grace is described in Isaiah liv. 10, and in Malachi ii. 5, as the covenant of peace.—Peace must be the result of harmony with God.—God is the God of peace.—He blesses his people with peace.—Speaking to his servant, he said, “My covenant was with him of life and peace.”—The converse of this is true; “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”—Peace does not represent a grace so much as a virtue.—Great misunderstanding prevails as to the true meaning of peace.—True peace represents the highest energy, controlled and sanctified.—Never represent spiritual peace by death or the grave, or by anything that is inert, or passionless.—

He only is at peace who in full possession of every faculty feels that there is no power in his soul that does not aspire towards God in loving obedience.—Peace of this kind does not exempt from daily trial and daily sorrow.—The presence of peace in the soul takes the right view of such discipline, and is sure to find stars in the darkness.—The peace that is spoken of is not a temporary arrangement; it is a matter of covenant signed and sealed.—The blessing of God is a covenant ordered in all things and sure.—Judge spiritual progress by the depth of spiritual peace.—“Perfect love casteth out fear.”—The great gift of Christ to the Church is a gift of peace.—The apostle describes the peace of God as passing understanding,—an enjoyment beyond analysis, and beyond criticism: passing understanding as flying passes walking, as the light of the sun passes all the sparks man can kindle upon earth, as the ocean passes the little rills that trickle over the surface of the earth.

“*Famous in the congregation.*”—  
NUM. xxvi. 9.

This is a necessity of human life.—In every assembly diversity of position and influence must be recognised.—The evil to be guarded against is jealousy.—Aaron and his sister envied Moses, because of his pre-eminence.—Men who are truly famous have restraints enough to keep them within proper limits; restraints which are often unknown to the very people who envy them.—Fame is an element of moral power.—To have fame, is to have opportunities innumerable for profitably addressing public attention.—Jesus Christ's fame went throughout all Syria.—The more his fame extended the larger became the number of applications for healing.—It is right to have

high spiritual ambitions.—Men who work solely to acquire fame, will be disappointed.—“He that saveth his life shall lose it.”—We have simply to do the work and let fame come or go as it may.—The motive of fame is contemptible vanity; but fame as an honest result of beneficent life may become the beginning of new and large advantages.—There were famous men amongst the disciples of Jesus Christ.—Peter, James, and John were admitted to privileges which other disciples did not enjoy.—Jesus Christ laid down the great doctrine: “He that is greatest among you, let him be the servant of all.”—Eminence is not to be a justification of tyranny.—There is a bad fame as well as a good one.—“Diotrephes loveth to have the pre-eminence.”—Simon Magus gave out that he was some great one.—Character is of infinitely greater importance than reputation.—It is of no importance how much fame a man may have, if he has not self-respect.—A man must, so to say, confirm his own fame, if it is to be of any service to him or to others.—The approval of a good conscience is the fame which every honest man supremely desires.—We know not who may be famous at the last, for then many an undiscovered worker will be revealed and crowned.—The “well done” of the Lord, is the fame after which every labourer should aspire.

“*They became a sign.*”—NUM. xxvi. 10.

So even the worst actions may be turned to public utility.—Let the word “sign” be considered equal to the word “example,” and then every drunkard, liar, thief, becomes a sign.—A sign was attached to Cain, and that sign is attached to all his progeny.—In the language of the prophet, “the shew of their countenance doth witness against them.”—A very solemn purpose is thus

served, by all persons who have been faithless or wicked.—“Remember Lot’s wife.”—New periods are dated from the commission of great crimes.—Some names cannot be mentioned without sending a shudder through the hearers.—We may well say of such names that they have become “signs.”—Whole histories may be summed up in a name.—All present examples of evil may be traced to a definite source.—There is a family or kinship of evil, the very household of Satan.—The other side of this text is happily true, for good men are examples stimulating in noble directions.—“Ye have heard of the patience of Job.”—The eleventh chapter of Hebrews vividly illustrates the power of brilliant examples.—One of two things is certain, men either leave a name that degrades or a name that elevates.—It is in our power to say which name we shall leave.

“*A man in whom is the spirit.*”—NUM. xxvii. 18.

The spirit is the man.—As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.—“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”—There is no mistaking the true spirit.—It is one of ardour, purity, self-sacrifice, unquenchable earnestness.—We only know the true spirit by the effects which appear in the life.—It is in vain to say we have the Spirit unless we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.—“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”—Genius is the gift of God.—The spirit of poetry is a gift sent down from heaven: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”—The spirit was given to Bezaleel and those who worked with him in connection with the tabernacle.—



The spirit we are to cultivate is the "spirit of judgment and of burning"; we are not to judge the spirit exclusively by what may be called romantic effects; the spirit may be shown in love, tenderness, simplicity, unselfishness: whatever effects may be displayed that are not accompanied by these graces are mere fireworks, utterly destitute of spiritual value.—Here again another side is suggested by the text.—We cannot disguise the evil spirit.—That spirit is noticeable in the very tone of the voice, and in every manner and action of the life. It is a spirit of sneering and repulsion, mistaking rudeness for frankness, and even in its most reckless manifestations planning its own safety and honour.—As for the indwelling Spirit of God, we have often need to adopt the caution not to judge by appearances, but to remember that God looketh on the heart.—It is everywhere taught in the New Testament, that if we really desire the Spirit it will be granted unto us.—The great and solemn prayer which should begin every day is, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."—Blessed are they who, without renown, riches, genius, have yet the spirit of a sound understanding and a devout loyalty to the doctrine and life of Christ.

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 "Beside the continual burnt offering."  
 —NUM. xxviii. 10.

What can there be beside or in addition to that which is "continual"?—The burnt offering is declared to be "continual," and yet something is to be added to it.—Is not that simply impossible?—For an answer to this inquiry we must turn to actual life, and there the mystery is being constantly illustrated.—Beside the continual sustenance of household life, there

is a festive occasion when neighbours and friends come to enlarge the family circle, and enhance its occasional joys.—The birthday is an event "beside" the continual love and interest lavished upon the child.—The continual exercise on road, or in field, and garden, is supplemented by the annual vacation when larger excursions test the strength and appeal to the imagination.—The continual regard shown between friend and friend accentuates all particular recognitions, presents, and signs of peculiar love.—The answer to all such mysteries is to be found in the deeper mystery of love, that is pure and intense.—Love is inventive.—Love is self-forgotten.—Love sees where another flower will grow, hears where another bird is singing, sees where a still purer stream is flowing.—The mother who writes to her child at stated intervals, is quite capable of creating special occasions upon which to express her solicitude and affection.—The doctrine of love is that nothing has been given whilst anything has been withheld.—Life would sink into a dreary monotony, were not provision made for outbursts of enthusiasm.—The monotonous line of life must be flowered here and there with acts which are not expressed by the letter of the law.

The continual is always held to be the principal life.—That is a fact of vital consequence.—Many persons are ready to be affectionate on occasions, to indulge the eccentricities of attachment and regard, and to be heroically ready for the crisis which seems to appeal to their pride of strength and resource.—Such affection is not to be relied upon.—It is as the morning cloud and the early dew; the occasional is indebted to the continual for its whole value. It is to the continual that the occasional owes its power of surprise, because when love is so con-

stant as to exclude the apparent possibility of addition, the amazement is the greater that love itself has invented a new delight.—Christianity is a "continual" service; it claims all strength, time, resource, and when all has apparently been done, it stretches forth its hand for something "beside."—This seems to be a contradiction in words, and the contradiction may indeed be real, but there is reconciliation in the passion and vehemence of sanctified affection.—Let nobody begin with the additional or exceptional, until he has honestly completed that which is continual.

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 "The Lord's tribute."—NUM. xxxi. 37.

The association of the words is remarkable.—Who can give anything to the Lord, when the earth is his and the fulness thereof?—This again, as in the former instance, is a mystery of spiritual love.—It is indeed because all is his, that we are expected to give him part of it.—What is ours is ours, for convenience, comfort, for passing necessity of any kind, and never ours in the sense of proprietorship.—This is vividly set forth in the words, "Ye are not your own."—When the hand does not belong to the man, it is easy to see that what the hand contains cannot be his.—Paul said, "I seek not your's, but you;" and the Christians to whom he spoke soon discovered that, in securing themselves, he had in reality secured all they had.—The Lord has his tribute of harvest, viz., the firstfruits; his tribute of time, the Sabbath day; his tribute of land and the sanctuary: his tribute of love, worship.—"Will a man rob God? But ye say, Wherein have we wronged thee?" The answer is, "In tithes and offerings."—The withholding of the tribute thus becomes felonious.—The tribute is not spontaneous, in the sense

that the character is as complete without the oblation as with it.—The Lord's tribute and money appropriated to ordinary uses will not exist together, no more than the ark could stand peacefully side by side with Dagon.—To spend the Lord's tribute in self-gratification, or for any purpose not included in its original dedication, is to expose all other money to the risk of defilement and loss.—No man is the poorer for paying the Lord's tribute.—It is a mistake to suppose that the payment of the tribute must always relate to work carried on at a great distance from customary action and association.—Sometimes charity may justly both begin and end at home.—He does not please the Lord, who allows his own children to go without spiritual culture and illumination.—It will be found, however, as a rule, that they who do most for objects that are near at hand do most in response to appeals which come from afar, and also that those who are most interested in the conversion of the ends of the earth, are most deeply engaged in the evangelisation of the localities in which they reside.—A sanctifying influence seems to follow the setting aside of the Lord's tribute.—The whole house is the sweeter for the place in it where prayer is most constantly offered.—The whole library is made select by the presence of the Bible, which will not keep unholy or unworthy company.—The whole commercial account is turned into a spiritual record, by lines here and there, which record the dedication of property to charitable uses.—Men are often left wholly at liberty to find out for themselves the best way in which to spend the Lord's tribute; some give it to the young, others to the aged, others to Christian apostles and missionaries, others to the circulation of pure literature; every man must discover for himself what he

thinks to be the worthiest field on which to expend the tribute of the Lord.

“*Their names being changed.*”—NUM. xxxii. 38.

Many persons live in names.—This is fatal to the grasp of complete truth and relation.—The poet asks, “What’s in a name?”—The name of a friend may be necessary to his identification, but the name is not the man.—Character is to be studied, motive is to be understood, purpose is to be appreciated, then whatever changes may take place in the mere name, love and confidence will be undiminished.—The change of names, both in the Old Testament and the New, deserves careful study.—The name of Abram was changed, so was the name of Jacob, so was the name of Saul of Tarsus.—Those changes of name symbolise changes of trust and vocation in life.—The name should enlarge with the character, but the character should be always more highly valued than the name.—The solemn application of this text is to the matter of great evangelical truths and doctrines.—For want of attention to this matter, bigotry has been encouraged, and men have been separated from one another.—Some persons do not know the gospel itself, except under a certain set of names, words, and stereotyped phrases.—This is not Christianity, it is mere literalism; it is, in fact, idolatry, for there is an idolatry of phrase as well as of images.—It is simply despicable, when men trickle about names, or details of any kind, in other words when they pay tithes of mint, anise,

and cummin, and forget the weightier matters of the law.—Literalism was the sin of the scribes.—The truth is not in the letters which print it, the letters but stand to express the inexpressible.—All life is symbolic.—God has spoken in little else than parables.—Revelation addresses the imagination, when imagination is used in its highest senses.—It is not the faculty of mere cloud-making, but the faculty of insight into the largest meanings and the innermost relations of things.—Many persons have less difficulty with the miracles than with the parables, simply because the one requires unquestioning assent, and the other continually discloses new aspects, colours, and suggestions of meanings. The parable will be found to be at once the hardest and pleasantest reading of the spiritual future.—The parables represent the kingdom of heaven, and in proportion to the dignity of that which they represent, is the rapture of following all their suggestion.—Your child is not a mere name to you; see that you be not a mere name to God.—The letter in which you endeavour to express your love, is a poor substitute for the living voice, and the living touch; it is indeed invaluable in the absence of the living personality; but what letter was ever written that quite satisfied the writer when love was the subject and devotedness the intention?—There is a change of names that inspires the soul with hope.—God is to give his servants a new name in the upper world; their name is to be in their foreheads; but, in the changing of the name, there is no changing in the burning love, and the rapturous adoration.

## DEUTERONOMY.

DEUTERONOMY, or the repetition of the law, is a book extending to thirty-four chapters. In the beginning of the book Moses is in the fortieth year of his leadership, and at the close of the book he is succeeded by Joshua. Moses speaks clearly of God's promise, and strengthens himself by its quotation in view of the great work which was yet to be accomplished. He then proceeds to instruct the people in the appointment of officers, and directs the sending of the spies, pointing out with his accustomed severity God's anger at unbelief and disobedience, and restrains the people from meddling with the Edomites, the Moabites, and the Amorites. The venerable leader desires to enter the Land of Promise, and is permitted but a prospect of it from a distance. His memory dwells with grateful delight upon all the wonderful disclosures of the divine presence and government as beheld within the compass of his personal leadership. The old story of Horeb and the ten commandments is told with a glow of thankfulness. Moses still persists in the recital of all details connected with foreign alliances and the taint of idolatry, assuring the people all the while that their enemies will be conquered, yet mingling the glad recital with recollections of Israel's rebellion; thus chastening an expectation which might grow into an unholy presumption. As Moses becomes older he seems to become even graver in his moral tone, constantly recommending obedience, showing how God is worthy of it because of his work amongst the children of Israel and because of the promise of blessing which he has attached to all willing service, not forgetting that threatenings are associated with disobedience: thus the great exhortation of Moses may be taken as the pattern of a truly evangelical sermon; knowing the fear of the Lord, he endeavours to persuade Israel: when persuasion would seem to be carried to a point tempting almost to laxity of discipline, Moses suddenly turns round and reminds his hearers that God presides over the tabernacles of lightning and thunder and storm, and that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Singularly, with an evident intent towards broader issues, comparatively little things are forbidden along with things that are manifestly important; as, for example, the use of blood is forbidden in food, and holy things must be eaten in the holy place; these would seem to be but matters of detail, yet along with them idolatry is not so much as to be inquired after, and

enticers to idolatry are to be avoided and destroyed by stoning, however near and dear they may be. Then again there is an elaborate statement of what may be eaten of beasts, of fishes, and of fowls. Yet these comparative trifles are also associated with distinct instructions to destroy cities which are given to idolatry. Special attention is devoted to the question of tithes in the fourteenth chapter, and instructions so minute are given that there can be no possible misconception as to their range and purpose; yet amidst all this rule and enactment the sabbatical year of release dawns like a summer above the snows of winter, and sounds of jubilee are heard throughout the ranks of Israel. We even hear of the voluntary slave in the fifteenth chapter—a name which would seem to involve a contradiction of terms, yet the gracious anomaly is reconciled by the very spirit which conceived it. It is most instructive to notice the alternation of subjects which are indicated as from the seventeenth chapter onward: thus things that were sacrificed were to be sound, and yet idolaters were to be slain,—where is the line of connection between points so remote? Then the election and duty of a king are set forth specifically, and whilst the local sovereign is to be respected and honoured a mysterious prophecy is announced concerning a Great Prophet who is to be heard and obeyed as the representative of God (xviii. 15-19). In the nineteenth chapter the matter of detailed obedience is kept up in all its vigour: the landmark is not to be removed; two witnesses at the least must testify in a disputed case: the false witness is to be punished; and then, quickly following these instructions, it is shown that "trees for meat" are to be preserved in siege; the sex is to be distinguished by apparel; the dam is not to be taken with her young ones; the house must be built with battlements; and attention must be paid to the fringes upon the vesture. Rapidly succeeding these comparatively trivial matters are found instructions regarding physical uncleanness and moral perversion of the most loathsome kind; then suddenly attention is directed towards usury, and vows, and the exemption of a newly-married man from war; stripes are not to exceed forty; the ox is not to be muzzled; and every weight is to be just. What a system of law was that in which Israel was trained! On every side was to be found prescription, authority, limitation, and all the apparatus of personal and social drill! Now and again we hear of the sabbatical year of release, and of the treatment of slaves at given periods, and in the twenty-fourth chapter we even read of charity; but the general tone of the book is that of legal restriction, criticism, and penalty. Hastily reading the whole book, it may be described as a book of law and little else; yet reading it more attentively, it will be found that even in Deuteronomy there are evangelical lines full of the very love and tenderness of God. The cities of refuge may be described as gospel cities; the protection of the birthright is an inter-

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position of mercy; the very battlement upon the house is the law respecting the neighbour exemplified rather than merely uttered in words; the protection of the dam (xxii. 6-7) is full of evangelical suggestion; and the measuring of stripes so as not to exceed forty shows that the law itself was restrained by wisdom and mercy. Unquestionably the curses pronounced upon disobedience in the twenty-eighth chapter are like a very storm poured down from the heights of heaven; but in the same chapter the blessings pronounced upon obedience show that high above all law there reigns the spirit of love and pity. In the thirty-first and following chapters Moses prepares to give up his leadership, and in doing so he tenderly encourages the people to persevere, and in paternal tones cheers the heart of Joshua in view of the tremendous task about to be assigned to him. Then Moses begins to sing, and soon after is sent up to Mount Nebo, whence he views the land. There Moses died and was buried, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. This is a bird's-eye outline of the marvellous book of Deuteronomy. Let us now turn and consider the whole book chapter by chapter.



## Deut. i. 6.

“Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount.”

### REMARKABLE THINGS.

THIS is the first remarkable thing in the opening chapter of the fifth book of Moses. God knows, then, how long we have been here or there. Our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in, are of consequence to him who made us. He keeps the time : he knows when we have been “long enough” in one place. He does not always consult us, saying, in terms of affectionate inquiry,—Would you desire to tarry longer here?—would it suit you to remain another year? Sometimes God seems to come down upon our life with a precision and an imperativeness which make us feel how little, after all, we have to do with what we call our own concerns. A blessed life, surely, and most sweet, and altogether tender and restful, is it when we wait patiently upon God and tarry until we receive his reply, and then go out and do his bidding with both hands and with the unbroken consent of the entire mind. From the way in which he speaks to us, God seems to take it for granted that no question will arise upon his instructions. Surely in the very method of approaching us, a tribute is paid to our noblest qualities. The Lord comes with an instruction as if we had been waiting for it ; he tells us when to move and when to rest, as if our eyes were continually directed unto him in attitude of attention and expectation ; his speeches are answers, not to questions but to prayers ; his commands are not merely edicts, but translations of the spirit which he assumes to be in us. Infinite is the wisdom of God.

“Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount.” We may get tired even of mountains. Wherever we live, we need change.



The first happy impulse often commits itself to the doctrine that we could live here or there alway. God does not take us at our word, because he knows that our word is but a speech of ignorance or of impulse : it does but give utterance to the emotion of the moment ; so, he allows our little speech to plash round about our life as if it were a river of his own creating ; but we soon see how it is dried up by the sun, and we are left in a thirsty and barren place. Expect the answer from Heaven when you are in wonder as to your residence and pilgrimage, or action of any kind. There need not be any communication of audible speech between your soul and God : the communication will be in the spirit—in its profound and loving obedience, and in its positive readiness to give up mountain and castle, and palace and crown, without one moment's querulousness, or suggestion that another day would be another day of good fortune. That is the attitude of the pious spirit—the heart that is really healthy towards God, the soul that has in it constancy and loyalty without speck or flaw.

We are ordered down off the mountain. Soon after we have said, It is good to be here, the Leader proposes that we should go down again. He will not have any heaven built upon earth ; he will never allow us to build permanently upon foundations that are themselves transitory. Who can build straightly upon a crooked foundation ? Who can build for ever upon a basis that may succumb in a moment ? Who would rear a supposedly eternal palace upon foundations that are doomed to be burned ? So, we are told to descend the mountain, though the sky be at its bluest, and though the air be full of health, and though our vision and our general senses be so quickened that we can almost detect the presence of spirits and angels. There are many mountains to come down—mountains of supposed strength, when the very robustest man must lie down and say : I am very weary, tired to exhaustion ; mountains of prosperity, when Cræsus himself must come down saying : I am a poor man ; let the meanest slave serve me, for I cannot longer serve myself. Then there is the coming down that is inevitable—the time when God says to every one of us : You have been long enough on the mountain of time : pass through the grave to the hills of heaven, the great mountains of eternity. Sometimes, we think we have been too long on the

mountain, and wonder when he will come, whose right it is to bring the sheep into the fold ; we say in our peevishness—not always impious, but rather an expression of weakness : Surely we have been forgotten : by this time we ought to have been with the blessed ones ; the night is coming on quickly, and we shall be drenched with dews.—So long are some men kept outside, on the very top of the hill, where very little grass grows,—bare, rocky places. But God cannot forget : we must rest in his memory ; he puts himself even before a mother who may forget her sucking child, but he has pledged himself never to forget his redeemed Church.

But, having ordered his people away from the mountain, where can they take up their abode ? We find the answer in the seventh verse. God has many localities at his command, so he disperses the people, setting them “in the plain,” “in the hills,” “in the vale,” “by the sea side,” and “unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” What space God has ! “In my Father’s house are many mansions,”—in my Father’s house are many localities. Do not say God has done with you because he has driven you from one pulpit, one church, one business, one very happy engagement in life, where you were making honest bread, and where you could sleep the night through untroubled by a single bitter memory. God has places enough for us all. We did think it hard when that last door was shut as if in our very face : when we turned away that day our faces were pictured all over with sorrow and grief and disappointment : agony was written upon the countenance ; we went home saying : The end has come, the cloud has gathered : there is no more hope ;—and, behold, whilst we talked thus atheistically and foolishly, the cloud opened, and we caught such glimpses of morning as our weary eyes had never caught before. The old mount had become a kind of home to us : we knew the short ways up the mountain : we knew the long, grassy slopes that led to the summit ; we had some little property on the very top ; we had begun, before getting full orders about anything, to lay just two or three courses which we meant to raise into a tabernacle ; we did stand upon the mount, and, looking upon those who dwelt in the plain, said we would not live down there : we would always live up among the blue skies, the white clouds, and at the very gate of morning. So, it was hard to leave the old

homestead : that morning we drained the cup of bitterness, and, when half-way down the hill, oh what a look we gave at the summit we should never re-ascend !—the old business, the old pulpit, the old happy relations in life, the mountain that had become a sweet home to us, and on whose steeps there was not one weary league. It did cost us much to leave the sweet place, haunted by ten thousand tender memories, and blessed by the recollection of many an answered prayer. But God has more places : instead of mountains, hills—little mountains ; not the great bulging mountains that seem to vie with heaven itself in majesty : still, little mountains—undulating mounds having green valleys on their tops which are still valleys in highlands, then plains, vales, sea-side, rivers. Who would not see all God's places ? Is it not wiser to take the longer lines, and to say to the heavenly One : Show us all the inheritance of thy power, and lead us hither and thither as thou wilt : it is thy world,—how green in the spring-time ! how rich in blossom ! how richer still in fruits !—If thou wilt lead us, the vale shall be as the mountain, and the mountain shall be as the plain ; and the sea shall be without a storm, and the river shall flow like a gospel of refreshment and hospitality. Why do we choose our own places ? Did ever man dispute the divine sovereignty without regretting his encounter with the Eternal will ? Why have any will ? Were we serving wooden gods, mechanical deities, divinities of our own creation or invention, we might dispute with them, point out what possibly they may have overlooked, suggest happier expressions, and draw bolder programmes ; but if God is the only-wise, if God is love, if God is light, if God died for us in the person of his Son, why not say : Not my will, but thine, be done : take me to the mountain or the plain, the hills or the vale, the sea-side or the river ; the taking itself shall be as a vision of heaven ?

Happy days were those of Deuteronomy !—God the Lawgiver, Instructor, Guide ; Israel receiving the speeches of heaven, and instantly striking the tent, and marching gladly, with hymns of thankfulness, to the music of the divine movement. Was this the case ? We find the exact contrary was the reality. When men brought back “the fruit of the land,” which they had been sent to search out, “and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the Lord our God doth

give us. Notwithstanding—" These are the words we read in the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth verses. What is their meaning? Evidently, that eye-witnesses were disbelieved. Caleb's word went for nothing; Joshua's testimony was ignored. That is precisely what we are doing to-day; that is literally what is being done with regard to Christian testimony in our own generation. What are Christian speakers saying? They are saying that they themselves have tasted, and handled, and felt the good word of life; and we give them the lie. Do not be hard upon ancient Israel, for, if inclined to a temper of severity, we may well inflict upon ourselves the severest chastisement. Do Christian speakers draw pictures, and appeal to the imagination, and suggest material for happy dreams? If so, then we commit no breach of decency or courtesy in subjecting their testimony to close cross-examination; but when men say, each for himself,—I was blind, but now I see; I was cruel, but now I am kind; I was a devotee of all evil and wrong, of every form of corruption and mischief, but, by the grace of God, I love truth and light, and grace and beauty;—if the living men themselves are there—not the words, not the logic, not the argument, not the rhetoric, but the men—we must first destroy their character before we can touch their testimony. This, then, puts the whole controversy in a very serious light. Christianity has not only sent messages to us, but messengers—not messengers who can repeat sentences, but messengers who incarnate the doctrine they preach,—or they have forced themselves into a service for which they have no qualification. Let the life speak: let the sweet temper be its own argument; let the invincible charity bear down with celestial strength the bitter opposition. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind;" it "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth." Were this controversy an antagonism between two hostile camps of words, then let his be the palm who wins it: let cleverness enjoy the prize, and let the wordiest speaker have the triumph due to his efforts. But it is not so: this is a matter of life and death, of reality or of unreality. The Christian speaker is not an argument only, but an incarnation; and before we can impugn his message, we must assail the character which he declares that message to have wrought in his own case. Good Christians would be good

servants: splendid lives would be splendid works; yet Caleb and Joshua were disbelieved. Eye-witnesses go for nothing in the pressure of an inveterate and unreasoning prejudice. Christ himself was disbelieved: he was "despised and rejected of men." Purity is a noble argument, but not one that inevitably secures victory and triumph: otherwise, the Son of God himself would but have required to show his life in order to win and subdue the ages.

What did Israel say? Notwithstanding the beautiful messages and the cordial welcomes, they went into their "tents, and said, Because the Lord hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt" (v. 27). That is human nature. Do not suppose that human nature is incapable of baseness so complete. Whatever can be imagined can be done. The fiction is often the larger truth. We say, on reading sundry books,—These are inventions. So they are; but inventions are possibilities: inventions may be the larger facts. We must see in others where we are ourselves. We cannot separate ourselves from others, saying,—We should not have done so. Said a lady in the hearing of Thomas Carlyle,—“Do you think, sir, that we should now act towards Jesus Christ as the Jews acted in their day? We should receive him with love and enthusiasm.” “No, madam,” was the answer, “if he came a rich man, without touching any of our prejudices or habits or customs, I might receive a card from you to be at your house at a given hour, and on the back of it might be written, ‘To meet the Saviour;’ but if he came back as he first came—the same poor man, the denouncer of all Pharisaism and evil,—you would say, ‘Send him to Newgate, and hang him!’” Certainly. It was human nature that did it—not the Jews. The Jews acted but incidentally: the Jews happened to furnish the historical point which gave vividness to the tragedy; but when the Cross was set up, it was human nature that crushed it into the rock: when Christ was jeered, it was the civillest of genteel persons that mocked him to his face: when he was in agony, it was the purest unchristian civilisation that added bitterness to his cup. We must not allow ourselves to imagine that the Jews disbelieved Jesus, and that if he came now we should welcome him. No: the human heart can never welcome Christ:—‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent

me draw him." It is a mystery : we cannot explain the profound enigma ; but the human heart never had anything for Christ but a Cross ; and from the Cross the miracle must be wrought which constrains human nature to crown him with many crowns. We may disbelieve Caleb and Joshua, we may turn our back upon Moses and Aaron, we may even bring ourselves under the awful denunciation of the thirty-second verse, in which we read—"Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God." Now, seeing that we must live by belief, who are we going to believe ? We cannot get away from this faith-life. Who is to be leader ? Say some,—“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord ;”—others,—“The God that answereth by fire, let him be God.” Set up what standard you will, fix the terms of your own appeal ; but Christian men will never hesitate to stand forward and say : Christ is my Lord and my God ; I cannot reach the sublimity of his holiness, but I can aim in that direction ; I cannot overtake my own prayers, but I can hold my face towards the rising of the sun ; I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do—I press—I press ! The attitude is Christian, the attitude is an argument, the attitude imposes a solemn and incommunicable responsibility.

Deut. i. 19.

“That great and terrible wilderness.”

**MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES.**

**T**HERE are some things that are never to be forgotten in life. There are troubles whose shadow is as long as life's whole day. The troubles are past, but the shadow is still there; the victory is won, but the battle seems still to be booming in the ear. We are miles and miles away from the desert—yea, half a continent and more—but who can ever forget “all that great and terrible wilderness”? Yet life would be poor without it. The memory of that wilderness chastens our joy, touches our prayer into a more solemn and tender music, and makes us more valiant, because more hopeful, in reference to all the future. There cannot be two such wildernesses in the whole universe. If there were another like it, it would not be equal to it, because our experience in the first would enable us to go through the second with a firmer step and a more cheerful courage. We are the better for the wildernesses of life, and we cannot escape them. No evasion is possible here. Apparent evasions have been accomplished, but they have been apparent only. You cannot get your children through life without passing through the wilderness at some time and in some way; and you are foolish when you think you can pay for their passage by some other and happier road. There is only one road—rough, cavernous, uphill, where the wind has full scope for its roar and cold assault; and we are the better for passing through it patiently, steadily, and religiously. I know it may seem hard to you that that dear little boy should have to go through the wilderness; but he must go. I know how you take him into your arms and say that you have had to suffer and he shall not; but you cannot help it; and if you post-

pone his suffering too long, he will suffer the more for the postponement. There is a chronology of discipline; there is a time-bill written in heaven, and hung down from the skies, by which all chastisement is administered, all discipline is undergone, all burdens are imposed, and all strength is given. It is folly, it is cruelty, to suppose that you can find out some road in which there is no wilderness—some method of education in which there is no chastisement. Oh, that great and terrible wilderness! It comes after us now like a ghost; it darkens upon our vision in the dream-time; we repeat the journey in the night season, and feel all the sleet and cold, all the dreariness and helplessness of the old experience. How many a joy we have forgotten, how many a glad laugh has left no memory behind it, how many a salutation has been but a beating of the air and an instant descent into oblivion; but we cannot play with “that great and terrible wilderness.” The very pronouncement of the words makes us cold. It was “great,” it was “terrible,” it was a “wilderness.” But, rightly trodden, its barren sand made us men; taken in the right spirit, we thought we saw in it the beginning of the garden of God.

Every man does not pass through exactly the same wilderness; it is not needful that he should do so in order to confirm this doctrine—viz., that in all lives there are great dreary spaces that we would gladly jump—great and terrible wildernesses that we approach with fear and traverse almost with despair.

There was that great business wilderness that you passed through—when all was loss and no profit; when your friends forgot you, or when their smile was not followed by any substantial blessing; when you dare not tell the tale to your wife at night, because you had no wish to make her cry and bear a heavier burden. You were not dishonest, nor deceptive; you were not guilty of a culpable secretiveness in keeping the state of affairs from her; you wanted to tread the wine-press alone. You said it would be better to-morrow, and then you would tell her all about it. You listened to her laugh and said, “Poor thing! did she but know how near the bankruptcy court is that laugh would be choked in her young throat.” But you would not tell you were passing through a great and terrible wilder-



ness. I am not prepared to blame men who wish to keep the length and the terribleness of the desert as secrets in their own hearts; that secretiveness may be born of love and tender sympathy and real manliness. You remember the time when you had no night, if night be time for sleep; when you had no day, if day be time for joy and triumph. You remember the time when you dare hardly look into your own books, they were such blanks. You have not forgotten your old companions—Poverty that walked on the right hand, and Friendlessness that walked on the left. It was a great and terrible wilderness. If you could have talked of it as a wilderness, you might have found some garden patches in it, but you dare not tell exactly where you were—everything was so dark, so hard, so sterile; no hint of green thing, no sound of bird-music, no glint of subtle and unexpected light. The wilderness was great and terrible; but it is past. You are in fairer lands now; your property is accumulating, your speculations are paying, your adventures are crowned with success. Do not forget the wilderness: other men are in it. The man sitting next to you now, with an apparently jocund face and bright eye, is in the very middle of the wilderness which you have escaped. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ;" bear them prayerfully, sympathetically. It is not needful that you should know them in name and detail, in date and actual locality; you must fall back on the solemn and perpetual facts of human history, and always consider that your comrades, friends, companions, neighbours, are undergoing chastisements and bearing burdens the very memory of which is no small part of your own individual training and spiritual education. Let prayer be made for all men. Never offer a prayer without thinking of the heavy-laden, the broken-hearted, the wounded spirit, the tired wayfarer.

Yours, on the other hand, was no business trouble, it was a long and painful affliction—the more painful because of a conscious strength that could not assert itself. Oh, that is pain! to know that you have great strength and yet to be pinned down, as it were, at one point. It is humiliating, it makes one impatient. We could sometimes almost tear the pinned filament away and claim opportunity for the exercise of our conscious

power. To stop there and to say: "It is right that I should so suffer, be so mocked; Father in heaven, not my will, but thine be done"—that is the last accomplishment of our spiritual culture. When we can say so, we are on the very last page of Heaven's first lesson-book, and will soon be ready to begin the second volume in the ampler and clearer light. You remember the affliction—when everybody in the house was quiet; when no one could commence anything new, when to-morrow was to be a revelation of some sorer trouble, some deeper darkness, some heavier burden; when you thought about yourself as about a life that was run out; when you said—by that curious euphemy by which we deceive ourselves—"If anything should happen to me." It is so that men speak about their own mortality; you remember the time when there were no joyful words in the speech of the house, when the morning was as night, and the night was sevenfold in darkness—that was "a great and terrible wilderness." The poor reason was reeling, the light was going out, the burden was increasing, because the spirit was chastened. It was a "great and terrible wilderness."

But yours was neither business nor affliction, it was a wilderness of temptation. You fought with beasts at Ephesus, you fought with yourself seven days a week, it was the hour and power of darkness, the hours were crowded and huddled into one rough midnight. You were without strength; it was the day of helplessness. You were mocked and haunted by invisible and impalpable powers. If they had been flesh and blood you could have struck them, and that would have been some relief; but we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Oh! could we but see our enemies, we might take measure of them; we could fasten our eye upon their eye, and anticipate their purpose by a steady glance studious of their intentions. But we do not see the enemy—he is on the right hand and on the left, behind, in front, and everywhere—a ubiquitous foe. Like the wind we cannot seize him, like the darkness we cannot measure him, like our own life, feeling it everywhere, but unable to place it in any one exclusive locality. We cannot corner those spiritual foes, they never sleep,

they give no notice of their approach, they have no Sabbath day in their long week, when they say—"We must give the hunted foe or prey a rest." Just now it is a "great and terrible wilderness." Recognise it as such, lay your account with it, and study the divine intention in its presence, and in its awful shadow.

What are the thoughts that such a review should excite? Can we look back upon that way, through all the great and terrible wilderness, without remembering the divine help which we received? God was God in the wilderness; God came walking upon the wings of the wind, and flying upon the pinions of the storm; God looked at us through the darkness, and there was no blaze of anger in his eye. Who can forget the touch that came upon our burning brow in the night-time? Who can forget the ever-branching tree, just by the side of the bitter pool? Who can forget the clump of palm trees where no palm trees were expected? Who can cease to remember the voice of leadership—the strong, authoritative man who came amongst us like a revelation from God, and spoke broad words in broad tones, and was a tower of strength to us in the time of our weakness, and wonder, and fear—the sympathetic pastor, the mighty preacher, the kind friend, the one who understood us wholly through and through? I know of no wilderness in which there were not mitigations of its dreariness and solitude; yet we could not map these out and say they will never occur to-day, and to-morrow, and a week hence, and in a year's time. Our blessings also come suddenly, unexpectedly, and, it may be, according to our reckoning, irregularly. But the "great and terrible wilderness" was the place where our great prayers were prayed. The darkness inspires an eloquence of its own; sense of loneliness makes a dumb man eloquent in intercession. You do not know what you said in that long night of wilderness and solitude; the words were taken down; if you could read them now, you would be surprised at their depth, richness, and unction. You owe your very life to the darkness which made you afraid.

Then, is there no divine purpose, the recollection of which may sustain us in traversing wildernesses and lonely deserts? Who made the world? Is the world a fatherless thing, an

unmade world, a self-rounded thing that may split up at any moment, or is there method in it? Is there a God above it? Is there a throne anywhere? And the King, is he but a name or an echo? I see purpose in my life; I see it now—"Thou hast done all things well." I did not think so at the time; I should have made the wilderness a mile shorter, but it was on the last mile that I saw the brightest angel. I would have come to honour and renown sooner; but I see now that the very movements were ticked off, and that a moment earlier would have been a mistake. "I would have come," says another Christian man, "to a sense of competency, and comfort, and household security ten years ago; but in my soul I see that ten years ago I could not have borne what I now carry gracefully." Thou hast done all things well. I would not have had seven graves in the cemetery, nor two, nor one; but I see now that I am the richer for the seven; I would not now have it otherwise. They are my best estate; I have property in them; I grow my choicest flowers there; there I meet with the angels that understand me. There is a method in all this: I will accept it; I will bow down before it; I will kiss the rod that lacerated me to the bone: it was in my Father's hand.

Then, is there to be no human gratitude springing out of all this? Is ours to be a false life—an unsympathetic existence? Ought there not to be a new power in the hand-grip? Ought not my hand to get round yours with a more cunning and expressive masonry, because of the wilderness through which I have passed and the sorrows which I have undergone, and which are now just beginning to fall upon you? You can never be wrong in regarding human life as having in it great gaps, great deserts, great and terrible wounds. The preacher should never forget this. When an assembly comes together, it does not convene as an assembly of philosophers and high thinkers and men who are thirsting for some special intellectual gratification. I care not where the assembly is, it is an assembly of broken hearts, burdened lives, blinded eyes, sorrow-laden souls. I will undertake, that he who speaks of God's infinity, eternity, spiritual majesty, deific magnificence and grandeur shall not touch one heart as compared with the man who speaks of fatherhood, pity, condescension, need of help, need of grace. He who

so speaks to Heaven will take up a thousand hearts with him, and in his one voice there will throb the necessity of a multitude of souls. As we have received help of God, let us give help to others. If our help sometimes be imposed upon, no matter. I do not want the sagacity which never makes a mistake; I want the sympathy, the great motherly love that tells a prodigal that he is almost an angel. That will do more good in the world than your sharp criticism, your discriminating and penetrating judgment, that knows exactly who is good and who is bad. That is not my business; I have but one hand in this matter, and that is the right hand—the giving hand, the writing hand, the helping hand, the working hand, the sheltering and protecting hand. He only must have two hands who can discriminate with infinite penetration and justness between the good and the bad. We do not all come through the wilderness with equal strength. Some are far behind, they were very weak; they got sore tired; they said, "Comrade, how far is it now?" And all we could say was, "It is not so far to-day as it was yesterday." Do not count the miles, take the steps; do not say you have to travel fifty miles, but say you have to take the next step, and grace shall be equal to thy day. "My grace is sufficient for thee." And at the last he will say, "Thy shoes were iron and brass; and as thy day, so thy strength was." And we shall reply, "Even so, my garments were not worn, my shoes bore no travel stains, the mystery of endurance was equal to the mystery of trial; so, God be thanked for the great and terrible wilderness!"

Deut. ii.

PROVIDENTIAL LINES.

THERE is a remarkable expression in the fifth verse—  
“because.” The same expression occurs in the ninth verse—  
“because.” The same word occurs in the nineteenth verse—  
“because.” Yet it is the infinite God who speaks and puts  
himself in the position of one who would explain to his creatures  
his reasons for making certain allotments. Instead of speaking  
as one might suppose the Eternal Majesty of the Universe to  
speak, he seems to place himself upon a level with men, and to  
tell them *why* they are not to do certain things. For example :  
The command was that Israel was not to interfere with the  
children of Esau :—“Meddle not with them ; for I will not give  
you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth ; because I  
have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession” (v. 5).  
That mount belongs to another man. The law of proprietorship  
must be recognised. We must have social rights, or we shall  
not have social securities. Very particular is the direction.  
Read the words again,—“No, not so much as a foot breadth.”  
It is upon such fine lines that such great rights are based. If  
Jacob, in the person of the children of Israel, could have put one  
foot upon Mount Seir, he soon would have put the other foot  
there too, and Esau might have been dispossessed. The only  
way for some men to keep themselves honest is to have nothing  
to do with the other side. A footprint may some day be turned  
into a boundary : a finger-print may one day be pointed to as a  
right. “Touch not, taste not, handle not,”—but keep away abso-  
lutely, in the very innermost thought of the mind, from the  
things that are not yours. The same law holds good in regard  
to the Moabites :—“Distress not the Moabites, neither contend  
with them in battle : for I will not give thee of their land for a  
possession ; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for

a possession" (v. 9). The same law related to the children of Ammon:—"Distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because"—then comes the reason (v. 19). God has taken care of every one of us in life. There is a little portion for the very smallest of us—one little handful of bread for the poorest man, one little ewe lamb for every life; and God knows what he has given and to whom he has given it, and he keeps the title-deeds in his own heavens; and he would look more after our property and rights if we would allow him to do so. Could we but give ourselves heart and soul to the kingdom of heaven, the doing of right, the continual education of the soul in truth, holiness, and nobility, God would see that every right was protected; and when we come to measure the estate which we thought to be but small, we may find that the boundaries have been enlarged and that we have more than we supposed we had. He is good unto all them that call upon him. He knows the measure of our hunger, and never did God send away from his table the unsatisfied appetite which he himself had created.

Contrast these commandments with the ten words which were given in Exodus—say, for example,—“Thou shalt not steal;” “Thou shalt not commit adultery;” “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” Where are the reasons there? Who can find a “because” following such laws? Yet the Lord could not rear virtue upon a command. “Thou shalt not steal”—never made an honest man. “Thou shalt not” is a proper enough form of representation of the idea, if it be understood in its spiritual relations. The word is much grander than “shalt” or “shalt not.” If a man were to say,—I do not steal because I have been told not to steal,—he is a thief in his heart, and he is stealing all day; his meaning is:—Had I not been told not to steal, I would steal at once, but being told not to steal I do not steal. He does not know how much he is deceiving himself. Where is the honesty? But change the form of expression, and light comes above all the lightning of Sinai:—“Thou *will* not steal;” “Thou *will* not bear false witness;” and throughout the commandments, “Thou *will*,” “Thou *will* not;”—the meaning being, that if the spirit of obedience is in the heart and the spirit in harmony with God, the man *will* not do wrong, *will* do right,—

by no effort, not because a prize is before him, or a whip is being laid upon his back in cruel laceration ; but the man will be so much like God, will live so deeply and truly in the Spirit of God, that he *will* not do things that are wrong, that he *will* do things that are right : he *will* keep the Sabbath day, and he *will* not covet his neighbour's goods. In our early education, we need the "thou shalt not" of verbal prohibition, because at a certain period we could not understand spiritual reasoning ; for a time, therefore, we live under what may be called arbitrary law—that is, law which vindicates itself solely by the majesty of the law-giver, and will not condescend to reasoning or explanation. In the progress of our education, crude words such as "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" fall out of our commerce with heaven, and we know the meaning of the divine speech which says,—*"Thou will honour thy father and thy mother ;"* *"Thou will remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy ;"* *"Thou will do no murder."* So, commandment is turned into revelation : at last we come to see that God was not speaking arbitrarily, or laying down small boundaries without stooping to give us explanations, but was anticipating the greater word—*"Thou wilt," "Thou wilt not."* The good tree will bring forth good fruit.

A very tender word is found in the seventh verse :—*"For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand : he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness : these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee ; thou hast lacked nothing."* We may put down wordy debaters who have nothing to live upon but their own invention,—troubled by their own verbosity ; but we cannot put down witnesses who testify what they have seen, known, and handled for a period of forty years. Time has a good deal to do with testimony ; time enters very subtly into all things human and mundane. Men may make a ladder in a very short time, but who can make a tree ?—and how constantly we are mistaking a tree for a ladder, or a ladder for a tree ! Time makes the tree ; time makes character ; time makes practical theology. Moses could say with emphasis at the end of forty years what he could only say with hopefulness at the beginning. The Christian witness is forty years old ; forty years have men tried the Christian doctrine and the Christian consolation, and at the end of forty years their witness is stronger,



tenderer, larger than at the first. Possibly they may know much or they may know nothing about theological terms and theological controversies; but they know the vitality of the matter—the inner grace and solace and inspiration,—and they are strong in testimony that, but for a doctrine heaven-descended and heaven-inspired, they would long ago have given up life in utterest despair. So we have to deal with facts now as well as arguments. A man rises and says: But for this Christian doctrine which is written in the Christian Scriptures, I should have been the worst of men, the unhappiest of men: explain it how you may, I am so constituted that I should have been a terror unto many, a shadow upon my own house, a plague to my own consciousness; but I have studied the Christian kingdom in its doctrine, legislation, and solace, and I have been enabled to receive Christ into my heart; and now, by the grace of God, I am what I am, and my life has in it the promise and the seal of a blessed immortality. Whatever did that for the man who is bearing witness is to be spoken of with respect. The Christian testimony, doctrine, or example never made immoral men. The men who profess this Christian guidance through the wilderness may not always have been what they ought to have been—they themselves will be swiftest witnesses in this matter as against themselves;—but no man who has tasted of this doctrine will be slow to confess that but for it his life would have been without a centre, without restfulness, without a purpose adequate to his faculties. This side of the Christian cause must never be neglected. Many men can be strong only upon this side, because they are not master of words, controversies, and counsels: they know next to nothing of the processes of evolution through which Christian argument has passed; but they say they know that after prayer their hands are stronger, their eyes keener of vision, their hearts tenderer in all sympathy. Any religion that will do that for any human creature is a religion well-deserving the noblest church that can be built to its genius.

The great leader who has lost so many of his followers becomes pathetic in the fourteenth verse, wherein he says, "All the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host." It is sad to live in a cemetery. It is sad to be the

survivor of thousands of old comrades; the air is cold when they leave us; summer is itself but a cloud when our heart-companions are no more. To have lost them in noble strife is not the worst of the situation. We could bury them with honours: we could lay the colours of the army on their green graves and call the soldiers sleeping their last sleep "good knights of God;" but Moses had to look upon a different spectacle. That many fell in honourable war might be true enough; but four-and-twenty thousand of them were struck down by the javelin of God because of an outrage against the holiness of his law. God can do without his generals, captains, and leaders of hosts; God can do without every preacher he has; but he cannot do without his holiness, his purity, his infinite righteousness. God will handle the evil-doers: where all the opponents of Israel could do nothing, the Lord blew upon the host of the chosen, and by one plague four and-twenty thousand of them were swept from the land of the living. God does not want our patronage. Never does he say: They are generals of mine, great leaders, marvellous captains in controversy, and therefore I must spare them, though they be evil-hearted and their minds be filled with superstition and error. He can do without any creature he ever made, but he will not have the integrity of his throne impaired. But take the brighter view. Suppose all to have died in honourable conflict—brave, upright, honest men, gentle—as all strong men are, wise and good; and still time bears them down and causes them to disappear. The Church is always suffering losses in this way. Some whom we wish to live for ever live but a handful of days; men whom we thought essential to the Christian cause are taken away as if their presence upon earth were of no consequence. Herein is the wisdom of God and the righteousness of the Father. He will not encourage idolatry of any kind; he will have the truth resting upon itself; he insists that the Bible shall make its own way in the world. Whilst we are deeply thankful for annotation, we should be still more profoundly grateful for the Book which is annotated. We do not live upon the comments: we live upon the Book; as we do not live upon opinions respecting the bread, but upon the bread itself.

How will God make up for all these losses? He takes the

case into his own hand. He will not put four-and-twenty thousand more men in the field: he will double the influence—or multiply the influence indefinitely—of those who are already engaged in his cause, representing and vindicating his kingdom. The twenty-fifth verse supplies the explanation and the proof:—“This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee.” He will work spiritually. Instead of working through the sword and the battle, he will work through fear. He promised this in the Book of Exodus; in chapter xv., verses 15, 16, we read,—“Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over.” Thus God works through the medium of apprehension, wonder, curiosity; thus God holds the eyes of men that they may not see the reality of the case; and thus God touches the eyes of men that they mistake one man for a thousand. Clouds on the horizon God makes into oceans, the very vastness of which terrifies the observer. God makes noises in the air which men mistake for the sound of battle, as if the war were being led by an infinite host of skilled soldiers. Write the history of fear as known in your own consciousness; put down exactly what fear has done in your case—how it has multiplied difficulties, how it has excited anxieties, how it has made you feel as if the little number you saw only came ahead of an infinite host; and the result will be that you will discover that fear has done more in life than reality has ever done—that imagination has outrun literal realism. We have suffered more from the things we thought were going to happen than we ever suffered from the things which really did occur. The mind of man is in the hand of the Lord; the heart of man is under the guidance of Heaven.

No Christian man can too strongly denounce the spirit and cruelty of war: there are no terms sufficiently expressive and emphatic with which to characterise the horribleness of the military spirit; but there are worse things than war: slavery is worse, oppression is worse, robbery is worse; war may

become comparatively righteous and even holy, but slavery can never become so, or oppression, or robbery, or wrong-doing, or corruption. That war will ultimately cease is true; but we cannot "take Jesus by force and make him a King:" he must come in his own time, he must appear in his own way. It would suit our impatience and our often unreasoning and immoral rapidity to crown him now; but he is more careful about his crown than we could ever be. The ages are in Christ's own hand; God knows every tick of time, every pulse of life: all the centuries are upon the divine record and are under the divine administration. We cannot hasten things. To hasten peace is to imperil peace. The Bible is a book of wars; "the Lord is a man of war:" he has arrows that are "drunk with blood," a sword that has devoured flesh; but in the end he will bring in everlasting peace. We cannot have the Christian kingdom in the Pentateuch: Christ is not born in the historical books; the Bible itself is the standard by which all progress is indicated; and not until many a weary chapter has been read, and many a weary period survived do men see a star in the east. We did not make the stars: we cannot make them come and go: they are God's bright lights; and he will indicate the time in his own way. Meanwhile, we can live in a spirit of anticipation, in a spirit of peace; we can hold up the great, broad, solemn sentiment of peace. This we are bound to do; but as to how the great nations of the earth shall be reconciled and held in amity, that is a divine mystery for which we must await a divine explanation.

### Deut. iii.

“Og the king of Bashan came out against us” (v. 1).

#### REVIEW AND PROSPECT.

**I**S it not remarkable that good causes and good men should meet with constant opposition? We are now perusing the history of a journey which was undertaken by divine direction, and again and again—almost on every page—we come upon the fact that the journey was from end to end bitterly opposed. Probably, if the people had started on a pilgrimage at their own suggestion, they could hardly have encountered severer hostility. We may even go further and say—Had the people gone out in direct opposition to the will of God, they could scarcely have been resisted with more obstinate animosity. Looking at the intensity of the hatred which the progress of the Israelites excited, one might say, not without plausible reasoning, that they had wholly mistaken the course which they ought to have pursued; it would be simply impossible to believe that God could lead any people into so many snares, antagonisms, battles, and cruel repulsions. The one part of the story thus appears to contradict the other. If we read the divine direction, we come to one conclusion; if we turn our attention almost wholly to social and national opposition, we come to a totally different opinion and judgment. What then is to be done? We must revert to facts which are known to ourselves and are vividly and completely attested by this day's bitter experience. Were this matter of ancient history, we might, in a happier condition of civilisation and in a happier mood of mind, dispute the theory that Israel travelled under divine direction and guidance; but this very thing is done to-day in our country, in all countries, in our own heart and life. Never man, surely, went to church without some enemy in the form of temptation, suggestion, or

welcome in other directions, seeking to prevent his accomplishing the sacred purpose. Where is the good cause against which some modern Og king of some modern Bashan, does not arise? The argument can be set in so many angles and helped by so many illustrations known to ourselves that we need not have any doubt about ancient history. Does no enemy arise against honesty? Does cleanliness, the simplest of the virtues, pursue an uninterrupted way—men, cities, and nations welcoming her and blessing her with thankfulness? Is the cause of temperance an easy, broad, and sunny road on which to travel, and having simply to show a radiant face, and lift up a ringing and pure voice to make converts by the thousand and the million? Name a good purpose which ever arose in your heart that was not instantly resisted by some force, sometimes without a name and without definite measure, sometimes almost a shadow, now and then apparently a mere superstition; still there was the hostile force. There need be no marvel then that precisely this fortune befell the progress of the Christian kingdom even when that kingdom was led visibly by the very Christ of God in the days of his flesh. He was “despised and rejected of men;” men sent after him the message,—We will not have thee to reign over us. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” At every heart he stands in a beggar’s attitude and adopts a suppliant’s tone. This is mysterious; this is bewildering; now and again it throws the heart into dejection akin to despair. The other course would have seemed so much more probable—that men should have seen Christ and instantly bowed down before him and hailed him Redeemer—King. But this has not been the history of education, of the higher thought of man, even of science itself,—certainly not of the broader and nobler truths, certainly not of the purpose of Christ. He who would be good must fight a battle: he who would pray well must first resist the devil. This makes life very hard: the burden is sometimes too heavy; but the voice of history so concurs with the testimony of conscience and the whole is so corroborated by the spirit of prophecy that we must accept the discipline, and await with what patience God himself can work within us the issue of the tragic miracle.

Is there no compensatory consideration or circumstance? The

Lord himself must speak very distinctly in some conditions and relations of life. There must be no third party; the interview must be a face to face communion with God. There are times in life when we could not bear even a friend's voice, or a pastor's prayer,—when we must verily with the heart's eyes see the very God of heaven. How sweetly the divine voice mingles with the human story! How wondrously the low places are lifted up, and the rough places are made plain, and the mountains are brought low by words full of divine fire and love! The verses seem to alternate—now darkness, now light; now dejection, now hope; now the moan of the weary leader who longs to unyoke himself and take rest, now the inspiring voice of God—a new promise, or an old promise set in new terms—the old, old diamond in a new and beauteous setting. The words with which the second verse opens are familiar words, but their familiarity does not destroy their preciousness. “And the Lord said unto me.” That is how the balance is adjusted. In the one verse, Og king of Bashan; in the next verse—Jehovah. Thus the story of our life alternates—now an enemy, now a friend; now the fight is going to be too severe for us and we shall certainly fall, and now the Lord of hosts is in the van, and kings are burned by his presence as stubble is burned by the fire. What was the divine message? It was a message adapted to the sensitiveness of the circumstances:—“Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand.” Get rid of fear, and you increase power. “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” He who is touched by the cold shadow of fear is not himself in all the richness of his quality, in all the amplitude of his strength. This is a miracle which can be wrought only by divine energy. The demon of fear cometh not forth but at the Master's own bidding. Disciples may cheer one another, for a moment alleviate the acuteness of the distress, and for a period may suggest thoughts which lift up the mind below the level of darkness; but the demon of fear—the demon that makes a coward of a man—can only be expelled by the voice of God, at the very bidding of Omnipotence. This should give us comfort. Many men suffer from a spirit of fear who imagine they are suffering from a spirit of doubt, amounting almost to impiety and even blasphemy. Men are thus cruel with them-

selves because they do not distinguish between things that differ. All men are not equally valorous. We are not equal in intellectual energy and determination. Some men are in bondage all their life-time through fear—not always of death, but of all kinds of difficulty; the very air is full of spectres; every wind that blows brings with it a moan of despair rather than sounds a trumpet of hope. God must judge all men herein. Let us, at all events, try to take the upper and better view, and not allow the enemy to cheat us out of our prayer by the suggestion that we have lost the altar and forgotten the all-prevailing Name. This is Christ's word. "Fear not" is taken from the Old Testament into the New: "Fear not them which kill the body;" "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" "Fear God." We must pray for the fearless spirit. Observe, this is a purely spiritual inspiration. Israel is not equipped with a new set of armour, as of bows or arrows, or swords or instruments of steel, or, modernising the incident, with all that we now call weapons of war. What ally is this who comes to the head? It is God himself. A promise is a victory. A seized and applied comfort of heaven lifts men into heroic proportions. How valiant would the Church be could she but realise and claim with thankfulness and energy the exceeding great and precious promises of God! "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal,"—the armour is spiritual; we live by thought, we fight by inspiration, we suffer in the spirit of hope; and, glorified by the indwelling presence of God, no king that ever came out against us can effectively lift his hand to smite the Christian banner. He who is strong in spirit is strong all through and through his nature; he who is only muscularly strong will fail in the fight. The brave heart, the soul alive with God—that will always conquer. Let us live and move and have our being in God.

What was the consequence? We read the story in the fourth verse:—"And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, threescore cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan." Opposition to God always means *loss*. No man can fight God, and retire truly and lastingly rich. He can have a thief's store; he can pillow his head upon heaps of gold; but he will find it hard lying, and



in the night-time his pillow may be stolen. Whoso opposes God comes to ruin in this way. There is no bad man who is successful. Do not let us interpret the word "successful" narrowly and partially, as if it were a term descriptive of mere appearances or momentary relationships. In the partial acceptance of the term the proposition will not bear examination; but in discussing great spiritual realities we must take in the full view; and, fixing the attention upon that view, the proposition remains an indestructible truth—that no bad man is really prosperous. He has no comfort. He eats like a glutton, but he has no true enjoyment; out of his bread he draws no poetry, no thought, no fire; it is lost upon him, for he is an evil eater. In his apparent wealth he is miserably poor. He has more anxiety than the penniless man. We suppose that anxiety is the portion of poverty; anxiety, in a still larger measure, is the portion of wealth, and especially of ill-gotten wealth—money that has a bad history behind it; the men who hold it will presently be coming in, setting down the money, and going out and hanging themselves that they may hasten after their elder brother Iscariot. If it could be proved that a man can oppose God and be truly happy, the whole Christian kingdom would be destroyed by that proof. The word of the Lord, as written in the Book, is against the possibility. If a man, therefore, can rise, whose word can be taken, who is of sufficient standing and station in society to have his word accepted, who can say,—I have broken all the commandments, I have defied the Spirit of the Cross, I have denounced the God of the Bible; and lived a bad man's life, yet I have purest enjoyment, a sense of sanctity greater than could be boasted by Christ and his Apostles;—if a man could bear that testimony, we should have brought into visible conflict the God of heaven and the spirit of earth. But, whilst we are waiting for that witness, we can call up an army, ten thousand times ten thousand strong, to testify that "the way of transgressors is hard"—that there is no peace to the wicked; that the mind of the wicked is like a troubled sea. The testimony upon that side is complete and invincible.

But what became of Og, the king of Bashan? We read in the eleventh verse,—“Behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon? nine

cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man." What an ending! How appropriate! How bitter the satire! Og king of Bashan came out to fight the people of God; a few verses are written in which battles are fought and cities taken, and at the end the bedstead of Og is nearly all that remains of the mighty king of Bashan! This is worthless fame; this is the renown that is pitiable. But there is no other renown for wicked men: they will leave a name in history, but a name the children will laugh at; they will leave behind them a memorial, but the memorial itself shall be an abiding sarcasm. The Lord turneth the counsel of the wicked upside down; the Lord will laugh at the wicked man and have all his devices in derision. His bedstead will be remembered when he himself is forgotten; he will be spoken of in the bulk and not in the quality; he will be measured like a log; he will be forgotten like an evil dream. The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. Who would be wicked? Who would oppose God? Who would not rather coalesce with the heavens, and pray that the Spirit of God would work in the human heart the miracle of reconciliation with things eternal and celestial?

Now Moses has a desire. In the whole course of the Pentateuch he only spoke twice on his own account in the matter of desire, and in both instances he was refused. Moses said, first,—“Shew me thy glory;” and God said, No: no man could see my glory and live: it would blind him and strike him dead; but I will show thee my goodness. Now, towards the end, Moses says,—“And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, . . . I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon” (vv. 23-5). And the Lord said,—No. This seems to be cruel. It occurs in our own life. We are sometimes so near, and, behold, the scene dissolves like a mirage—vanishes at our approach like a thing that mocks us. The child comes to the twenty-first year, but never completes his majority; the dream is just going to come true, when some rude wind blows it absolutely away; the blossom is beautiful, the fruit is forming, and whilst we are looking on the east wind comes and blights the tree; now and again, in prayer, we are just going to lay both hands upon the answer and bring it back with us like a reaper returning with a sheaf from the harvest

field, and before we can touch it we who were mighty in prayer become weak in unbelief; we see so many things come towards maturity which never ripen into the bloom of perfect life. Then what became of Moses? Here is an unanswered prayer. Blessed be God for many prayers that have never been answered! What if at the end we have to thank God more for the prayers he did not hear than for the supplications to which he replied? Let us picture Moses now as an old man: let us, in imagination, see his white hair, his wrinkled face, the fire of his eyes diminishing—nearly extinct; let us for a moment imagine a child's emotion swelling his old breast as he says,—“Let me go over, and see the good land;”—and then imagine him doubling his age and falling into decrepitude as in a moment when the forbidding word falls from the lips of God. That is no romance: it is to-day's distressing story. But that is not the end. Moses wanted to see the lower Canaan—what if he saw the higher? Moses uttered a little prayer—what if God denied a reply so small as the intercession and took him up without prayer into the region of eternal praise? The prophets were cut off without seeing the culmination or fruition of their predictions; but what heavens blazed upon their opened eyes in the other and better world what sage may hear, what poet imagine? There we stand. God denies only that which is little, earthly and mean, or miscalculated, or undesirable. He surprises us by the vastness of his answers. He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Into that sanctuary of promise our souls would fly as into a refuge inviolable. You prayed for the child's life, and the child died—what if it were but transplanted from cold climes to the summer air of heaven? You prayed for a certain kind of prosperity, and it was denied—what if your soul was enriched with a nobler largess—a greater proof of favour divine? Do not interrupt God, or mischievously and narrowly interpret his promise. It is written upon the record, it was spoken by the voice of Christ—that God will always do some better thing for us than we have ventured to desire. If the little prayer is denied, it is that God may make room for a larger blessing—yea, for the new Jerusalem itself.

## Deut. iv.

### THE DIVINE FOUNDATION.

**T**HIS book is a book of speeches. The man who delivered the speeches—three in number—said he could not speak. Aaron was chosen because he could deliver public messages and take charge of the appeals and commandments of God to mighty men. But, as in life, the first is last and the last is first. Who can quote anything that Aaron ever said? Who does not know that the whole of the Pentateuch is alive with the eloquence of Moses from the very time of his coming into it? Yet Moses said he could not speak: he was “of a slow tongue,” and his lips did not move easily to music or eloquence. How God turns the counsels of men upside down! How the slow mouth might become most eloquent, could the man but accept the will of God!—making his very weakness a reason for accepting, that God might be the more magnified and honoured and glorified. When did God choose a man for his ministry without intending to qualify him for it? He does not accept the mighty man who says he is all but omnipotent. He accepts the trembling man, broken-hearted, his eyes full of tears, his tongue stammering because it cannot carry the burden of his thought and his emotion. Whom God has called to his ministry—be he a dumb man—he will qualify and he will crown. A book of speeches should have extraordinary fascination for us. There is a literature of speech as well as a literature of mechanical and exact composition. The difference is easily discernible and is often quickly felt. The world will surely never wholly dismiss its speaker. The speaker is so much nearer to us than the writer can ever be. He brings so much to his work which cannot be reported or reproduced—all the sympathy of presence, voice, tears, encouragement. The very utterance is itself an annotation; the speech is made alive by the man. Let us encourage one another in this ministry of

speech—often broken, sometimes all but incoherent, yet singular in fascination because singular in sympathy and reality, not a lesson recited, but an appeal delivered; and not an effort accomplished with great outlay of strength and patience, but a new breathing of a wind from heaven. Moses appears, therefore, as a speaker in this book of Deuteronomy. His speech is solid with instruction, tremulous with appeal, grand with character. Yet Aaron was to have been the speaker. Aaron is dead,—Moses is quoted by Christ and is sung in heaven. Moses called upon Israel to “hearken” (v. 1). Who can hear? Who has ever met a man, in any congregation, that could listen? What is wanted to-day may be described as good hearers. It is not given to man to rush away from his business, place himself down suddenly in the sanctuary, and call for revelations that he can appreciate. Men must be prepared to hear as well as prepared to preach. To “hearken” is not a mechanical exercise. The word “hearken” is charged with profound meaning; it represents the act of acute, vital, profound, fervent attention. He who “hearkens” is in an attitude of eagerness—as if he would complete the speech, anticipate it, or elicit from the speaker a broader eloquence by the gratitude and expectancy of his own attention. Would that they who say much about speaking would learn the elements of good listening!—so learned, they would be dispossessed of themselves, their ears would be purged of all noises and tumults and rival competitions, and importunity being dismissed, anxiety being suspended, and the soul set in a posture of expectation, would receive even from slow-speaking Moses statutes and precepts solemn as eternity, and rich as the thought of God. “He that hath ears to hear,”—not for noises to please,—“let him hear.” Such hearing is almost equal to praying; such listening never was disappointed. Moses had such grasp of his ministry and understanding of his holy function that he was strong even within supposed limitations. It is when men have no boundaries that they are vague in intellectual conception and indefinite in religious speech. Moses should be the teacher of teachers. Moses was under the impression, which is fast being got rid of, that God has begun the ministry, has actually pointed out the starting-place, has gone further, and prepared the speech, so that man now has only to deliver it, incarnate it, represent it.

It is not the word of man, but the word of God. About what other word could Moses have said—"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" ? (v. 2). Certainly, this puts human genius upon a severe trial. Men, having "sought out many inventions," would like to invent a Bible. What a Bible man could invent! There should be in it no dust of the ground answering to the breath of God, no trial-tree, no tempting serpent, no tragedy; but a kind of minor heaven, a dull blue and pale light, and mechanical virtue, and regulation enjoyments,—no devil, no hell. Men are not compelled to accept the Bible ministry, but if they do accept it, they are bound by the record. Men may invent bibles, but they ought also to invent churches to preach them in, and invent the sacrifice which could bear the disappointment which always follows the criticism of disapproving Heaven. We are not forced into the pulpit, but being in the pulpit by the highest force—namely, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost—the one thing we have not to do is to invent either law or gospel. That is what is meant by limitation. The centre is given and the circumference is described, and within the circumference we have large liberty. We have no right of trespass or violation. Who can describe the moral contemptibleness of the man who invents bibles and gospels whilst he is standing on professedly Christian ground and surrounded by Christian sanctions and is enjoying the comfort of Christian recognition? What is wanted is more Bible; a fuller reading of the Bible, following a profounder understanding of the Bible. Who has exhausted all the truth of God's Word? Who can get to the end of these five loaves and a few small fishes? The feast grows with the appetite that enjoys it: the light increases upon the vision that can receive it; until, at last, the Christian student says, lifting up his eyes: I see heaven opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Add nothing, take away nothing, but give the Word opportunity of natural and proper development. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard-seed, the least of all seeds; but when it is sown and grown, how ample its branches! how hospitable its shelter! So the Book is more than a letter; it is a letter to begin with, but

it must be sown, planted, watered from the clouds of heaven, shone upon by the light of the God who wrote it; and then it is not a Bible projected by the invention of man, but a revelation fully expanded, blooming with immortal summer, grand and rich with the joy of God.

But does not this require great faith? Most certainly it does; but that faith itself is sustained by vision. The law of God is confirmed by experience. It is not all faith, a merely intellectual or spiritual effort. It is marvellous how this inner action is sustained by outward facts; how God re-writes the Bible in human history and annotates it with a thousand facts day by day. So Moses said, "Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day" (vv. 3, 4). Marvellous is this interplay of faith and fact, consciousness and experience, prayer and realisation. The world is an outside representation of many a sanctuary mystery. The book of Proverbs is not a book of apophthegms, of guesses at possibilities: every proverb is a history expressed in a proposition. The way, therefore, to read the proverbs is to select one, and say, What does human history reply to that proposition?—and a fair analysis of human nature and a fair induction of human facts will end in the confession that the proverb has anticipated in a marvellous manner, and generalised with massive eloquence, all that has been proved by human history. When the Sanhedrim laughed at Peter and John and said bitter things about them, they were merry up to the point of victory, but, "beholding the man," a sudden cloud fell upon their joy, and troubled them exceedingly; there is the man who was lame standing up, looking in the face the accusers of the Christian healers. A written miracle they could have smiled down—they had a gracious smile;—but—"beholding the man!" That is the proof to which Moses refers; that is the proof to which Christian teachers may always refer. "Beholding" the temper, the charity, the nobleness, the purity; "beholding" the miracle of the Holy Ghost, eloquence is dumb, and criticism commits suicide. But, if we have nothing to show, we may at once surrender. We must be able to refer to experience, and fact, and reality,

and call up the witnesses a thousand at a time to bear testimony. All men cannot bear that testimony in logical terms or in high theological expressions : it is not given to every man to confuse the Word of God by terms which no other man can understand ; but who cannot take part in the testimony which is indicated by the words, "Once I was blind, now I see" ? In the last grand "Hallelujah !" there is emotion as well as argument. The great thinkers and the great teachers say, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth : the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." That is argument ; that is history ; that is eloquence. Now some can only take part in the emotion, and they say, "Hallelujah! hallelujah!" Do they contribute to the testimony? Certainly. The testimony of God is a testimony that must have fire, emotion, soul. Great leaders, mighty sons of the morning, may speak about the kingdoms of this world having become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ—may speak statesmen's language and utter imperial sentences; but the mothers, and the broken hearts, and they who have had small chance in literary life can take part in the final testimony, saying, "Hallelujah! hallelujah! hallelujah!"—a mere declamation to those who have never been touched by the emotion, but an argument in fire to those who know the mystery of the peace and joy of God in the soul.

This grand argument of experience is sustained by the grand argument of public criticism and public recognition. Thus, we read in the sixth and seventh verses,—“Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for” ? It would seem as if Moses represented the heathen nations as forming their estimate of what we now call Christian people and kingdoms. The picture is a vivid one, full of graphic suggestion. The heathen are looking on, observing the temper of so-called Christian communities and nationalities ; they see there what they can see nowhere else, and, gathering up all the evidence, they say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” We always have that great possibility in front of us.



There may be those who could sneer at a nation praying in the face of imminent war. There is no need to sneer at such an act. Sneering men never did anything for the world; it is not in the power of a sneering man to help any noble cause. Impressions are made upon observing peoples by religious acts, by religious consecration, by Christian charity; and it may be—who can tell?—that even heathen nations may fear to approach in deadly hostility a nation that can truly pray. There is a wondrous power in innocence. Men have gone up to it at midnight to challenge and arrest it, and they have been struck to the ground by an arm unseen.

The appeal of Moses is the eternal appeal of the Bible:—“And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (v. 8). That is the appeal to common sense and to common honesty. The commandments are not described as eloquent, marvellous intellectual conceptions, great advances in ethical thinking. Moses asks,—What other nation can produce a Bible so righteous? Any Bible must go down that is not righteous above all other things, how high soever the varied attributes by which any book may be characterised. What is the moral tone of the Bible? Pure, righteous, true, holy. What are the great commandments of the Book? “Love,” “love,”—twice love. The first object?—“God;” the second, “Thy neighbour.” This is the strength of the Bible; and we can all begin at this point to inquire into the remainder of the Book. The difficulty with many students is that they begin at the wrong point. The great duty of every reader of the Bible is to begin at any point he can. He may say, I understand the beautiful word, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” Keep there: watch at that gate, for many an angel comes through it from heaven. Another reader says, Whatever there may be in the Bible which I cannot understand, I feel my whole heart going out towards the man who said, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want”—and all the music of the twenty-third Psalm. That is your Bible: stand there; blessed is that servant who is found standing by that door, for out of it the Lord comes. Men may ask bewildering questions about the archæology and the so-called science of the Bible, and may even puzzle the uncultured reader with many a

question relating to spiritual mysteries ; but taken from end to end the Bible is charged with righteousness : it will have the neighbour loved as the man himself ; it will have the harvest like the seed-time ; it will insist upon right balances and full weights ; it will have no concealed iniquities : it carries its candle of flame with fire never kindled upon earth into the secrets of the mind and the chambers of the soul and the hidden places of motive and purpose and ultimate, but unexpressed, intent. The Word of God is sharp, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. It is a righteous Word. The Bible has a thousand weapons in its armoury : not the lightest, not the weakest is its magnificent morality, its heavenly righteousness, its incorruptible integrity. It shakes off the wicked man ; it will have no communion with darkness ; it strikes the liar on the mouth ; it avoids the unholy follower. This is—let us repeat—the argument of Moses, and it is the eternal argument of Christianity.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

The Lawgiver here stands amidst Israel, warning and consoling, commanding and exhorting, surveying and proclaiming the future with marvellous discernment. The speeches begin with the enumeration of the wonderful dealings of God with the chosen people in the early period of their existence. Moses clearly proves to them the punishment of unbelief, the obduracy of Israel, and the faithfulness of Jehovah with regard to his promises, which were now on the point of being accomplished. Fully aware of the tendencies of the people, and foreseeing their alienations, Moses conjures them most impressively to hold fast the commands of the Lord, and not to forget his revelations, lest curses should befall them instead of blessings. The Lawgiver then expatiates on the spirit of the law and its reception into the hearts of men, both in a positive and negative way. Fear, he says, is the primary effect of the law, as also its aim. As Israel had once listened to the announcement of the fundamental laws of the theocracy with a sacred fear, in like manner should man also receive, through the whole system of the law, a lively and awful impression of the holiness and majesty of God. But as the essence and sum of the law is love to Jehovah, the only and true God, man shall by the law be reminded of the divine mercy, so variously manifested in deeds ; and this reflection is calculated to rouse in man's heart love for God. This love is the only and true source from which proper respect and obedience to the law can proceed.

Deut. iv.

### MEMORY AND DUTY.

**I**N the ninth verse we have a very solemn possibility indicated. The words of Moses are :—"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life : but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." The solemn possibility is the possibility of forgetting God and God's providence in human life. We fail not always through sin or vulgar crime, as if with both hands we would smite the sceptre of God and the throne of righteousness : we may be far enough from any such exhibition of a rebellious kind ; but what is of equal fatality as to spiritual loss and consequent exposedness to every temptation of the enemy is the possibility of forgetting all that is worth remembering. We may not have endeavoured to expunge, as by an express and malicious effort ; but memory is treacherous : the faculty of recollection is otherwise than religiously employed, and before we are quite aware of what has been done, a complete wreck has been wrought in the memory of the soul. The accusation will not found itself upon the thought that we have learned a lesson and have allowed the lines to slip, but our attention will be called to the fact that we who were eye-witnesses can no longer bear testimony because of the vacuity of our minds. There will settle upon the intellectual faculties themselves, and upon the senses of the body, a stupidity amounting to sinfulness. We may have no memory for words : had we committed the lesson to an intellectual recollection we might have been excused for forgetting somewhat of its continuity and exactness ; the point is that we are called to remember things which our eyes have seen. The eye is meant to be the ally of the memory. Many men can only remember through the vision ; they have no memory for things abstract, but once let them see clearly an object or

a writing, and they say they can hold the vision evermore. God's providence appeals to the eye; God's witnesses are eye-witnesses—not inventors, but men who can speak to transactions which have come under their immediate and personal observation: they have seen and tasted and handled of the Word of life. What a loss it is to forget the noble past! How treacherous is the memory of Ingratitude! All favours have gone for nothing; all kind words, all stimulating exhortations, all great and ennobling prayers,—forgotten in one criminal act. To empty the memory is to silence the tongue of praise; not to cherish the recollection is to lose the keenest stimulus which can be applied to the excitement and progress of the soul. On the other hand, he whose memory is rich has a song for every day; he who recollects the past in all its deliverances, in all its sudden brightnesses, in all its revelations and appearances, cannot be terrified or chased by the spirit of fear: he lives a quiet life, deep as the peace of God. Can Moses suggest any way of keeping the memory of God's providences quick and fresh? He lays down the true way of accomplishing this purpose:—"Teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons"—in other words, speak about them, dwell upon them, magnify them, be grateful for them; put down the day, the date, the punctual time, when the great deliverances occurred, and when the splendid revelations were granted; and go over the history line by line and page by page, and thus keep the recollection verdant, quick as life, bright as light. What a reproach to those Christians who are dumb! How much they lose who never speak about God! "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written. . . And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." To speak of the mercies of God is to increase the power of witness at another point. We first see, then we teach. The teaching of others is not to come until there has been clear perception on our own part. The eye-witness is doubly strong in whatever testimony he may make: not only can he tell a clear story from end to end, he can sign it with both hands, he can attest it with the certainty and precision of a man who has seen the things to which he sets his signature. Our Christianity amounts to nothing if it is not a personal experience. We cannot preach Christ until we have seen

Christ. To preach salvation should mean that we ourselves have been saved.

Were all days alike, then, to the ancient Israelites—a great monotony of light: for even the summer may become a burden, and men may long for cloud and pouring rain? The days were not all alike: the monotony was broken in upon. So we read in the tenth verse: “Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.” There are “special” days even in the highest experiences; there are great high-tides in the soul’s emotion; there are times of transfiguration, seasons when we see things as we never saw them before, glimpses of day, shootings, first, scarcely discernible, of bright lights across the whole firmament, which may be received by the soul as pledges of a whole heaven full of glory. Such moments may be few in number, but such is their quality that they require whole pages of our life-book for their clear and explicit writing. In all life there are “special” days:—the birth-day, the wedding day, the funeral day, the day when the letter came that brought a gospel of release from manifold and intolerable anxiety, the day when the epistle came from a hand which we thought would never write again. What is the day which Moses specialises? It is the day that ought to be the most memorable in every man’s experience: the day when the divine Word was heard—revelation day, conversion day, salvation day,—say broadly—resurrection day. The day when the soul first became conscious of its true relation to God, and answered the appeal of heaven, ought to be the all-absorbing day; it should be as the day when the ear heard music for the first time. Can the man cured of almost total blindness forget the moment when he first saw the blue sky and the beflowered earth under his feet? No more can the soul forget the time when it first saw through the letter the meaning of the Spirit—when it first caught the music of heaven, when it first realised the meaning of life and duty and sacrifice. Whilst Moses would have nothing forgotten he would have a special remembrance made of the day when the word of the Lord was heard in the mount that “burned with fire.”

A singular expression directly follows in the eleventh verse. Moses says:—"And ye came near and stood under the mountain." This is a new view of humanity. Probably the people themselves to whom Moses immediately spoke this word did not come near the mountain: most of them may have been born after the promulgation of the law from Sinai;—because, indeed, of their not having heard that law in its original promulgation these great Deuteronomic speeches were spoken by Moses: it was a repetition of the law to men who had not themselves actually heard it in the first instance; yet the people are spoken to as if they themselves in their own personality had been present, had come "near and stood under the mountain," and had felt the scorching of the fire which made that mountain unapproachable. This is the right view of human history. Human nature is one; humanity is a solid. *We* were at Horeb, and we heard the law. There is no recognition of such time as separates ages and races and revelations in the matter of devolving the responsibility of witness wholly upon dead men. We who now live crucified the Son of God. When the world believes that, it will rise to a new conception of its relations to the whole race and to all the ages of time. We were not born and shall not die, in any sense that shall insulate us from all the currents and significations of human history. We are the poorest of the city: we are the richest of the land; we who now live are great as kings, and are unknown as suppliants who hide themselves in darkness and speak their muffled prayers from obscurity. God "hath made of one blood all nations of men." We belong to one another. The child born yesterday was at Horeb, and will be present at the last great scene. Realise this thought, and instantaneously the true democracy is appreciated and valued—in no pedantic or narrow sense, but in the holy sense that all nations are one, that whether we be conventionally and socially high or low, rich or poor, is a matter of mere detail: we are alive with the same blood, and are hastening to the same arbitrament. There are narrow and partial and transitory senses in which men differ from one another, and are separated and classified; but sinking down to proper depths we come upon a vital line which unites and consolidates the human family.

An extraordinary caution was addressed to the Israelites by

Moses in the fifteenth verse:—"Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire." The people were not to make any image of God—"the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of anything that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth" (vv. 16-18). We must not touch God in the matter of making similitudes of him at any point. It is quite true that God fills his creation, and that any pebble taken up from the sea-shore might be made a symbol of his presence; but, seeing that no object can represent him in his totality, there must be no attempt to engrave the image of the Eternal. He is without shape, without gender; he is in the beast of the earth; he is in the winged fowl that flieth in the air; he is not ashamed of any worm he ever made to wriggle in the meanest soil; he is not ashamed to hear the young lions when they cry, or to entertain the insects at his bountiful table;—they are his: every pulse is his, every drop of blood is his; but he will not be figured, represented, or monumentalised in fragments and in detail. "God is a Spirit,"—a marvellous revelation of that which cannot be revealed! We seem to have heard something, but we have heard nothing; the soul is enchanted by the music of a new expression, but not helped by the carving of a new symbol. The soul delights in the meaning, seizes the purpose of the revelation, and in repeating the holy words brings itself into a sweet rhythm and harmony with all the movement of creation, saying, again and again, as if uttering the refrain of an eternal song,—“God is a Spirit.”

Why forbid the creation of a similitude? The answer is given in the sixteenth verse:—"Lest ye corrupt yourselves." The answer is also given in the nineteenth verse:—"And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven" and begin to worship sun and moon and stars, and all the hosts of light. There is a reason for the invisibleness of God. There is a reason for all the denials which God has addressed to human curiosity. Who would not know more of the future—not the mere future of time, but the great future which we have learned to know by the name "eternity"? The answer is, "lest"—and there the curtain falls.

Who would not know more of the dead—the holy, sainted crowned dead? Why this eternal silence? Why not an occasional glimpse of the outline of the soul's figure? Why not an occasional note of the individual voice to assure those who are upon the earth that the loved one is uniting in the songs of light? The answer is, "lest"—meaning that it is for our good, that this denial is part of our education, that by the trial of our patience we might rise to some higher perfectness of faith. Who would not wish to have one moment's glimpse of heaven—one opening of the cloud? If we could see the green land of paradise—unblighted, unsullied, bearing upon it the light of an infinite blessing, responding to the smile of its Creator—we never could be unhappy any more. So we think; it may be but mere supposition on our part. No good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly; if anything, therefore, is withheld, it is because the granting of it would interfere with the divine cultivation and perfecting of the soul. We are thus called to the rest of faith. We are educated by silence, as well as by speech. To have our liberty bounded may be to have our liberty perfected. There is an *intension* of spiritual life as well as an *extension*; in the one case, the spiritual life is deepened, enriched in every quality, ennobled in all thought; in the other case, information is widened, multiplied, and so rapidly and unexpectedly that the soul is almost affrighted out of the most solid and enduring peace. The growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is not always ostentatious—that is to say, an appeal to vision, to sense of any kind; much may be proceeding which no observer can discern and of which the subject himself may be to some extent uncertain. We are too much inclined to go by what we can measure and totalise in augmenting figures, saying, with the tone of a statistical inquirer,—We have grown thus and so much, within a given period of time. How long shall we take that childish way of measuring our soul's progress? Let us remember for our comfort that there is a deepening process going on in silence, that providences may be so interpreted as to enter the soul with new vitalising forces, which are not yet ripe for expression; and when we open our whole being to the highest influences of heaven, and keep earnestly holding ourselves in readiness for light upon light and truth upon truth, instead of being able to



measure the increments, we shall know that they have taken place in the soul, by some day, suddenly to ourselves, breaking forth into new songs, surprising the soul by a music within itself which it had not hitherto realised. Our duty is plain; our duty is simple; our duty is to keep our minds and hearts open to the inspiration of God, to read the law of the Lord, and meditate therein day and night, to gather richly of the word divine, letting it dwell in the soul like roots planted in good ground by the Husbandman of the Church. The great thing is to keep a clean heart towards God, never to invite the Most High into a complete and furnished heart, the very elegance of which involves a subtle compliment to the heart itself and a subtle patronage to the God who is invited, but to ask God to come into a broken heart, a contrite, helpless heart, a sighing, self-complaining, sin-confessing, sin-detesting heart,—then the meeting will be a glad one, because it will be founded upon right relations; there will be no mockery on the part of the man, and there will be no interception of the whole almightiness of the living and redeeming God. Let us beware of materialising the spiritual. We must have the material, because we ourselves are not wholly spiritual. The senses need to be assisted that the forces which they represent may be sanctified; but it is one thing to have the house, and another to mistake the house for the tenant: it is one thing to keep the dead body in the house for a day or two before interment, another to keep it there as if the laws of nature could be set aside and a new economy established by the utter weakness of man. We must fall under the grand ideals which are everywhere brought to our attention in the Holy Book. The ladder we see is a ladder into heaven; the opened heaven is an opportunity of seeing the Son of man; and the written Book itself is God's nearest way of bringing his hand close to our life: We do not worship the built house, or the piled altar, or the living teacher, or the sculptured monument; in so far as we have these, we use them as lenses through which to see the furthest stars, the more distant lights, the very Shekinah of heaven.

In the twenty-fifth verse we find not only the possibility, but the disastrous influence of corruption in religious thinking. "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves,

and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed." Out of what origin or fountain does this cataract of denunciation proceed? Moses sets before the children of Israel the possibility of their religion becoming irreligious, than which no greater curse can befall the human mind, or pervert the way of human progress. Wrong in your religion, you are wrong everywhere. Man is profoundly religious in senses that have not been altogether fully realised and applied. He not only worships instinctively—that is to say, turns up his eyes to the heavens to find an object greater than himself, or falls down before an object which he supposes to be greater than himself; but he is so religious that when he becomes wrong or mistaken—wilfully or unwilfully—in his religious conception, the influence is felt in every point of the circumference of his conduct. Men soon turn away from the right religious thought. It is a painful thought in some aspects; it must be so, because it imposes discipline; it educates a man by humbling him; it will accept nothing of his patronage; it will insist continually upon the doctrine that without Christ he can do nothing; that all he is and has and does that is good is really a manifestation of the Son of God within him. Other religions might give him importance, might assign him a kind of superiority, might even deign to consult him, or to accept some addition from his hands; but the religion of the Bible is as unapproachable as the sun, and yet as friendly as the light. There is always a point gleaming in the infinite heights which can never be touched: a mystery in the clouds and above the clouds; and yet there is always a beautiful blessing round about the poorest life—an hospitable, re-invigorating and hopeful light beating upon the poorest man's one-paned window, calling him to hope and energy and renewed prayer, and promising him still broader glory. It might suit our vanity to lay our hand upon the sun himself, but that is not permitted unto man; it is enough that he see the light, receive the light, walk in the light, toil in the light. His concern is not with the mysterious body out of which the light descends, but with the

light itself. Jesus Christ teaches this doctrine in words characteristically his own; he says,—“If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”—in other terms,—If the religion that is in thee be wrong, if thy piety be impious, if thy prayers be profane, how profound the iniquity! how unutterable the blasphemy! How false is the supposition that religion will take care of itself in the human mind, that it will accept any course of conduct and be equally at home with the drunkard and with the pious man, with the thief and with the honest citizen; that it resides almost exclusively in the intellect, and in the imagination, and never descends into all the practical walks and relations of life! Say religion is a sensitive angel, shocked by evil conduct, affrighted by temper not sweet or gracious, turned away in great pale fear from all things unholy, unclean, undivine,—that would be a right representation. We cannot keep our prayer and our profanity in the same heart. The final choice must be made. Allow the mind a false conception of God, and what follows? Necessarily a false conception of all life, all duty, all sacrifice. Given a profound and true conception of God, and what follows? Elevation of the whole character, an ennobling of the whole circuit and range of the mind, out of which will come the testimony of good temper, beautiful feeling, responsive sympathy, eternal charity. So, rightly understood, in no narrow or pedantic sense, everything really turns upon a true theology, by which is not meant a formal science, a shaped and articulated doctrine, but a right conception of the spirituality of God, the fatherhood of God, the invisibleness and mysteriousness of God—ideas so received into the mind as to create reverence, and never to debase intellectual action into mere superstition. What becomes of those who corrupt religion and turn away from the light? Is God indifferent? Never do we find human conduct treated with divine unconcern. Our conduct seems to make a kind of other heaven for God when it is right. He loves to be with the soul when it prays, when it looks up with expectancy, when it claims, how mutely soever, its kinship with the Infinite and its association with the Eternal. “To this man will I look, to the man that is of a humble and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word.” In the heart of such a man God finds an under-heaven, a sanctuary he delights to dwell in,—a place sacred to his presence. By so much as this is true

on the one side there is a completing truth on the other. Let a graven image be set up instead of the spiritual Deity, and God will wither the life of the worshipper:—"ye shall soon utterly perish." As the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, so a man cannot bear fruit except he abide in the true God, and he can only abide in the true God by a true spirit—a spirit of simplicity, trustfulness, burning sincerity, saying, in every look of his eye and every action of his hand: I would be like my Father in heaven. Let us never suppose that we can safely trifle with religious conceptions, thoughts, and disciplines; we are only safe as we are in the sanctuary; the outside seems inviting, the paths are full of flowers, the air trembles with the music of birds, and a thousand seductions endeavour to draw us forth into the open spaces and the boundless liberties, but we are soon taught that law alone is liberty, and that the sanctuary of right thinking and right conduct is alone exempt from the lightning and the tempest of judgment. No religion that is not true has ever come to anything in the world, viewed in the largest relations and in the amplest and clearest light of things. Great nations have had false religions, but what have the nations been great in?—great in number, great in contemplation, great in poetry that never embodies itself in energetic and beneficent action. Only they—account for it as you will—who love the Lord God of heaven and earth, as revealed in the Bible, are found east, west, north, south, preaching gospels, seeking to reclaim human nature, to evangelise the world, and are prepared to suffer and to die for their faith. We are not unaware of the existence of stupendous idolatries and of great nationalities associated with false altars; but judging religion by the spirit of sacrifice, by the desire to do good, by the inspiration of beneficence, by practical conduct of every kind, no religion can stand beside the religion of the Bible. God will soon cause those to pass away who displease him by graven images. Moses said in effect: You shall have enough of them, you shall be humbled amongst the heathen; you, who have begun with speciality of name and function and destiny, shall dwindle away among the heathen whither the Lord shall lead you—"And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell"—if you will have idolatry, you shall have it in fulness,

yea, to repletion ; yea, until the soul mocks the divinity it began to adore. The way of wrong-doing is always downwards. Wrong has no radiant stairway up into heaven, its ways downward are more than a thousand in number, and easy is the descent of the way to the pit. It is easy to go downhill. There is something in wrong-doing that suits the complex nature of man : he goes to it so easily, as if he loved it ; when the iniquity is cleansed out of his hands and his countenance is purified from its more obvious stains, so cunning is he that he rolls iniquity under his tongue as a sweet morsel : but he lives a life of decay ; the sentence of death is upon him ; though he spread himself like a green bay tree he will pass away so that he cannot be found—yea, when men seek for him they shall obtain no intelligence of his destiny. Whom God wipes out who can find ? Hence the point of the exhortation and the value of the warning. We should take heed unto ourselves and unto the written Book which we hold, so that we depart not from the simplicity of spiritual worship. “God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”—often in silence—golden, precious, expressive silence ; the speechlessness which means that the thing cannot be spoken because of its majesty and sacredness and heavenliness. Do not trifle with religious convictions ; do not play with religious institutions. Everything that is solid and useful and beneficent in life springs out of a right sound, true conception of the nature of God and the purpose of his kingdom.

In the twenty-ninth verse we have what may be described as the eternal Gospel. Hear the sweet words ; say if in sweetness they do not make you forget the honey and the honeycomb :—“But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice. . . . He will not forsake thee.” We may go back to God. He will not look at our blushing shame. He will interpret the set of our countenance, saying,—Behold, they who went away have returned : their hunger shall plead with me : their necessity shall be their vindication ; having come back they shall come home. What a

proposal is this! Verily, human life needs it, and is the better for it. To hear that we may go home again and tell the tale of our sins, and have it interrupted by the very tears of God—who ever dreamed that dream knew as no other man ever did know the deepest necessities of the human heart. The Old Testament is full of the word “return,” “come,” and other terms of welcome, and hailings, as of friendly expectation and assurance of hospitality. The Old Testament would almost seem to outrun the New in its broad welcomes and assurances of divine love. Nothing can stand against the Old Testament but Christ’s own words. When the Apostles come to speak of these things, they seem to speak in a sterner language than did the ancient Hebrew prophets, psalmists, and leaders, as if the Greek tongue were edged, and sharp, and poignant, and the old Hebrew music were round and redundant in the amplitude of its love, having upon it no keenness, no hidden judgment concealed in all the harmonious roll of its musical thunder. Let us enter by some door. The Old Testament speeches may touch some hearts, the New Testament invitations may touch others,—both mean the same thing; all came from the same Fountain. Jesus Christ’s words are very simple—“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus Christ knew all about this departure from the Father’s house, and he represented the exodus by the parable of the prodigal son, who said,—“I will arise and go to my father, and tell him I have sinned;” and he who painted the prodigal in colours so true represented God in love infinite and ineffable, interrupting the penitential speech, and thrusting heaven upon the man whilst the prayer was yet trembling on his lips. Let us return unto the Lord. “Rend your hearts, and not your garments.” We have to rid ourselves of many a corrupt thought, of many a debased course of conduct, and to return to simplicity, to the child’s conceptions of God and to the child’s sweet way of praying. Say, is there any picture known to the human imagination so expressive and tender as a little child upon its knees, with clasped hands, and eyes searching heaven with all the expectation of unsophisticated love? Except we be converted and become as that little child we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. We must not have a theology which the people

cannot understand ; religion must not be one of the fine arts or the most recondite of the sciences. It must be a gospel, a piece of music, a heart-welcome, a cry outrunning the sinner, and sounding upon his ears in the wilderness, telling him of home and sacrifice, of the Cross and of forgiveness. These are words which never can be displaced by the enticing words of man's wisdom.

A wonderful pathos is given to the whole speech of Moses by the words of the thirty-first verse :—“For the Lord thy God is a merciful God.” Who speaks this ? A man who is about to die. This is a dying testimony. The man is old ; no man of his time ever had such variety and range of experience ; he is the principal man of his age ;—in many respects he is the principal man who has yet risen in all the ages up to the date of his birth ;—now his course is closing ; he is to see the promised land from afar, but is not to cross the river ; he is making a valedictory address, and this line comes into it—“The Lord thy God is a merciful God.” How nobly the old man said it ! How his grand voice trembled under the emotion ! Moses was not a sentimentalist : Moses was a legislator, a leader, the very captain of the Lord's hosts ; a man that could break the tables of stone, grind the golden calf into powder and scatter it upon the water and make offending Israel drink the water so empoisoned ; and he—prince, king, mightiest man of his day—closes his course by saying, “The Lord thy God is a merciful God”—I know him ; I have lived with him ; I have been closeted with him in the secrecy of the mountain girded by light and by tempest ; I know him ; he has denied my desire to go and see the land flowing with milk and honey ; all this is before me, and yet my dying testimony is—“The Lord thy God is a merciful God ;” he gave the commandments, and I brought them to you ; but, though Legislator, I have seen his tears ; though he speaks commandments, I have been close to his heart ; though one hand is judgment, yet in another is mercy ; the Lord thy God is no mechanical deity, no infinite Jove, seated upon a throne of ivory, without sentient response to all the tragedy of life,—lifted high upon the circle of eternity, he “is a merciful God.” Give me a man's dying testimony. We shall know the man's religion by what he says in the last extremity. When speculation can do nothing for

him, when genius has blown out its flickering lamp, when the earth recedes, when time closes its dull days, when the cold river plashes suddenly against the approaching feet—tell me what the man said then, and I may touch the reality of his conviction and his hope. Blessed are they, with heaven upon heaven, who are enabled to say, when life is closing and heaven is nearing,—“The Lord our God is a merciful God.”

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## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy mercy endureth for ever. We have read of it: our fathers have told us concerning it; but, blessed be thy name, we ourselves have tasted and felt and handled the word of life. We know somewhat of its power in the soul; we know what the Holy Spirit hath done for us. Once we were blind: now we see; once this world was enough: now it is too small. We look up: we look beyond; we search the distant lines of the sky to see if any opening reveal itself to tell of further spaces. Once we knew not God, and our life was dark and very cold, without sympathy, without hope,—a great riddle without an answer; but now, having seen the Saviour with the eyes of our love, having been accepted in the Beloved, behold, all things are new, all nature is larger, written all over with messages full of holy suggestion; creation itself is an infinite altar at which we bow in holy, tender prayer. Behold, thou hast made all things new to us. If any man be in Christ Jesus, all things are new: old things have passed away; new heavens and a new earth, and a new future—these are the gifts of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; then the promise of heaven—heavenly study, heavenly service, heavenly progress. Our mind cannot follow the line of fatherly promise: we know not what it is in all its meaning; eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared, laid up in store for them that love him. Truly, by the Spirit, we now see in part: we see through a glass darkly; but still thou dost hold before us the solemn truth that we have not yet begun to see or hear or comprehend as compared with our enjoyments of thy presence and thy light in the world to come. Help us to read thy Book with an understanding mind, with an acute and reverent attention; and may we hear all the tones of thy voice, and see in thy word some outline of thy shape, thine image, thy glory. Let thy mercy be extended unto us according to our need. We are the children of necessity: our life is one continual want; our eyes are unto the hills whence cometh our help. We bless thee for answered prayer and for prayer denied. We pray, and leave our prayers at the throne, sprinkled with atoning blood, made eloquent by the intercession of the Son of God; and thine answer, whatsoever it be, shall make us glad or content, or quiet us with the assurance that a denial is the most beneficent of answers. In this faith we stand; in this confidence we live. It gives us strength and light and hope evermore. Amen.



### Deut. iv. 32-40.

32. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it ?

33. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live ?

34. Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes ?

35. Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him.

36. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee : and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.

37. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;

38. To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.

39. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath : there is none else.

40. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.

### THE SPECIALITY OF THE BIBLE.

**T**HIS is the eternal challenge of the Bible. The appeal may be regarded as a call to the study of comparative religions. There are many religions in the world; gather them up into one view, extend the inquiry far and wide, through time and space, and see whether the Bible does not separate itself from all other books by miracles that cannot be rivalled and by excellences that cannot be equalled. Other miracles are not denied, other excel-

lences are not disputed; the point is whether the Bible after occupying common ground with many other religions does not represent forces and qualities unknown to any of them. Let it not be supposed that other good books are denied; let it not be imagined that idolatries are ignored; let it not be supposed that the Bible is afraid of comparison or competition. God himself inquires for all other gods; he will have them skilfully displayed: the best of our artists may be engaged in arranging all the deities that were ever named in mythology or philosophy, or the best dreaming of the human mind; God will have them well shown: there shall be no attempt whatever to underrate values and dignities, or to cover with the disadvantage of obscurity any god who can do anything. The God of the Bible says concerning gods, "Where are they?" and awaiting the production of other gods there is silence in the universe. If the Bible were a priest's book, or a mere trick on the part of some incipient divinity, it would keep all to itself: it would ignore the existence of all other gods and religious claims and even revelations, and it would turn darkness into an instrument of protection, and employ obscurity to add to the accent of its claim. The Bible does nothing of the kind. In the spirit of Moses it says, "Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?" (v. 32). Never forget this challenge on the part of the Bible. It is a noble speech. The Bible will not remain with us one day longer than it can supply what no other book can furnish. The Bible awaits to be displaced. As soon as any one can arise who can speak in a nobler eloquence, in a tenderer music, with a profounder wisdom, the Bible is willing that its old pages should be closed for ever. There are good men who have no Bible; there have been virtuous men who never heard of Christ; there are good writings which the world will not willingly let die that have not been baptised in the triune name of God. This is acknowledged, and must be broadly and frankly and gratefully confessed; the question still remains, Does not the Bible by some quality stand out above all other books—the very pinnacle of the temple of literature? The inspiration of the Bible must be proved by the

quality of the Bible. For a considerable period other books may keep pace with the Bible, but at a certain point it bids them farewell and rises into heights they can never ascend. The Bible lives by its peculiarities. Individuality is a matter of speciality. Up to a given point all men are alike : in repose it might be very difficult to distinguish between one man and another : both claim to be men, both lay claim to certain dignities and honours of citizenship : there is, no doubt, a broad and indisputable democracy ; but in special circumstances, great national crises, in struggling with certain difficulties, and attempting the solution of special problems, men are distinguished from one another sharply, and the greatest man proclaims his ascendancy not in words but in deeds, by giving the best answer, the largest reply to the necessities of the mind. This is substantially the case with the Bible in the first instance. When all other books have made their speeches, the Bible rises as though no voice had been heard, clears a space for itself, and by uniqueness of majesty and sympathy it claims the primacy of literature. If the Bible is merely held sacred as an expression of a superstitious feeling, it will daily lose influence, it will daily evaporate as to all the energies which have given it position and authority, and hence on it will do nothing but decay and die. The Bible simply wants to be heard, to be read, to be expounded, and to be understood. It asks nothing from its ablest teachers but a paraphrase true to its own spirit and tone. It will not have addition : it will have expansion ; it will not be decorated from the outside : it asks that its root may have full scope to express in leaf and blossom and bud and fruit all the bloom of its beauty and all the wealth of its uses. This is the position Moses occupies ; we cannot amend the position : we accept it.

Note the speciality which Moses fixes upon. He asks a question—" Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live ?"—if so, prove it. The challenge is not a lame one. The Bible awaits the evidences. We, if earnest men, should be in quest of the best book, without asking who wrote it or by what authority it was written. If it speak to us as no other book can speak, we are bound to accept it. Books must not be imposed upon us : they must consort with the soul, develop a latent and often unconscious

kinship of mind and spirit, and so educate the whole man that at last the man will scarcely be able to distinguish between his own thoughts and the thoughts which are inspired : they are so alike in quality, in range, in purpose, in nobleness. How easily Moses speaks about "fire!" How early he seized upon the right word! the very key-word of the universe, for what is there in all the temple of space but fire? Is not thought fire? Is not spirit fire? How did Moses come to speak so familiarly about hearing God out of the fire and living afterwards? He came to do so because he himself had passed through this very experience : he said, I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is burned with fire and yet is not consumed. And as he drew near a voice said unto him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses saw the fire, heard the voice, and lived. Personal experience is the great secret of preaching. If Moses had only heard of the fire as a possible vehicle of the infinite and eternal God, he might have spoken about fire in a very different tone ; but he himself had seen the fire, had been warmed by its glow, had watched the whole miracle, had heard the God of history, and yet he lived. Such men must lead the Church ; such men must preach to the world. Since the world began was it ever heard that God died, and yet faith in the existence of God was required on the part of man? When a man can say, I have seen that very miracle ; I have watched at the Cross until it became a ladder reaching unto heaven ; I myself have seen the dying Christ, and felt the cleansing of his blood, such a man begins with power, grows in power ; age cannot wither him : and as for preaching, custom cannot stale its infinite variety, because the man himself lives in God. The appeal of Moses is so rational, so broad in its common sense, as to be wholly invincible by logic. That is true in its moral purpose. By asking a question you may outlive an argument. An inquiry may be a reply. Sometimes men have to express their wonder in interrogation ; simple affirmation would fall below the necessity of the case. Moses adopts this course : "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" The thing was historical : the argument was based upon facts, something had occurred that could be identified, and every assertion based upon that fact partook of

the quality and strength of the fact itself. The pulpit cannot live upon dreams, impulses, or imaginations: it must be founded upon a rock, if it would survive the shaking wind, the tempest, the great rain. What was the gift of God? It was the gift of a word. Call that word by such names as "statutes," "judgments," "commandments," it comes to the same thing; it was the word of God, the speech of God, the mind, the will, and thought of God. What more can even God give? He has given wondrous framework in the matter of suns and stars and great gleaming fires that have not yet received baptism at the hands of men who would describe the universe in parcels and in names; but having set up all the framework, he must needs speak the word—or, in other terms, breathe the word, and give meaning and dignity to the works of his hands. We have received nothing until we have received the word—the word of wisdom and of grace; the subtle, spiritual music that sings in the soul and charms the life out of its tumult and fever. They miss the king who only see the palace. It is something to be permitted to walk over the state-apartments when the monarch is absent,—then curiosity is touched, then vanity may in some degree be pleased; but what is really wanted to be seen by the truly earnest observer and inquirer is majesty, monarchy, living sovereignty,—the I AM THAT I AM. Until we have heard the living word, we have but seen the exterior framework of the Most High.

Christianity adopts this challenge: Christianity says in effect, —What other religion is there that deals with *sin* as I deal with it? I do not ignore it; I do not hasten over it; I do not treat it as a mere incident, or a cutaneous affection which superficial means may subdue and which proper attention may remove. What other religion, theory, philosophy, grapples with sin as Christianity does? It will penetrate it, cleave it asunder, analyse it, search into it, and never rest until it gets out of the soul the last fibre of the bad root, the last stain of the fatal poison. Let us be fair to facts; whether we are in the Church or out of the Church, whether we belong to this section or to that section, do let us in common decency acknowledge that Christianity, come whence it may, does grapple with infinite energy with sin. The appeal of Christianity also is,—“Ask now of the days that are

past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other," whether any other religion tries to make the same kind of men that Christianity makes? Let us judge the tree by its fruit. We are not superstitious or fanatical or narrow-minded; we do ask the question and insist upon an answer, Does any other religion make such men as Christianity makes? Here Christianity must be judged by its purpose, by its own written word and claim, and not wholly by the men themselves, because we are still in the land of bondage in many particulars: we are in the flesh: we suffer from a thousand weaknesses; Christianity, therefore, must be judged in its declared intention regarding the culture of manhood. What kind of men does Christianity want to make? Weak men? It never made one man weak. Strong men, valiant men, men of the keenest mind, men of the largest judgment, men of the most generous disposition;—if that is the kind of men Christianity wants to make, where is the religion that can excel or equal Christianity in that purpose? Produce the *men!* Judge by facts. Where Christianity has entered into a life, what has it done with that life? Can it be proved that Christianity, fairly understood and thoroughly received, has soured the temper, narrowed the sympathies, dwarfed the noble ambitions of the soul? Has Christianity ever made unhappy homes, unrighteous parents? Let the challenge be thoroughly understood and frankly replied to. Christianity lives visibly in the Christian. Christianity wants to put away all other evidence, argument, and wordy encounter, and to be able to say: Judge me by my children; judge me by my believers; I am what they are. Therefore, if the Church of the Living God could stand up complete in the purpose of its Redeemer and Sanctifier, the snowy pureness of its character, the lofty dignity of its moral temper would abash every assailant and silence every accuser. Do not be harsh, or point with mocking finger to some poor weak soul, and say: If this man represents Christianity, we do not want to know further what Christianity is. Christianity can only be judged by the Book which reveals it, by the Christ who founded it, and by the noble history which has surrounded it. So, we accept and repeat this challenge. Christianity has no reason to retire from the field if there is to be a thorough and

impartial examination of the races which have been under its nurture and the races which have never known its influence.

The inference which Moses suggests is perfectly clear :—If there is a religion anywhere—for Moses gives the points within which the examination is to be completed—“ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other”—if there is a religion with equal credentials, equal miracles, equal morality, equal grasp of the future, produce it. Can a challenge be more rational, more dignified? We do not live in a corner, or perform the little miracles of Christian faith under the shadows of night. Christianity longs with eagerest solicitude to meet on an open field to contest any other religion that has ever touched the imagination or affected the will of man. We must, however, limit this matter of contest and comparison. Let us see whether the limitation be not reasonable. The challenge cannot apply to anything found in nominally Christian countries. Who can tell what Christianity has done even for countries that are not practically Christian? How soon we forget our indebtedness to the influences which shaped our life and blessed us in times of unconsciousness! No man can be permitted to rise in any Christian country and say he has a Bible which surpasses the Bible of Moses and the prophets, Christ and the Apostles. Why may not he arise and challenge? Because he was born in a Christian atmosphere, he was trained by Christian parents; there never was a moment of his life that was not influenced by Christian ministries of one kind or another; he lived under the light of the Cross, enjoyed the liberties of Christianity, was educated in the civilisations of Christianity; and, therefore, he cannot say,—This is original: this has been invented by me without any obligation to Christian teaching, and therefore I produce it in reply to the challenge of Moses and of Christ. We cannot tell how much we are indebted to the earliest associations of life. It is pitiful to see some broken-down, vain-headed infidel starting up with some theory of morality which, consciously or unconsciously, he stole from the Christ whom he is anxious to depose. I know of no object more hideous and contemptible than some weakling boy, who was prayed over morning and night, loved with all Christian love, indulged because

of the very excess of that love, turning out to play the infidel and to be wiser than his parents were ; specially is he ineffable in contemptibleness when he wants to play off some other morality against the morality of Christ, saying he has found in Hindoo literature various beautiful proverbs, or seen in the Koran lines glittering with moral beauty, and has understood that long before Christ came into the world men spake morals and discussed ethics and set up philosophies of conduct. There is no speech permitted to well-regulated minds that can meet a case so morally contemptible. It is a cleverness that ought to be frowned down, an originality that ought to awaken the moral laughter and scornful derision of just men. We have been trained in a Christian country ; we learned to read out of the Bible ; one of our first little lessons on which we laid our young finger was—"God is love," and another, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," all words of one syllable, which our mother helped us to read. The child that learned these lessons, that uttered these syllables lispingly because of infantile weakness, can never rise to claim originality and to compete with Moses and the Lamb ; he drank in these thoughts with his mother's milk ; he was reared upon them ; they are part of him : sooner can he part with his blood and remain a living man than he can take out of his intellectual and moral nature all these influences, and pretend to have invented civilisation or discovered a religion.



### Deut. iv. 39.

“Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath : there is none else.”

### THE RELATION OF MAN TO GOD.

I SHOULD like it to be understood, that I occupy the position of a distinctively Christian teacher, with the Christian Scriptures open before me, and everything I say is to be judged by this fact. A pagan might argue for the existence of a Creator ; but the pagan and I would mean different things, though we might employ exactly the same words. Mine is a *Christian* faith ; therefore I seek to teach truth as it is in Jesus. This you must bear in mind if you would follow my meaning closely and correctly.

I can imagine a man of average education and intelligence, asking me some such question as this : *How is it that God does not show himself more clearly to us than he does, and so put an end to all uncertainty concerning himself?* I answer : Are we capable of understanding what is and what is not the proper degree and method of divine manifestation? Have we so proved our own wisdom as to be justified even to ourselves in saying that we are competent to judge how far God has manifested himself, and how much further he ought to have done so? Every day, as a matter of mere fact, we convict ourselves of making mistakes in the commonest affairs of life. Each day is marked by its own special sin. We are always going too far or not far enough. If we are just to ourselves, we shall apply the scourge of self-reproach to our hearts and understanding every day. Are we, then, with all these mistakes, like so many wrecks lying about us ; are we, after all, the men to say *how* God should manifest himself, and *when* he should do so? Is it decent that we should take upon ourselves this high task of dictation? Is it becoming in men, who cannot

certainly tell what will happen in one single hour, that they should write a programme for God, and appoint the way of the Almighty ?

These things cause me to say that religious questions, if they are to be profitably considered at all, must be considered in a deeply religious spirit. You can make no advancement in this learning unless you bring a right heart with you. That is the beginning. If my scholar escape me at this point he will flounder through all the rest of the lesson. What is your sincere desire ? What is the condition of your heart ? Are you really and truly anxious about this matter ? Are you self-sufficient, boastful, confident in your own strength ? Do you light the candle of your own wit and judge the universe by such little light as it can shed ? Or are you reverent, humble, meek, and wishful to learn things as they really are ? Everything depends upon the tone and temper of your spirit in entering upon any course of religious inquiry and instruction. If a man shall spring into the arena, where Christian inquirers and worshippers are assembled praying and considering these questions, and say, "Now then, look about, I am coming to see what the whole thing means. I shall set up this standard and lay down this rule ; I shall put things round about and set them in the right way ; I shall examine and cross-examine, and none will get over me"—if a man shall come into the arena talking with such vigour as that, he will one day certainly have an arena worthy of his incoherence. But God will not speak to him ; the universe will be hushed, and the fool shall hear nothing but his own noise !

I shall not soon forget standing upon a lofty and magnificent hill, amidst some of the most romantic and impressive scenery in Britain. It was summer noonday. A spirit of rest seemed to be upon everything ; the eternal hills were talking to me, and the great grey rocks, which might have been the tombstones of centuries, were standing there, witnesses of my youthfulness and comparative insignificance. I enjoyed the scene as if it had been the house of God and the very gate of heaven. But there came upon it half-a-dozen wanderers, laughing and jibing and exchanging their poor vulgar jokes with one another ; and when they got upon the hill-top one of them said, "What have we

come up here for? there's nothing up here." He was right; there was nothing for him there. He was a trespasser and ought to have been arrested as a criminal; he was out of his sphere; give such people sandwiches, and barrels of beer, and dancing bears, and brass bands, and then the scene would have been "worth going to." But the eternal hills spake not, and the grand old majesties of the rocks were silent! They have nothing to say to vulgarity, and rudeness, and boisterousness. Incline thine ear and they will speak to thee; be calm, be struck with wonder and reverence and intelligent admiration in their hoary presence, and the hill tops will tell thee many a story of the past, and the rocks will have sermons upon their rugged faces graven there by the hand of Time!

It is so in the consideration of great religious questions. A man is not to come into this school and say, "I have it; I will show you how it is; I have a measure in my pocket, and a plumb-line in my hand, and a pair of compasses; I will undertake to examine the whole thing for you and pronounce an opinion upon it." Never! "To this man will I look." When God looks, it is morning; when he does not look, it is midnight! "To this man will I look." The man that is going to square up everything—the man that uses contemptuous expressions—the man who says, "Hoity-toity," and takes the Bible and throws it into the fire, and tells his wife and children that "religion is all nonsense, you know"? No! "To this man will I look." Lord, to which man wilt thou look? To the man that is humble; to the man who is of a humble and contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word. This is a qualification for the religious school. A truly reverent and earnest desire to know what God's meaning is, and God's will. To the man who possesses these qualifications, every page of the inspired volume will bring messages of light and comfort and heaven.

I once heard a peculiar controversy or conversation in a garden; it quite entertained me. There were, after some heavy rains, two worms that had struggled out of the earth, and found their way upon the wet green grass; and they began to talk in a very decided and mocking manner about myself. One, the elder and better-to-do of the two, said, "Eh, eh, eh! we have been told that this garden has an owner, or somebody that takes

care of it, that nourishes the roots of things, and that altogether presides over the affair. Eh, eh, eh! I never saw him. If there is such an owner why does he not show himself more clearly? why does he not come to the front and let us see him?" And the leaner of the two said, "That is an unanswerable argument. I never saw him. There may be such a being, but I care nothing about him: only, if he is alive, why does he not show himself?" They quite wriggled in contemptuous triumph; yet all the while I was standing there, looking at the poor creatures, and hearing them! I could have set my foot upon them and crushed them; but I did not. There is a way of wasting strength; there is also a way of showing patience. But the worms could not understand my nature. I was standing there, and they knew me not! What if it be so with ourselves in the greater questions? And if out of this homely illustration we may get a far-off glimpse of the fact that we who are talking about God manifesting himself, and asking him to come to the front,—what if one day we are compelled to exclaim, "Lo! God is here, and I knew it not! This is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!" That, whilst we are discussing about God and calling his existence in question, he is listening to us. He could put the tip of his finger upon us and destroy our life. He could touch our reason and wither our intellect. Yet he spares us. For judgment is his strange work, and mercy is his supreme delight.

Proceeding with our statement respecting the revelation of God, I ask you to believe with me, as a matter of fact—First: That we stand to God in the relation of dependants. That is our actual position in life. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Let a man begin his studies there, and he will become correspondingly reverent. Have you genius? Who lighted the lamp? Have you health? Who gave you your constitution? Do you find the earth productive? "Yes." Who made it productive? "I did. I till it; I supply all the elements of nourishment needful; I did." Did you? Can you make it rain? Can you make the sun shine? Come, I will set you a little task, mighty man, potentate! This: Change the quarter of the wind! Now, come, that is a very little thing for a great man like you. "Well," you say, "that is the sort of thing that I

really cannot do." Then, clear a fog off the hill. You can do that. Look what a port you have, and what infinite impudence. Come, clear a fog! Where would your tilling, and your manuring, and your subsoiling, and your harrowing and rolling all be, and what would they come to, if God were to say to the wind, "Never leave the east;" if God were to say to the clouds, "Stand still;" if God were to say to the sun, "Do not show thyself for a year"? All these things show us that we are, notwithstanding our resources, which are undoubtedly numerous and great, dependants. There is a point at which we must give up and stand still, and say, "We can do no more." That is a matter of certainty in common daily life; and out of it will come such reflections as these: I have nothing that has not upon it God's signature and God's superscription. I can work; but my work may come to nothing. I may sow my seed; but if he withhold the baptism of the dew and the rain, and the benediction of the sunlight, all my labour will come to nothingness, mortification and pain! This must have some meaning. There must, in such a combination of circumstances as these, be a purpose which I ought to know, and understand, and work by. If a man once be started on that course of reflection, the probability is, that he who begins as a reverent inquirer, will end as a devout worshipper.

The very fact of being dependent should lead us to be very careful how we measure the sovereignty and the government of God. He has made us servants, not masters. We are little children, not old beings, in his household and universe. We are mysteries to ourselves. We need not go from home to seek mysteries. Sometimes it seems to be supposed that we have only to give up the idea of God and all will be light. There will be no difficulty about anything. Life will then be a straightforward course, and we shall have no enigmas to answer and no spectral mysteries to affright us. It is a misrepresentation of facts. Oh man, thou art thyself a riddle, but half answered! What is the secret of thine own life? Explain the secret of thy desires, thy restlessness, thy ambition, thy hunger which cannot be appeased by the stones and the dust of this world! Hast thou seen thine own soul? Where is it? What is its image, and what is its nature? Are there not secrets in thine own blood and life which

have never spoken to thee? Are there not spaces in thy hidden being on which the candle of finite knowledge has never thrown its dim ray? Canst thou stop the throbbing heart that is within thee, and say to it successfully, "Tell me thy secret, let me know what it is in thee"? The heart has stopped. Can you start it again? You can touch it; you can put your finger and thumb upon it; can you not start it into action again? You are very clever; you want to know all about God, and you have turned your back upon the Almighty, because your little questions are not answered; why cannot you just take hold of that little heart that has stopped its beating, and say, "Begin again"? There is a man with blighted reason. Why do you not go and breathe a new summer upon the man's brain? There is a brain in which reason has lost her way. Why do you not find the poor wanderer and set her in the right course again? If you cannot do that—who are you, I ask, that you should determine the measure and the method of divine manifestation, and pronounce dogmatic opinions upon the sovereignty and the government of God?

The very fact of the mystery of our own life should be the beginning and the defence of our faith in God. Reason from yourself upwards. There is a way out of the human to the divine. It is a commendable course of procedure to reason from the known to the unknown. If you are such a mystery to your own child, if the philosopher is such a mystery to the uninstructed man, if you are such a mystery to yourself,—why may there not be power around more mysterious still, higher and nobler yet? Reason from yourselves,—from your own capacities and your own resources. Is not the maker greater than the thing made? Will you show me the machine you have made, and say to me, "I made that machine, and the machine is greater than I am"? Is it within the compass of any man's ability to make something that is greater than himself? Does not the thing made prove always to be less than the maker of it? It is so in our own life. The artist is greater than his picture; the engineer is greater than his viaduct, his tunnel, his railway, or his steam engine. The *man* is greater than the mere manual labourer. If it be so amongst ourselves, may we not carry the reasoning up to its religious application, and say, he who made the sun and

the stars and the whole universe, what can he be but the sum of all mysteries, even God blessed for evermore ! I am convinced of this, that for men of a certain type of mind to become religious—profoundly and truly religious—they must study this with care ; they must work from the point of their own mystery, and carry the wondrousness of their own nature up to its highest and best applications.

Pascal said, "I am greater than the sun !" How so ? "I am greater than the sun." Show it. "The sun could fall and crush me ; but I should be conscious of defeat, whilst the sun would be unconscious of victory !" Herein is the wondrous greatness of man. Even his failures show the mystery of his being,—he is majestic in ruin ; he is all but divine even in death !

Take away the idea of God from human thinking, and mark the immediate and necessary consequences. This is a method of reasoning which I commend to the attention of young inquirers, who are earnest about this business, the method, namely, of *withdrawment*. If a man doubts concerning God, I shall withdraw the idea of God from human thinking, and see the necessary result. If a man has any argument to adduce against Christianity, take Christianity out of the country, and see what will be left. Take out the doctrine, take out the practice, take out, not only Christian theology, but Christian morality, and see how many hospitals would be left, how many refuges for the homeless and the destitute, how many penitentiaries, infirmaries, schools, and asylums for the deaf and the dumb and the blind and the idiotic. So take away the idea of *God* from human thinking, and see the immediate and inevitable consequences. There is no God : then there is no supreme supervision of human life as a whole ; for none could have the eye that could see the whole orbit of things. We see points, not circumferences. There is no God : then there is no final judgment by which the wrongs of centuries can be avenged ; there is no heart brooding over us to which we can confide the story of our sorrow, or tell the anguish of our pain : the promise of a cloudless morning, and a graveless world, is the bitterest irony of human speech : the weak must die under the heel of the strong : human culture is but the carving of so much dead wood : **poetry is but falsehood set to music : the shining heavens, in**

whose every star we have seen a welcoming light to something higher, whose every golden morning has been to us as the gate of glory, instead of being the beginning of a better universe, those shining heavens are but the upper boundaries of a magnificent prison : and as for the mysteries of our own hearts, their hope, their pain, their struggles after something better, their dreams, their battles, "their fond desires, their longings after immortality," what are these, but the refinement of cruelty, and the very torture of hell! Set God again on the throne, and all that makes life worth having, even imaginatively, comes back again. Set God upon the throne, and all things take upon them a new, true, beautiful meaning; there is hope of judgment, and a certainty that right will eventually be done.

Need I ask you to remember—that our little day has been too short to know the full mystery of God? When an infant of yours has gone to school, do you expect the little one to come back at twelve o'clock on the first day and be able to read you a chapter even out of the simplest book? When your little boy, six years of age, first looked at his arithmetic, did you expect him to come back, after two hours' teaching, and be able to reduce a certain set of fractions to a common denominator? Did you expect him, after an hour's consideration of arithmetical questions, to be able to do the most advanced rules, and to throw the book up before your face and say, "No more of your arithmetic for me, let me go into algebra at once"? You did not expect that, did you? You would have said, "That boy, depend upon it, is half crazy; he does not know what he is talking about;" and you would probably consult the most prudent adviser about the prodigy. Yet we want to know all about God at once, and we cannot get the information! How old do you say you are? "Old! why, threescore years and ten." "No! threescore years and ten! Why, there is a tree two hundred years old, which has seen generations of your family buried." "How old?" "Getting on for fourscore years." "Are you? There is a star; look at it; ten thousand years ago that star was shining! You are an old man; yes, but a young being, an infantile being. Very old indeed, if you think of insuring yourself, or buying another estate, or laying out a great sum of money,—very, very old indeed; but if you are talking of the



universe, you are the insect of a moment—hardly born! But you wish to read the book called the Universe through at one sitting, like a cheap novel. You cannot do so! When you have concluded your school day here, you have only begun just to turn over the first leaf,—hardly that indeed, perhaps. Put your seventy years—an expression which fills your mouth so, and which is intended to awe the human family into respect and veneration for your person—put it down and look at it, multiply it by ten thousand, and then by ten thousand more, multiply the whole by millions of ages, and eternity has hardly yet begun!”

We are of yesterday and know nothing; and the teacher, what is he, but a man who having seen one ray of light amid thick and terrible gloom, comes to say you may see the same beautiful revelation? All this shows us what our spirit ought to be. All this ought to put young men upon their guard respecting such as suppose themselves able to answer every question, and to settle every difficulty, and to determine every controversy. Is there one of them can tell you what will happen in the next five minutes? At the very beginning, therefore, we must all agree that we are of yesterday, and of ourselves we know nothing, and that we are dependent for the revelations of God upon God himself. And this, let me say to you, young men, The greatest men I have ever known have been the most humble, docile, self-distrustful. If Isaac Newton likened himself to a child on the sea-shore, gathering a few pebbles brighter than the rest, and humbly said, that the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before him; who are we that we should set ourselves up in mid-water and say, “We see the other side of the sea”? We must begin at the beginning; we must begin in a religious spirit; we must not come with any preconceived conclusions and prejudices, and argue along our own lines and in our own way. We must remember our ignorance, look our own mistakes fully in the face, and say: With these things around me, I dare not be boastful, I cannot be confident; I will say with my heart, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” And the Samuel who shall put himself in that attitude before God and his book, shall in due time become

a learned and able man in the school of Christ,—well controlled in his spirit and temper, charitable and noble in all his sympathies, gracious to the weak, a source of strength to those who have no helper, a very pillar and ornament of society.

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#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost, by thy Son Jesus Christ, take away the sin of the world. Thou dost not cleanse the outside, thou dost purify the inmost life. Out of renewed and sanctified motive thou dost bring pure and noble conduct. Other gods tempt us, and mock us; but thou dost take away the sin of the world. Who but thyself, thou Christ of God, could lift the infinite load? What power but thine could dispel the infinite cloud? We cannot take away sin; but the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God taketh away all sin. We cast our sins on Jesus. We do not understand his love, but we answer it with tears and faith and sacred hope. If this is not the way of salvation, then is there no other. We have hewn out unto ourselves cisterns—broken cisterns—that could hold no water, and we have attempted to build towers that should reach even unto heaven. But we stand before thee now, convicted, burning with shame, having utterly failed to do the thing which we set our hand to accomplish. Thou dost teach us in many ways: by fear, by poverty, by joy, by wealth; and by all the ministry of life, thou art teaching us the holy truth, and shedding upon us the upper light, and drawing us more nearly to thyself. Being in a school, may we not forget the lesson. Having an opportunity of learning wisdom, may we not live and die as foolish men. May we know the rod, and him who hath appointed it. Enable us to kiss the chastening hand. Lift upon us the light of thy countenance, and our tears shall be beautiful. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us in the night of sorrow, suffering, disappointment, and pain. Sanctify to us all trouble, distress, and fear, and sadness, and out of death itself may we see a springing of immortal life. Work before our eyes this wondrous mystery. Show us how thou dost bring beauty out of that which is unbeautiful; how the morning rises upon the night, and how summer comes swiftly after winter. Thus may we have hope, through Christ, in the living God. Teach us that all things work together for good to them that love thee. When the cup is very bitter, may we drink it in thy strength, and because thou hast given it unto us. Teach us to bring all prayers into one, saying, with full hearts, with unbroken, ever-hoping trust, "Not my will, but thine be done." In that spirit there is triumph; in that faith there is no overthrow. Lord, increase our faith. Then from the place of darkness shall we see the stars. In the night-time of solitude shall we have angel-like companionship, and up the steep hill we shall feel the sustaining hand of God. Amen.

## Deut. vi. 1-12.

1. Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it :

2. That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life ; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it ; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4. Hear, O Israel : The Lord our God is one Lord :

5. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart :

7. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

10. And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

11. And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not ; when thou shalt have eaten and be full ;

12. Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

## PRINCIPLES AND DUTIES.

**A** WONDERFUL change has taken place in the tone of Moses. We can tell by his very voice that he is much older than when we first knew him, and much tenderer. When we first heard his voice, we noted how singularly wanting it was in mellowness, sympathy, kindness, such as sore and wounded hearts may recognise and bless. Throughout the Book of Exodus

the tone of Moses was very high, penetrating, and commanding. Then a change took place in the whole manner of the man: he was not less in stature, not less keen of vision; yet somehow he was quieter, perhaps more indulgent, certainly mellow. In Deuteronomy all these qualities of the voice, being also qualities of the spirit, culminate; Moses exhorts, entreats, wrestles with men, that they may be wise and good; there is nothing wanting that is suggestive of ripeness of experience, depth and genuineness of sympathy. Moses becomes shepherd again, only now men and women and children, more wayward than any beasts of the earth, constitute his multitudinous and most trying flock. Read Deuteronomy immediately after Exodus, and mark, though the fire of his eye is not dimmed, the growth of the man in the softening of his voice, in the multitude of his tears, in his pastoral solicitude for the salvation of Israel. The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy is full of exhortation and expostulation. In the third verse we read,—“Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.” This is not bribery. Moses must not be conceived of as holding up a prize, saying,—This donation is for the best-behaved amongst you. No man can be made good by such temptations. The very desire to have the prize may itself indicate a viciousness inveterate and ineradicable. Moses is not pointing out a reason, but indicating a consequence or issue: whoever observes and does the commandments of God shall enter into largeness of blessing, immeasurable depth of holy contentment, and every land shall be a land flowing with milk and honey. The man makes the land. When men everywhere praise the Lord, the earth shall yield her increase: the swelling psalm of honest thankfulness and the waving harvest of golden wheat shall be seen together upon the earth. No man can do right in order that it may be well with him, but no man can do right without its being consequentially well with every faculty of his mind, every emotion of his spirit, every outgoing of his life. Moses is already preaching the Sermon upon the Mount according to the measure of the light which made up his ancient day. What is he now doing but saying, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,

and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"? "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do the commandment of God; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily." Our business is with the "hearing" and the "observing," and God's business is with the other end, namely, the end of result, and issue, and blessing.

But Moses soon comes back to central principles. Moses is never less than a philosopher,—a philosopher with a broad streak of shepherdliness running all through his mental and moral constitution, but still a philosopher, a reasoner, a theologian. What could be more pregnant with meaning, more inexhaustible in suggestion and poetry, than the fourth verse,—“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord”? The sentence seems to be easy. There is no simplicity in the Bible that does not hold within its lines the very eternity of Jehovah. We must have a right view of God. The meaning of the exclamation of Moses is not that the Lord our God is one Lord as against some possible distribution of number in His own constitution, but He is one Lord in distinction from all the gods and idols, and all the claimants to human worship known in all the lands and peoples through which Israel has passed; the Lord stands apart from them; he is singular in relation to them; he has no relations with them, unless they be relations of contempt and mockery and disdain. Moses was not arguing a theological proposition: he was not laying down the doctrine of the unity of God as against the tri-unity of God; that sphere of thinking was not involved in this contemplation of the divine nature; Israel was called to monotheism as opposed to polytheism—the many gods that ruled the inferior thinking, and accounted for the debasing superstition of mankind.

Yet, though so lofty in his conception, Moses soon becomes tender in his tone. Hence we find in the fifth verse words which even Jesus Christ did not alter:—“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” God must never be set away from our love—that is to say, in some inaccessible region of intellectual contemplation or of high theological imagining. God must be kept quite near to the heart. Once let the heart lose touch of God, and God himself becomes but a distant and infinite idol.

Keep the heart right, keep the soul sweet, keep love unmixed and unembarrassed—a free, generous, undivided affection, and all the rest will flow out of that central conviction and attitude as a living stream out of a living fountain. The question which the soul should often put to itself should relate to love. There is a place for reverence—for the worship so awestruck as to be speechless; but we must always find room for simple, childlike, clinging love. Jesus Christ delighted to paint God as a Being full of love—so loving the world as to spare nothing for its redemption and salvation. The love of God culminates in the Cross of Christ. The Cross of Christ is not only the symbol of the Atonement, it is the eternal pledge of a beneficent Providence: not only does it include forgiveness of sin and the way into the liberty and peace of heaven, it includes a guarantee of daily bread and daily care, divine attention to all the details of human life. “If God spared not his own Son”—is the basis of Paul’s sublime appeal on the matter of human providence and social government. God being the object of love, we ourselves must have the spirit of love in regard to God; we must love God. Love does not reason: love is a poor logician as to forms and symbols; love insists upon speaking its own language and finding its own prayers, and creating its own songs and setting them to its own music. Love will have liberty. Love could never live in prison. Love was made to fly in the open firmament of heaven, to beat its gracious wings against the very gates of the morning, to rise into the holy place of the light, and to come back to do earth’s work with heaven’s purity and tenderness. Children can love where they cannot understand. Love is before reason and after reason: love passes through the zone of reason, and ascends to the heaven where it was created in the heart and thought of God. Live in reason, and life will be cold; do nothing that cannot be defined and affirmed and indicated by consecutive reasons, and life may become mechanical. Rise into the very passion of love—the very sacrificial temper of consecrated affection—and the wilderness shall be a garden, and death but a messenger sent to bring the soul into some inner place in God’s infinite sanctuary.

Is it enough to have a right conception of the unity of God in relation to the multitudinous idolatries of the world, and to

have a right view of the moral qualities of God as opposed to an insensate and unresponsive deity? Moses teaches that there is no religious sufficiency in either or both of these things. Moses will have more. What more he will have he tells us in plain terms:—"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart" (v. 6). We begin with words; we begin with things and with pictures, with substances and with commandments, visible and utterable; and from all these we may grow away not by an act of separation but by an act of the fulfilment which comes out of development. Christian words are to be in our heart. The heart has a memory of its own. Give into the custody of the heart some lesson, and it will be retained. Men remember what they want to remember, in all the highest relations of life. Intellectual memory is hardly called into operation in this matter of religious communion. The heart is kept alive; the fire upon the altar of the heart never goes out; the heart hears every knock upon the door; the heart sees every sign that is marked upon the spaces of the firmament; the heart overhears all that is passing which has relation to its own development and completion. We are what we are in the heart. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Are the words of God to be kept in the heart as treasure may be kept in some secret and inviolable place? Is the heart the only organ that is interested in this great matter of religious information and culture? Moses gives the reply:—"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (v. 7). He who teaches out of his heart will be able to speak to children, even in the simplest sense of that term. Children like teachers who talk out of their hearts. The heart knows all the little words because itself is a little word of one syllable. The heart waits for the very slowest walker in this great quest of the temple of wisdom: the heart says,—We must tarry for the cripple. When the intellect would say,—Let us urge forward,—and the imagination would step from mountain-top to mountain-top, miles at a time, the heart says,—Wait! here is a little child who cannot go at that pace; here is a poor old traveller who wants to rest awhile;—stop! not one must be lost: every child

and every cripple and the meanest member of the flock must be saved. There is a way of teaching the words of God: they may be so taught as to repel or discourage or affright; or they may be so taught as to allure, fascinate, entrance, and put out of view every competitive spectacle or seduction. God's word must be spoken in God's way.

Having delivered the words to the children, does the task end there? Moses says it does not end at any such point; he adds,—“and shalt talk of them”—not lecture upon them, not deliver superb and magnificent orations upon them, but “talk” of them. The very word is suggestive. The words of God are to be so thoroughly in our hearts as to become part of our life, and to mingle with our very breathing; then we may talk about them with the ease of conscious mastery, with the familiarity—not only of intellectual intimacy, but of the heart's truest friendship. Religion is not to be introduced upon state occasions, or upon great days, or even upon the Sabbath day as an exclusive period of time. The word of God is to be talked about, is to come into conversation as if it had a right to be there, to elevate the speech of social man, to give grace and dignity and solemnity to all the transactions and covenants which make up the business of the day. To teaching we must add talking; to the formal exposition we must add the informal and most friendly suggestion and the unexpected prayer, coming into conversation with the ease which belongs to perfect acquaintance with the Spirit of God.

Is the teaching to be conducted in the sanctuary, and the talking to be limited to holy places of public resort? Moses gives an answer to these inquiries, and there is no escape from the comprehensive terms in which his response is couched:—“when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (v. 7). Here is a religion which covers the whole day, which belongs to every attitude of man, which condescends to flow into the mould of daily position and continual progress. The word of God can accommodate itself to every season and to every position and to all the circumstances of life. It is never there by force, or unaccountably there; it belongs of right to



our whole life. It can be spoken in walking ; it can simplify itself so as to suit the position of one who is sitting in his house, quietly and lovingly, in the very centre of the family ; when the man lies down, religion will consent to be spoken about in terms and promises of restfulness and recruiting and the sleep which brings youth back with it ; and religion is so energetic that when the man rises up a whole man, complete in strength, reinvigorated in every faculty, it can leap forth into every expression of energy and outrun every effort of the mind.

— So the answer of Moses is very complete. The word of God is to be in the heart, it is to be taught to children, it is to form the subject of talk, it is to be talked about everywhere. Does the matter end there ? Moses has still further field for religious activity. He is delighted to find the words of God in the heart, and to hear them talked in the public assembly, and to hear them spoken about with all the familiar ease of conversation : he is delighted to meet men in the house and on the highway, sitting down, rising up, and still talking about the goodness and the judgment of God ; but he will have more : Moses adds,— “ And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes ” (v. 8). There shall be no secret religiousness, no stealthy piety, no profound consecration that wraps around itself garments which are so used by itself as not to involve particularity of devotedness. If the word is in the heart, it must also be written on the hand ; if the word is part of the speech, which only a few can hear, it must be as frontlets before the eyes, that observers may note, so that men passing by may be able to say,—This man publicly acknowledges, and, perhaps, publicly worships, God.

Does Moses put a full stop here ? Moses does not : Moses still finds further space—“ And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates ” (v. 9). Moses would have a broad religion, and would have a broad religion broadly acknowledged. The heart, the tongue, the hands, the eyes, the house,—this is most comprehensive. It is, in fact, absolutely inclusive. There is no spot left on which the devil may play his pranks. The heart all Bible, the speech all savour, the hand all consecration, the eyes set in one direction, the posts

of the house and the very gates bearing inscriptions of heaven, this was the religious idea and this the religious programme of Moses.

Then comes a great caution:—"And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware—" (vv. 10-12). Moses is growing old, but he is intellectually as astute as ever. It is not his soul that is growing old; it is not the perennial mind that is drying up or withering away. Mark the conception which Moses formed of all advancing civilisation. How much we have that we have not done ourselves! We are born into a world that is already furnished with the library, with the altar, with the Bible. Men born into civilised countries have not to make their own roads. We are born into the possession of riches. The poorest man in the land is an inheritor of all but infinite wealth, in every department of civilisation. In the very act of complaining of his poverty he is acknowledging his resources. His poverty is only poverty because of its relation to other things which indicate the progress of the ages that went before. Young men come into fortunes they never worked for; we all come into possessions for which our fathers toiled. We could not assemble in God's house in peace and quietness to-day if the martyrs had not founded the Church upon their very blood. Men to-day enjoy the liberty for which other men paid their lives. It is ungrateful to forget that every liberty we enjoy, every security we boast, is the result of suffering too poignant to be expressed adequately in words. Coming into a civilisation so ripe and rich, having everything made ready to our hands, the whole system of society telephoned so that we can communicate with distant friends and bring them within hearing, the table loaded with everything which a healthy appetite can desire,—all these things constitute a temptation, if not rightly received. Moses drew the picture, and then said—"Beware." In the time of prosperity, and fulness, and overflow—"then beware lest thou

forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (v. 12). Prosperity has its trials. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Poverty may be a spiritual blessing. The impoverishment and punishment of the flesh may be religiously helpful. There are anxieties connected with wealth as well as with poverty. The high and the mighty amongst us have their pains and difficulties as well as the lowliest and weakest members of society. Ever let men hear this word of caution—"beware." When the harvest is the best harvest that ever was grown in our fields, then—"beware." When health is long-continued and the doctor an unknown stranger in the house, then—"beware." When house is added to house and land to land, then—"beware." Many men have been ruined through prosperity.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

"*Frontlets between thine eyes*" (v. 8).—The practice of using phylacteries was founded on a literal interpretation of that passage where God commands the Hebrews to have the law as a sign on their foreheads, and as frontlets between their eyes. It is probable that the use of phylacteries came in late with other superstitions; but it should be remembered, that our Lord does not censure the Pharisees for wearing them, but for making them *broad* out of ostentation; and it is still uncertain whether the words referred to ought not to be taken literally. One kind of phylactery was called a *frontlet*, and was composed of four pieces of parchment, on the first of which was written Exod. xiii. 1-10; on the second, Exod. xiii. 11-16; on the third, Deut. vi. 4-9; and on the fourth, Deut. xi. 13-21. These pieces of parchment, thus inscribed, they enclosed in a piece of tough skin, making a square, on one side of which was placed the Hebrew letter *shin* (ש), and bound them round their foreheads with a thong or riband when they went to the synagogue. Some wore them evening and morning, and others only at the morning prayer.

As the token upon the hand was required, as well as the frontlets between the eyes, the Jews made two rolls of parchment, written in square letters, with an ink made on purpose, and with much care. They were rolled up to a point, and enclosed in a sort of case of black calf-skin. They then were put upon a square bit of the same leather, whence hung a thong of the same, of about a finger in breadth, and about two feet long. These rolls were placed at the bending of the left arm, and after one end of the thong had been made into a little knot in the form of the Hebrew letter *yod* (י), it was wound about the arm in a spiral line, which ended at the top of the middle finger.

## Deut. vi. 20-25.

20. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you ?

21. Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt ; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand :

22. And the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes :

23. And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers.

24. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

25. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTIONS upon religious subjects will be asked, and we ought to be prepared to answer them in some degree at least. We are not called upon to be irrational—that is, without reason—even in our Christianity. We did not part with our reason when we were enabled to yield ourselves to the higher inspiration of faith. We ought to be able to say something in reply to inquiries addressed to us concerning the most important portions of our history. We ought, therefore, to be instructed in our own doctrine, and to have some clear conception of the way along which Christian doctrine has passed ; and we ought, further, to be able to identify ourselves with that doctrine, and thus give sharpness and clearness to all our religious recitals and arguments. Moses told Israel that questions would be asked. The son would ask of the father the meaning of institutions, statutes, and judgments, and the father was bound to reply to the son's natural and rational inquiry. Such is our position now. Suppose that one wholly uninstructed as to Christian faith and doctrine and practice

should ask us,—What mean ye?—account for yourselves; what are you doing? and why do you act as you do?—it would be pitiful to the point of unpardonableness if in presence of such an inquiry we were dumb; our speechlessness would show that our piety is a mere superstition. It is surely, therefore, incumbent upon us to be able to give some reason or explanation for the faith and the hope that are in us. We cannot adopt a better reply than the answer suggested by Moses. No originality of answer is required. The leader of Israel gave the only reply that will stand the test of reason and the wear and tear of time. All we need is in this paragraph.

Adopting this reply, what answer should we make to the kind of inquirer now supposed? We should, first of all, make the answer broadly historical. We are not called to invention, or speculation, or the recital of dreams: we do not want any man's impressions as a basis of rational and universal action; we call for history, facts, realities, points of time that can be identified, and circumstances that can be defined and have a determinate value fixed upon them. We could enlarge the answer which Israel was to give, and ennoble it. We, too, were in a house of bondage. That must be our first point. The house was dark; the life of the prison was intolerable; no morning light penetrated the dungeon; no summer beauty visited the eyes of those who were bound in fetters. Human nature had gone astray. The great cry of the ages was,—“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;” “There is none righteous, no, not one.” The Christian argument starts there. All Christian doctrine is founded upon that one fact, or bears direct and vital relation to it.

We, too, could add with Israel, human nature was divinely delivered. The action began in heaven. No man's arm delivered us; no man's eye could look upon us with pity that was unstained and unenfeebled by sin. God's eye pitied; God's arm was outstretched to save. Great was the compassion of God and tender his love; and every action of his hand, though an action of almightiness, was chastened, softened, mellowed, by an indwelling and overflowing tenderness.

Then we could continue the reply, and say the divine deliverance was attested by many “signs and wonders.” Christianity

has its miracles corresponding, according to time and speciality of need, to the miracles wrought in Egypt by the Jehovah of Israel. We do not surrender the miracles. Some of them we have seen. As we grow away from them we grow towards them, in their highest and most spiritual meaning. To-day miracles are wrought—miracles of the higher sort: an inner vision is opened, the ear of the soul is excited to reverent attention, the whole nature is transformed, changed, lifted up into new relations, and made glad with new and immortal hopes. The temple of God is a temple of miracles. The nature of the miracles may have undergone considerable change, but their inner meaning is an eternal truth: it abides through all the ages, for every purpose of God in the miracles which were wrought was a purpose of life, growth, holiness, transformation into his own image. The purpose is in reality the miracle. That being so, the miracles never cease, for to-day the Gospel performs nothing less than the miracle of making the dead live, and the blind see, and the dumb speak in new and beautiful eloquence. We, too, had a Deliverer, as Israel had; the name of our Deliverer is Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem; he proclaimed himself the Son of man, the Son of God; he looked upon the whole race with eyes filled with tears; he tasted death for every man; he died the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God; he was crucified, he died and was buried, and on the third day he rose again, and now he is in heaven, our Advocate before the throne; his wounds still upon him as historical marks, but the pain of the wounding is for ever gone. That is our answer in brief and imperfect outline. We, therefore, stand upon this historical ground. Right or wrong, here we are. We did not make the history, we may not modify it, we are not at liberty to introduce any new elements into it; our position is historical: we continue a story, we are chapters added to a great narration. Never part with your history; always go back upon the fact. We are not called upon, as has been said many times, to invent a Bible or to suggest a new form of revelation; we stand upon history, and therefore give a broadly historical reply.

In the next place, still following the idea laid down by Moses, we must make the answer definitely personal:—"thou shalt say unto thy son" (v. 21). Speak about yourselves, about your

own vital relation to the historical facts. The history is not something outside of you and beyond you : it is part and parcel of your own development, and your development would have been an impossibility apart from the history ; let us, therefore, know what this history has done for you. The answer will be poor if it be but a recital of circumstances and occurrences and anecdotes,—a vague, although partially reverent, reference to ancient history. The man who speaks must connect himself with the thing which is spoken. Christianity, in its incarnations, is not the recital of a lesson : it is the embodiment and vitalisation of a truth. We may repeat the history all day long, and who will care ? But give it personality, show how it bears upon the individual life and the personal witness, include and involve your own integrity in the story which you recite,—then the man who hears it has two things to do : not only to disprove the history but to disprove your testimony. Suppose, then, we could speak thus in reply : We perused the history ; it seemed strange to us ; many a question was excited by the perusal ; sometimes our faith was in the ascendant, sometimes doubt seemed to break our wings so that we could not fly heavenward : we fell to the earth enfeebled and distressed ; but we returned to the history and considered it deeply ; in the first instance we felt our own need of something of the kind ; the miracles bewildered us, but when we came to the offer of salvation, when a Man called Jesus stood up before us and said, “ I will give you rest ”—we said within ourselves,—Rest is what we need : we are restless ; we are killed all the day long ; the burden of life is heavy over us, and the accusations of life bear down upon us like a final judgment ;—then we began to see that perhaps this Man is the very man we needed ; we trusted him ; we began shamefacedly at first : we were almost afraid to be caught in the company of the Man or listening to his doctrine ; but as he advanced we wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth ; we turned aside and said to one another,—He knows us altogether : he has plumbed the depth of our necessity ; hear how he speaks !—with what wisdom ! with what grace ! with what sympathy !—he will cast none out ; now we begin to see a new light shining upon the miracles ; we could have doubted them ; we could have brought them altogether in one view and written our denial

across them ; but, becoming familiar with the Miracle-worker himself, getting to know somewhat of his spirit, feeling in some degree the fascination of his sympathy, we were enabled to go farther, and we stood before the Cross : we watched the whole tragedy ; and as we looked upon him we said to one another, "Truly this Man was the Son of God ;"—our reason could not go much further, but a new faculty was called into operation, a faculty called faith—trust, confidence, an outleaping of the heart towards outstretched arms ; we were enabled to cast ourselves into the arms of Jesus Christ, and having done so rest came into our souls, a sense of pardon made us glad ; we entered into the mystery of spiritual peace ; then we were stirred towards beneficence of ministry : we became eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf, and a tongue to the man that was silent ; and we followed Christ step by step, doing as he did according to the measure of our power ; and now we feel the energy of God in the soul, renewing us every day, drawing us forward by gracious compulsion to nobler life. That is our answer to any man who asks us, What mean ye by this Christian profession and activity ?

Thus the answer is, in the first instance, broadly historical—a mere outline of facts, the facts being well-nigh innumerable, and so striking in many instances as to be almost incredible. Then the answer is distinctly and definitely personal. We had to deal with the facts, to weigh them and consider their value. We adopted that course, and the outcome of the process was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,—a tender, vital clinging to the Saviour's Cross. So far we feel the solidity of our ground. The ground would not have been solid to us if the history had not been personalised, vitalised, adopted by the individual man himself so that he who went through the process of conversion becomes an annotator upon the page of the history, and where there was difficulty before there is light now. The answer is still incomplete. It is broadly historical, and therefore can be searched into by men who care for letters and events and ancient occurrences ; the answer is definitely personal, and therefore the character of the witness has to be destroyed before any progress can be made with his particular view of the history ; now the answer must, in the third place, be made vitally experimental. The twenty-fifth verse thus defines this conclusion :



“And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.” One targum says, “it shall be our merit.” The general meaning would seem to be,—“it shall be accounted unto us for righteousness:” the attention and the service shall not be disregarded or put down into any secondary place, but what we do in the way of attention and observance and duty and service shall be reckoned unto us as a species of righteousness. What is the meaning to us in our present state of education and our present relations to one another? The meaning is that out of the history and out of the personal relation to that history there will come a quantity which is called character. God is all the while forming character. His object has been to do us “good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.” Without the righteousness where is the history? Without the character what is the value of our personal testimony? We may be speaking from a wrong centre—from mental invention, from intellectual imagination, from spiritual impulse, from moral emotion; we may not be standing upon vital facts and spiritual realities. The outcome, then, is righteousness, character, moral manhood, great robustness and strength, and reality of life. The Christian man’s history is to himself worthless if it be not sealed by character. The speaker’s eloquence is as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal if it be not followed by solid and invincible character—not the kind of character that is mechanically arranged, one part being beautifully consistent with another but so beautiful as to be suspicious; it may be a rugged character, but in the centre of it is a burning fire, a desire after God and God’s holiness. The character is not a neatly trimmed and dressed arrangement: it is a spirit, a meaning, a high and noble purpose in life; the word is a bond; the outputting of the hand is an oath; an assurance is a pledge that cannot be broken. The man who is thus righteous may die, but will never break his word; he may suffer much, but he will never falter in his testimony; he may be marked by a thousand defects as to action, attitude, and temporary relation, but his soul is alive with God and his life is consecrated to his Saviour. Who adds righteousness to the good-doer? Not himself. If the man made record of his own actions and totalised them into some nameable

virtue, his diary and his reckoning would throw suspicion upon his motive. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love. It is God who imputes righteousness. It is God who says,—“Well done, good and faithful servant.” It is the Father who says,—“Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found”—make the house thrill with music, for there is a birth in it of manhood and immortality. So, we must have no mongering in virtue, no dealing and tricking and arranging in nice little actions and pat little circumstances, having upon them the bloom of a bastard piety. We must keep up the history, relate ourselves personally to it, turn it into character, and leave God to count the righteousness and to number up our actions and to put a value upon them. Character involves solidity, hope, recompense, reality. A man cannot pretend to character who may lay some little claim to reputation. Reputation is but expressive of appearances, superficial estimates; but character is the man, the man’s very soul, the man’s very self, without which he would seem to have no existence. So then, there is a doctrine of virtue, a doctrine of works, a doctrine of legal values. The fatal mistake upon our part would be if we set ourselves to its adjustment and determination. We have really nothing to do with it. We begin with duty, we continue with duty; we add nothing to God’s Word; we obey it by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and at last we shall be startled and gladdened by finding that all our life long we have by the grace of God been building up into heaven.

Deut. vii.

### PROHIBITIONS.

THIS chapter might be so read as to give great offence. There is in it a tone of pitilessness. The whole chapter is a vengeful speech. The chapter is charged with partiality on the part of God towards one nation, as though other nations were self-created or had been fashioned by inferior deities, and were worthy of nothing but contempt and destruction. Who made the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites,—seven nations greater and mightier than Israel? Were not they also the creation of God? Did they not live because “his mercy endureth for ever”? Why this passion? Why this almost eagerness to get rid of them by violent means? The putting of such questions reminds us that we are living in a different age. We do not read many portions of the Old Testament in the right light. Of course the great mental and spiritual difficulty is to think ourselves back to the exact condition of the time and circumstances under which certain parts of the Old Testament were written. There is a language of the time; there is an atmosphere of history as well as a detail of circumstances and events. This chapter, read in full recognition of that fact, assumes a totally different relation to our mind, and reveals a totally different purpose from that which at first we might suspect and condemn. People must be talked to in their own language. God himself must speak in terms which the people can understand. There is a providence of language. Language is daily changing in aspect and colour and accent; meaning is poured out from vessel to vessel, and many of the old word-vessels are either thrown away or have to be used by some carefully-guarded hand and application of

thought and meaning. No ruthless hand must touch some of these vessels, and no untutored mind must undertake to discuss some of those lessons; otherwise God himself and his whole truth will be put in a false light, and will be so expressed as to draw upon themselves the anger and moral indignation of mankind. The language of this chapter is in some parts awful. It is not to be explained by mere criticism, but is rather to be expounded and revealed in its intentions by the New Testament spirit, by the larger providence by which God has revealed his purpose and discovered to the observation of man what all the time he has been endeavouring to do. We must avail ourselves of some such principles as these if we are to get through with any comfort many of the rough places and rocky roads of the ancient record. The language might be changed, and yet every principle remain in its integrity. This is the very lesson which revelation is endeavouring every day to teach us. The revelation is not a matter of mere words or unchangeable expressions, but of what is in the words: the words being the mere wrappage within which we are to find the contents of the divine mind and purpose. The chapter might be rewritten in modern language and yet not one of its principles would be for an instant modified or impaired. We could get rid of the passion and yet retain the justice; we could wholly strip off all vengefulness and yet retain the divine purpose which is to create a Church, a family, a kingdom pure as the purity of God.

Look a little at the detail. All marriages with the heathen peoples were forbidden:—"Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (v. 3). The separation is not final. Within this regulation there is a purpose of purity. The line central and vital is not to be changed in its direction. God is not now making eternal statutes and judgments as to the separation of the nations one from another. His purpose is to have but one nation upon the face of the whole earth—a royal generation, a peculiar people, a new humanity, headed by a new and eternal Adam. Meantime, something must be done of a remedial and mitigatory

kind. God's providence must begin where it can. The world was not prepared for the full blaze of the divine thought and meaning, so even God had to condescend to work in literal commandment, in striking limitation of human liberty, and in such details as of necessity occurred in the outworking of individual and social life. Even God is limited by human conditions, specially by human ignorance, more specially by human sin. He himself under some circumstances can only "stand at the door and knock." Meanwhile, the principle is a perpetual guide in Christian conduct. It is still true that things cannot be combined which are of different qualities, which have no essential and vital relation to one another. Nor is the inculcation or enforcement of this principle operative on one side only. Both the united people would be miserable. God is not only caring for those who are his own: he is also caring for those who are opposed to him—for by all false alliances and unholy unions both lives are spoiled. The judgment does not fall upon one only: it falls upon both with tremendous force. Change the terms, soften them as much as you will, put them into modern form, and tone them down into modern softness and mellowness,—still there remains the vital principle that two things not being related to one another vitally and essentially, not in their innermost and best nature yearning for one another, can never come together in any form of marriage without involving both sides of the union in unutterable disappointment and distress.

Then the instruction was to deal severely with heathenish institutions and customs. This is proved by the fifth verse:—  
"Thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire." That is not the law of this day. It was the only possible law in the early time. Men must grow into right conceptions of force. There have always been men who have been impatient with Jesus Christ himself because he did not go quickly enough to the kingdom. In his own day the people sought to make him a King "by force," but Jesus Christ would have no kingship thus violently and prematurely instituted. The kingship of Christ is a necessity of the universe. The very first courses

of the foundations of creation, rightly interpreted, bear upon their masonry this promise:—Jesus Christ shall reign over the whole creation. But the fulfilment of that promise belongs to the providence of time. There we enter into an evolution transcending the imagination and mocking the patience of the most devoted Simeon. The only way in which Israel could deal with the heathen nations was by the way of destruction, breakage, downcutting, and burning. The period was given up to that species of force and urgency. We have come to learn that persuasion is mightier than arms, reasoning is more potent than violence, and prayer will accomplish victories which are impossible to sword and spear. It would seem to be an easy way to get rid of idolatry to burn the idol and reduce their altars to ashes. All this species of inroad might be made upon the idolatry, but idolatry itself would remain untouched, secure in the citadel of the heart's trust, and hardly less secure in the castle of debased imagination. Only truth can destroy error; only love can burn all evil; only heaven can get rid of hell. So the innermost thought remains. The principle of destruction abides for ever. Everything that is done by the most peaceful and patient servant of God has in it the quality of destruction, only it is spiritual violence, moral conquest, the victory of the soul. "Put up thy sword into the sheath:" "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Nay, Jesus will not have even embattled angels crowding to his side to smite with lightning those who assail him. Jesus Christ says,—Let the truth be spoken in a fair field, and in the long run light will conquer darkness.

The harshness was not arbitrary, but logical. God is represented in the tenth verse in these terms:—he "repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face." How such words could be read with spitefulness of tone!—as if God were some petulant deity, vain and careful to assiduity about all the decoration of his throne; as if no hand must touch it; as if intruders would be thrust into the sea or burned in the furnace. There is no such meaning in the words. The same law applies in nature. It is the law of agriculture as certainly as it is the law of theology and morals. It is not

given to man—poor man—to overturn the divine decree in any realm of life or action. Whoso would try to invert the seasons shall find himself without bread in the day when his garners should have been full; and if some imaginative Moses, gifted with the power of vivid pictorial description, should say, looking upon the empty barns,—“He repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them,” he would but vindicate a law which is not arbitrary but gracious—a providential law; and providence is the dawn of grace.

But was the election itself arbitrary, fixed, and wholly independent of the spirit and conduct of those who were elected? The answer is given in the twelfth verse:—“Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers.” So election has been misunderstood. Men have not been slow to say,—Once in grace always in grace; being born again we may do what we please; we are not now under the law; we are Jews no more; we are free to sin. Nowhere is that doctrine taught in the Old Testament or in the New. The contrary doctrine is put in every possible variety of words, and is vindicated by every possible variety of event and circumstance in human history. We are committed to the law which demands righteousness. Over all controversies and all endeavours to escape restraint and prohibition there rises this great inquiry,—“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” That is Christian life,—not some metaphysical mystery which has no practical exemplification, but a profound spiritual mystery which proves itself by conduct as mysterious in its nobleness as its origin is mysterious in its divinity. There are two mysteries in the Christian life: the mystery of its beginning and the mystery of its maintenance,—the mystery of spirit and the mystery of conduct. Whenever a man, smitten on the one cheek, turns the other also, he sustains and completes the mystery of regeneration. The man who is living on metaphysical conceptions, and dreaming away his life in theological contemplation, without unfolding the mysteries of grace in the mysteries of conduct,

has abused the covenant, and has committed high treason against the throne of God.

Showing, as he always shows, a most penetrating mind, Moses points to a very subtle temptation which would arise in connection with the progress of Israel. The graven images of the heathen nations were to be burned with fire. Moses says in the twenty-fifth verse, — “Thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein.” How subtle is the temptation in that direction! Might not this ointment have been sold for hundreds of pence? and might not the produce have been given to the poor? Shall we cast in the hideous gods and the valuable gold and consume them both in the unsparing fire? How much better first to strip the god of his golden coat and then burn the wood or clay or grind the stone to powder! Moses, foreseeing this temptation, and by the very inspiration of God, knowing the mysteries of human nature, said,—“Touch not; taste not; handle not.” In such abstention is the only possible safety of the Church. The temptation operates to-day. Men will sustain a questionable mode of earning a livelihood on the pretence that they can gather from the forbidden trade gold and silver which they can melt down and mint with the image and superscription of God; they can allow the devastating traffic to proceed, reeking like the pit of hell, destroying countless thousands of lives, and yet justify the continuance of the iniquity by taking off the gold and the silver and throwing part of it into the coffers of the Church. Missions so sustained are dishonoured. The gold torn from any evil way of getting a livelihood and given to the Church is an abomination to the Lord thy God. He does not want even good gold stolen for his purposes, or gold won by unholy means thrown into his exchequer. His Son could live without a place whereon to lay his head, but he could not live in any house that had in it the Dagon of the Philistines—unholy gains, patronage with a smiling face but with a heart all but too bad to be damned. God’s independence, Christ’s independence, asserts itself in many ways in the Old Testament and in the New; and the Church must be as independent as the God who created it. There is a



strong temptation to continue the mischief, and tax it for the good of the heathen or the benefit of the poor. God accepts no such money. It never can be changed; it has no real and permanent value in the sanctuary; it makes the treasury full, but it is the fulness which is the truest and veriest emptiness. Let us give honest money. Let us eat bread unleavened by wrong-doing; there may be little of it, but Christ will break it with his own hands, and it shall be more than our hunger needs.

Marvellous, too, is the prevision of Moses when he lays down the only law or principle by which all these abstentions and all these actions can be sustained. Do not let us ascribe these regulations to the prevision of Moses unless we understand by that term the inspiration of God. What is the principle which guarantees safety and protects the soul from the unclean things of heathen nations? That principle is laid down in the twenty-sixth verse. Speaking of heathen abomination Moses says,—“thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it.” There is no middle feeling; there is no intermediate way of dealing with bad things. “If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off;” “if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.” “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” Thus the Testaments are one: the moral tone is the same; the stern law never yields to time,—its phrase changes, its words may come and go, its forms may take upon them the colour of the transient times, but the inner spirit of righteousness is the spirit of God, without beginning, without measure, without end. We are thus called to revulsion. How can this be made plain to every understanding? Perhaps it can scarcely be adequately explained by merely spiritual terms and suggestions, but it admits of some indication from a physical point of view. Imagine any preparation given for food from which the whole nature recoils with unutterable horror. That may be considered the beginning of the meaning of this verse in its spiritual application. Having had such an offer made, the soul loathes it; hunger itself will not look at the offensive bribe given to the agony of its pain; all nature shudders and turns away—if silent, only because the strongest speech would be but a mockery of the intensity

of its pain. Thus the body may help the mind to right constructions of divine purposes and spiritual laws. You do not dispute about that which is offered which awakens the sensations of horror, nor do you ask questions about it, nor do you look on with partial approval if, haply, in some way, the inconvenience may be got rid of; but having seen that which is offered, nature, asserting an eternal law, rises, flies insulted and dishonoured. Abstain from the appearance of evil. Touch not, taste not, handle not the unclean thing. Do not allow the mind merely to disapprove of evil, merely to condemn certain social customs and arrangements,—to keep in a kind of hovering relation towards things upon which God has put his veto; but seeing one of them, “thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it,”—the soul shall rise against it as if God himself had been pained by some sudden and tremendous offence. How is this spirit to be created within us? It is the miracle of Christ; it is the miracle of the Holy Ghost. This spirit is not born with man, or by the will of man: it is born in us by the incorruptible seed of God.

• This is the wonder of the Almighty, who looking upon the accomplishment of this miracle says,—“It is very good.”

Deut. viii.

### THE PLAN OF LIFE.

THIS chapter may be considered as laying down the sacred and stimulating doctrine that our life is planned and ordered for us as to its divine side and moral obligation. We are not called upon to consider the great questions of moral duty or righteousness or good conduct in any of its vital springs, with a view to conceiving some plan of our own as to the realisation of perfect character. The idea of this chapter is that all moral duties have been defined and all moral limits have been divinely described and imposed, so that all we have to do is to concede the homage of rational and thankful obedience. This is a difficult lesson for the unrenewed human heart to learn ; it is, however, the one lesson which runs through the entire scope of revelation from end to end. It would seem to be a tribute to human sagacity, and even a recognition of human responsibility, to have left every man to define right and wrong for himself and to discover on his own account the shortest and safest way to heaven. A conception of this kind represents a profound and fatal mistake ; that mistake being that we are in any sense upon equal terms with the Creator and Preserver of our spirits. To begin truly we must begin with the assumption that we are of yesterday and know nothing, and that appearances alone reveal themselves to our imperfect vision, the spiritual and eternal reality of things being of necessity hidden from faculties which could not comprehend it. Thus the Biblical doctrine is one of human dependence upon divine revelation. All our quests after first principles and final issues are in reality expressions of the heart's desire to find and understand the will of the eternal God. We may shrink from that form of expression as being perhaps almost superstitious to our present incomplete reason, but viewed in its largest issues it comes to this—that man is everywhere seeking for the

complete word, the divine term, the sure and everlasting rock. Having the spirit of little children, and coming to the Bible tenderly reverent to know definitely what God would have us do, we shall receive from the sacred page light for every day, comfort for every sorrow, and inspiration for every duty. If we appeal to the law and the testimony for the sake of finding materials for argument or abstract philosophy we shall kick against the pricks and involve ourselves in endless vexations. The Bible has nothing to say to such a spirit. It will only speak to the meek and lowly in heart, and to men who ask with reverent earnestness what God would have them do.

The plan of life is happily vindicated by the experience of life. Moses calls upon Israel to "remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years." This is the happy issue of faith. Faith began without evidence of an external and positive kind, but as life advanced one day after another shaped itself into indisputable testimony, and so fortified the faith with a sacred and unimpeachable experience. We must begin with the faith and end with its verification. God will not allow us to begin at the other end: his plan is to train by trust, and to vindicate himself by the illumination which he vouchsafes to every day, so that the night shall corroborate the morning, and at eventide men shall praise God for the trust with which they began the day. Israel was not called upon so much to remember the literal road, but "the way," that is the manner or method, or, as we might say, the genius of the whole journey. In the Acts of the Apostles the Christian life is more than once called "the way." The journey of life is not made up of mere details and separate incidents; all these are strung upon what we may describe as the thread of a divine purpose, and it is to that thread we must constantly look if we would see the unity and the direction of the divine intent. It comes to this then, that every Christian believer must fall back upon his personal experience of "the way." To personal knowledge the Christian may add the history of the whole Church. Individual experience and universal history concurring in an indivisible testimony, the result is a conviction which no mere argument or intellectual scepticism can either obscure or disturb. When Christian life is thus verified, Christian testimony will assume a lofty and definite tone. No longer will

Christianity be found in the attitude of a mere apologist; it will rise to the dignity of a living witness conscious of perfect and even divine veracity. Without such consciousness what is preaching? what is public profession? what are Christian institutions? Everything depends upon the reality of the personal life, the true, deep joy of the renewed heart; to these experiences there is no answer, the attempted reply of mere words being without point and without effect.

In the third verse Moses lays down by inspiration the sublime doctrine that the sustenance of life is not confined to one method. His words are most remarkable:—"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." These words were used by Jesus Christ in reply to the temptation of Satan. The sustenance of human life has ever been a divine mystery on which God has never condescended to cast any light. God will sustain life in his own way. He gives it "manna," a term which itself requires definition, and which has baffled all the attempts of investigators adequately and finally to solve. It is an utter mistake to suppose that God could not sustain human life or any other life without what is known as bread. We call bread the staff of life, and, as a general expression, the term is sufficiently accurate: but God is not dependent upon the processes of nature; he could support human life as he supports the angels in heaven: if he has made the eating of bread apparently necessary to the sustenance of the bodily frame, it is that he might make the cultivation of bread a practical means of human training and a bond of social union. It is not God who is dependent upon the bread as an instrument; it is man who is dependent upon it as a condition of commerce and the unit of the commonwealths of the world. By allowing the mind to assume that by bread only man can live, we direct our thoughts into a narrow and unworthy channel. We make man a debtor to the earth and a debtor to his own invention. The sublime doctrine of inspiration is that we live and move and have our being in God,—and are in no sense, other than is involved in the divine sovereignty, either children of the dust, or debtors to anything

which the ground can supply. He who is most conscious of his highest nature is least conscious of his bodily requirements. Now and again we have had happy experiences which at least remotely indicate that a time may come when life will be an expression of thought and feeling and worship, rather than a result of gratified appetite, or the cultivation of meaner things. All this cannot be expressed in words. We are thankful to have now and again a hint of that larger being, that holy consciousness which is best described by the thrilling word *Immortality*. Wonderful are the words of Christ upon this matter of the sustenance of life:—"He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The seventh verse reminds us that obedience is always associated with reward:—"For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills," and so the promise rolls on in noble eloquence,—"*A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil, olive, and honey.*" This has been the divine method of cultivating and ennobling the human race from the beginning. Men can understand reward, or the coming in to great and abundant possession of such things as can be immediately used in the promotion of human comfort and human security. God has always availed himself of the principle of rewards and punishments in the training of mankind. His delight has been in pointing to an infinite and glorious heaven as the crown and glory of human obedience. It is not to be supposed that any appeal is thus made to the meaner nature, or the baser motives by which conduct is moved. Man needs kindly stimulus, a gracious impulsion on the way towards the city of light. It is possible that Christians may have outgrown the whole idea expressed by terms which ancient Israel could understand, but the very outgrowth is itself a testimony to the reality of the principle which is found in this chapter. A purely spiritual heaven would have had no meaning in the days of the Israelites. Moses and his people could only understand such words as brooks, fountains, wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, and pomegranates; God meant all these words to be the beginning of spiritual terms, and the spirituality of the terms never could be realised until human experience had passed through

all the consciousness excited and sustained by these practical promises.

Moses does not shrink from propounding the apparent contradiction that even a life of obedience must also be a life of chastening :—"Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him" (vv. 5, 6). It might be thought that obedience would escape chastening, and no doubt it would if the obedience were perfect; but obedience itself being, under present conditions, partial or imperfect, chastening is needed for the purification of motive and the subjugation of will. The wise man says that a wise parent seeketh chastening for his son. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth"—is a doctrine which the greatest teachers of Christianity have not shrunk from declaring. Chastening does not always mean what is generally understood as punishment. Chastening may mean a trial of patience, so that the will may be taught the habit of waiting, and expectation may become the beginning of prayer. God has always recognised the value of the element of *time* in the schooling of the human race. He did not give all his revelation at once, he did not send his Son into the world at the beginning: he does not immediately answer all prayers: the mystery of the operation of time has never yet been fully understood; day is to be added to day, and one event is to be linked on to another, periods of rest are to intervene between periods of activity, and the judgment which man may pronounce upon God is to be deferred until the divine way has been perfectly accomplished. The purpose of chastening is to reveal a man unto himself: "To humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart;" we do not know ourselves until after the test of many days. We are surprises unto ourselves. By the utterance of language, the adoption of policies, the accumulation of companionships and responsibilities we amaze ourselves by the variety, the subtlety, and the persistency of life. We learn in hunger what we could never understand in fulness. To be kept standing throughout the night dews and knocking at inhospitable doors may give us definitions of home and security which the enjoyment of such blessings might never originate. The humble and obedient soul rejoices

that life has not one burden too many to carry, or one tear too hot to shed, or one difficulty too severe to encounter; it says,—All these things are appointed as gracious necessities in the perfecting of my education; I know that my Redeemer liveth; I know that all things work together for good to them whose love is set upon the living God. This spirit drives away the demon of impatience and blesses and tranquillises the soul with the angel of heavenly confidence. If the children of God suffered nothing but punishment, those who look on from the outside might well wonder as to the rewards and issues of virtue even in this world: but chastening is not punishment, it is training, it is education, it is experience, it is part of an inscrutable but beneficent method. Blessed are they who wait until the end, and who speak not of the judgments of God until they have seen all the glory of heaven.

It would seem that in this direction the thought of Moses steadfastly moved. What was God's object in bringing out Israel from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and leading the people through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought, where there was no water? Why did God bring forth water out of the rock of flint? Moses gives the tender and noble reply:—"That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end." That is the sublime purpose! If we exclude the "latter end" from our view of divine methods we shall certainly be entangled in the thicket of details. The latter end is not in our keeping; but it is set before us in order to restrain our passion and attemper our imagination and cultivate our patience. It is something to know that at the end God means to do us good. That should be a steadfast fact in the mind, and may be used in many different relations, but all for the same purpose. What of the difficulties of the way if the end is to be bright and beautiful heaven? What of the battle and storm here and now if according to our steadfastness and loyalty to divine principles is to be the splendour of the divine recognition in the land of glory? Thus we draw ourselves on by the latter end. Again and again we tenderly exclaim: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." The latter end will explain everything. On the last day of life we may see more than we have



ever beheld during the whole course of our pilgrimage. Sudden glory may drive away every cloud and shadow, and bring in eternal day. One whisper from the upper spheres spoken to the dying may dissolve every doubt, break down every bound and barrier separating the soul from God, and admit the spirit into celestial liberty. We will not be deterred by to-day's difficulties. We shall not be tempted by sneering opponent or bitter sceptic or godless life to regard the providence of heaven as bounded by any one day. Give God whatever time he requires, and when he has accomplished the hours claimed by his purpose and has declared the consummation of his design in our life, we may be permitted to give some opinion as to "the way" by which we have been led and the method by which our best life has been sustained.

But Moses will not stop at this point. He becomes eloquent in lofty religious warning. Towards the close of the chapter he says:—"And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God" (vv. 19, 20). Thus the way of the Lord is equal. Disobedience means penalty as certainly as obedience means reward. The two courses are openly set before us. It is undoubtedly within our liberty to oppose God, to set up an altar of our own, to invent commandments out of our own imagination, and to serve whom we will and as we will; in these matters we have no right, but according to our moral constitution we have the liberty: but God has not hidden from us the consequences of such perverseness and idolatry: nor are those consequences partial in their operation or alterable in their pressure; they are tremendous consequences, too awful to be expressed in words, too appalling to be encompassed by the imagination. This is where I rest in the matter of everlasting punishment. What that term may mean it is impossible for any human mind to conceive. It would seem as if God himself felt the inadequateness of language to express the infinite idea. The prayer of every man should be,—My soul, come not thou into this secret. Men should never trifle with the idea of the punishment of sin; it is everlast-

ing punishment; it is eternal penalty; it is an expression of the horror of God as his infinite holiness looks upon the abomination of sin. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is not a one-sided law; it is the impartial law which holds within its ample scope all that is terrible in the idea of perdition and all that is sublime in the promise of heaven.

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#### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we seek the truth. Jesus Christ said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We would see Jesus; we would fix the attention of our love and expectation upon thy Son, and receive from him what he alone can give—life, pardon, peace. Without him we can do nothing. We are powerless when cut away from the Vine and the upper life, the divine and eternal; then we fall back into the dust: we are without spirit or force or goodness of will. We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us,—yea, we can bear much fruit and make the Father glad. May we abide in Christ; may we look to the Son of God; may we fix our whole love upon Jesus, and, studying his law with a complete attention, may we obey it with a consenting will. We thank thee for all the words spoken by the Son of God; they are spirit, they are life, they are full of tenderest love; they lift the cloud from the outlook of the mind and shed eternal glory on things beyond. Never man spake like this Man. We wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth,—how full of wisdom! how tender with heavenly unction! how adapted to our necessity and pain! When he concludes his speech the heart, grateful and enraptured, says,—My Lord and my God! May Christ ever speak to us, ever abide with us, walk with us on the evening road, and begin at Moses and all the Prophets and the Psalms, and show unto us the things concerning himself; and as the wondrous speech proceeds our heart shall burn within us, and we shall know that we are near the bush out of which the Lord spake unto Moses. We bless thee for thine house, its security, its quietness, its spirit of holy peace. Be near us, every one. Touch the sad heart, and give it one hour's release from burdensomeness. Look upon the struggling life, and the glance of thine eye shall be as a guarantee of hope and conquest. Bring back the prodigal; he has many a weary mile to return, but if it shall come into his heart that thou art expecting him and longing for him with all the yearning of love his steps may be hastened, and the miles will soon be passed. Comfort us in our sorrow; carry our burdens a while for us. Seal our eyelids in peaceful sleep, and on the morning we shall rise invested with new energy and inspired with new hope.

This prayer we say, every word of it, in the name of him who, once crowned with thorns, is now crowned with all the crowns of heaven Amen.

## Deut. viii. 16.

“That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.”

### THE DESIGN OF AFFLICTION.

**I**T can never be inappropriate to address men upon the subject of affliction. In that one solemn fact there is a whole philosophy. How comes it that in this green world, with its blue skies, it can never be inappropriate to address a large assembly of human creatures on the subject of human sorrow? Laughter would often be out of place, and merriment would be a sin; but tenderness, sympathy, recognition of tears and heartache and weariness—why, almost at the wedding feast such allusions would evoke an assenting sigh. There must be some reason under all this. There is not a man living but knows what is meant by grief and pain, trouble and fear, suffering and sorrow. These are the well-known words that need no explanation—their utterance is their exposition. The heart knoweth his own bitterness. Every man's sorrow has an accent of its own, as every man's joy has a smile that he could find nowhere else. It is a notable fact that everywhere the Bible recognises the existence of affliction. In no other book is affliction so minutely and pathetically delineated. It seems to have been written on purpose to talk about affliction, sorrow, pain, death. It would seem as if the Book could have had no existence but for darkness and trouble, sorrow and anxiety. No feature of affliction escapes the attention of the Bible. The black image throws its fretted shadow over the whole area of the Book. You find affliction in Genesis. The Bible cannot begin except in the night-time, in the hour of darkness and under the gloom of sin. You cannot find a single historical book without finding the black line of affliction running through all the moving narrative. And the Psalms—why, affliction is the mournful inspiration

of the Psalter. The Psalter would not be a book were there no affliction in the world. All that is noblest in its pathos, sublimest in its solace, and grandest in its outlook, it owes to the fact that at the root of human life is the worm of human sorrow. Why is not the Bible all joyful? Why is it not a series of military marches? Why does it not sound the timbrel and beat the cymbal and cause the trumpet's blare of triumph and joy to be heard on every page and through every scene? Do let us get at the reason of the mournful tone which pervades the holy revelation. That reason we give in one word. It may admit of controversy in terms; but it admits of no dispute in facts. The brief, grim, tremendous answer is—SIN. But my immediate purpose does not lead me in that direction. The one inquiry which challenges my mind, and to which I would venture to call attention, is this: Granted that sin is the parent of sorrow, and of affliction and death, what are God's uses of affliction? What does God mean when he afflicts the children of men? Has he condescended to explain his intention? Does he thunder and lighten upon the world without cause? Do the arrows of his wrath fly without moral intent, or gracious control? What is the meaning of chastening, loss, grief, disappointment, affliction, in any, in all its dark and trying phases? Happily we are not left to conjecture. We go to the Book that speaks about affliction, to receive an answer to our urgent inquiry. What is God's design in troubling and chastening human life? Here is one reason which I will quote directly from the Book itself. Let us be silent, let us cause our nimble, but often faulty, fancy to sit down whilst we listen with the attention of the heart to the inspired explanation of human discipline: "Remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee, these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." There is a twofold design of chastening. The first is self-revelation, "to know what was in thine heart." Some things can only be got at by fire. There are depths in our consciousness that nothing can sound but pain, anguish, bitterness, sorrow. And these are not all bad; sometimes pain works its way down to our better nature, touches into gracious activity our noblest impulses, and evokes from our heretofore dumb lips the noblest

prayer. Sometimes we see farther through our tears than through our laughter. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. Many a man owes all that he knows about himself, in its reality and in its best suggestiveness—not to prosperity, but to adversity. Not to light, but to darkness. The angel of trouble has spoken to him, in whispers that have found their way into the inmost hearing of the heart.

The next design of affliction given in this quotation is "whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." Obedience is the purpose which God has in view. There can be no grand life until we have learned to obey. It is good for a man to have to obey. It is a continual lesson, a daily discipline. He gathers from it a true consciousness of his own capacity and his own strength, and he begins to ask questions of the most serious intent. From the beginning God's purpose was that we should obey. You cannot obey in any good and useful sense the spirit of evil. You only get good from the exercise of obedience when that exercise goes against your own will and chastens it into gracious submission. I say this the more clearly, lest some should imagine that there is no good in obedience in the abstract. A young person might say, "Then I will obey the spirit that bids me indulge myself, evade my lessons, my duties; trifle with my engagements. That will be obedience." So it may. But it is an obedience that brings no good along with it. It goes with the current of your own evil nature. It is an acquiescence that pleases you, not a discipline that tests your noblest and most useful qualities. It is good for a man to obey—it shows him that he is not God. It brings him down to his proper level. It enables him to say, "I do not wish to do this. I would rather not do it; the thing in itself is right, but I wish to evade it or do something that may be supposed to be equivalent to it, but in a pleasanter way." Now a man has that battle to fight; every battle must begin in a man's heart. You cannot fight your battles with your hand, you must have thrown the devil in a secret encounter and crushed his head in the concealment of nightly agony of prayer and thought, and then in the open light and the broad highway your victories will come easily to you. Obedience is not abstinence of the hand; it is acquiescence of the heart. The Lord therefore says, "I sent

this trouble upon thee to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep my commandments or no." Self-revelation and filial obedience—these are part of God's design in sending afflictions upon us.

Take another explanation: "I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" Sometimes God's withdrawments evoke from the heart conscious of his absence the most poignant and eager prayers. He says, "I will go away that they may miss me." He says, "I will withdraw and cause the walls of their security to tremble and the roof of their defence to let the storm pour down through it in order that they may begin to ask great questions." He will not have us fretting the mind with little inquiries and petty interrogations. He will force us to vital questionings: "Are not these things come upon us, because our God is not among us?" Why deal with symptoms and not with real diseases? Why try merely to clean the window when you have shut out the sun? Why paint the cheek when you know the disease is in the heart? It is thus that men awake oftentimes to a great interest in spiritual things. They build up walls so far, and in the morning they find them thrown down. They say, "It is the wind." They build them again, and again they are thrown down, and they say, "It was the vibration caused by passing vehicles." They build them up again, and again they are thrown down. And now they say, "How is this? Are the spiritual presences against us? Are the secrets of the universe turned into our enemies? Are we working along forbidden lines? Why this overturning? Why this daily mockery?" And then, with faces upturned, they catch the secret in the light, not in the dust, and find that it was God himself who prevented their bricks cohering and who melted their cement—God who caused his geometry to fight against their bad masonry. That may be the reason why you sustained the tremendous disaster last week. That may be the reason why the postman brings you no deliverance, why every letter brings fire with it, why every envelope is full of stings, and why every communication becomes a threat and a fear. O man, *that* may be the reason, and you, poor fool, have been

thinking all the time that it was some little accident or matter of detail ; not thinking that God's round heaven was fighting against you and from its every inch sending out stings and rebukes of fire. Here is an exact explanation of the law. God says : " I will withdraw, I will forsake them, I will go away that they may ask, ' Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us ? ' " That may be the reason you have no joy at home ; it is a God-forsaken house. You may have your altar there, you may utter your morning and evening prayer there, you may turn over the sacred leaves as if seeking for something in the dust there. But you have no God—great, fatherly, ever-shining presence, gentle benediction, brooding heart, and tender pity. That may be the reason why your table is not steady, why the bread turns sour in your mouth, why the water is all fire-drinking, why the fire goes out suddenly and you know not why. That may be the cause. Search for God in the house, ask him to come back again, say you have found the reason now and you mourn it, and ask him to return.

Take another answer : " They shall bear the punishment of their iniquity . . . that the house of Israel may no more go astray from me. " Punishment—meant to bring men home again. That is God's weapon, and you cannot steal it. You do wrong, and the scorpion stings you. You cannot bribe the scorpion, or tame it, or please it. Do what you will, it is a scorpion still. You say you will eat and drink abundantly, and grow your joys in your body, and the blood saith : " No ! " And every bone says : " No ! " And the head and the heart say : " No ! we are God's, and not in us shall you grow any joy that is not of the nature of his own purpose and will. " The bones, the joints, the sinews, the nerves, the whole scheme of the physical constitution of man, all fight for God. You have your enmities in the intellect and your oppositions in the imagination, and your troubles of a technical kind, and you try to wriggle your way out of the morality of Christianity. By some theological jugglery, by posing as an " honest doubter, " you want to drink the wine of the dishonest glutton and wine-bibber. But God will cause his laws to speak for him and defend him ; so you shall be beaten and punctured and troubled. You shall have no sleep, or in sleep a hell in sleep ! And what

a hell there can be in a bad dream! What is God's purpose in this? To bring you home again, and nothing else.

Take another statement of the cause and purpose of God in this matter of afflicting men: "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant . . . there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed." There again is the internal mystery. It is not the heart that needs must be revealed. You cannot argue with a man who is running down to hell with the consent of all his powers. Argue with him! Your argument and eloquence would be thrown away upon him. You must so show the evil of his doings as to work in the man self-loathing. You may show him pictures of evil, and he will gaze upon them—nay, he will buy them and hang them up in his rooms at home and point them out to his friends as works of vigour and power and wondrous artistic skill. He will not regard them as mirrors reflecting his own image. The work must be done in his soul. He must so see evil as to hate himself—self-disgust is the beginning of penitence and amendment. When the Prodigal came to himself—saw himself as he really was—he said: "I have sinned against Heaven." Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. That is another purpose of God in affliction. God sent his servant Paul a thorn in the flesh that he should not be exalted above measure. And to the text, "that he might humble thee and that he might prove thee," there is the sweet answer—After thou hast tried me thou wilt bring me forth as gold. How much education some of us need! I envy some men, because they so soon, to all seeming, get through their lesson and are good, and others of us require time after time affliction upon affliction, and still the furnace fire is heaped up, and still we remain in the burning, and we seem to become no better. One man had a death in his family, and from that moment he became a new creature. Others have carried out child after child, and still the home is without God and the life without hope in the world. Some men, after one debauch, have hated themselves so that hatred turned into prayer and penitence and trust in



God; and they stood straight up, renewed, redeemed, emancipated. And others have been for years in the mire and in the filth, and wallowed there and enjoyed it. Debauch after debauch, and become the worse for every experience. Some men have seen the error of their ways quite early, and yet seem to still go on repeating evil thought and deed without learning anything. The object of God is to do us good at our latter end. If the end of digging grave after grave is that we see our sin as God sees it, and hate it as Christ hated it, then all the loss has been for our good. God means us to be men, he means to purify us and sanctify us, to make us holy, to restore his image and likeness in us—in Christ, through Christ, by the power of Christ, by the ministry of his sacrificial blood, and the ministry of God the Holy Ghost. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, and to get that will accomplished he has to take away the first-born and the last-born, the dear old father or mother, the dearest friend, the kindest presence, health, fortune, position. He has to get us down to the root, branch and stem and all, right down; but he says: "The root shall remain and become good and strong and young again, and out of this root shall come beauty and fruitfulness such as shall please the heavenly Husbandman."

We all have affliction. Yours seems to be greater than mine—mine may seem to be greater than yours. But let us know that there cannot be affliction in our life without its being under God's control, and he will not suffer us to be tried above that we are able to bear it, and with every trial he will make a way of escape. He does not willingly grieve the children of men. He is pruning us, cutting us, nursing us, purifying us by divers processes to the end that he may set us in his heavens—princes that shall go out no more for ever.

Let us now look at some portions of Biblical testimony, and see how far they cover what we ourselves know of the afflictions and distresses of life. Let us begin at the lowest point, and step by step move onward to the higher altitudes. Take as a starting testimony this pitiful speech of an ancient offender, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; there-

fore is this distress come upon us." Afflictions do not spring out of the ground. Behind the meanest action there is a whole philosophy. We could almost write a Bible ourselves, so much have we seen of life, of guilt, of consequential pain, and of possible hell. The brethren of Joseph were self-condemned. They did not refer their distress to some high theory of the universe, with which they had little or nothing to do. Placing their finger on the black line which that finger itself had written, they said in candour (which is one element of penitence), "This is our doing." What a world it would be if distress did not follow crime! Life would be insupportable. Society would be impossible. It is the biting serpent that keeps us right. We make broad ways, along which the penal hosts of God come armed with weapons of righteous vengeance to inflict upon us the punishment appropriate to our guilt. You are in distress; ask the reason why. We have seen that distress is not always a sign of divine indignation, because distress is not always a consequence of personal guilt. But, looking at the matter from the standpoint of the text which is before us, let us ask ourselves this plain question, "How did this distress come upon me?" It is a pain of the body. You can easily account for it. It is a pain in the conscience—the witnesses are at the door. It is a dread fear of to-morrow. The reason is in the way you lived yesterday. There is no mystery about many a case of distress. If you have not a home, a place of security and of defence and sacred retreat, you know how you came to be in that position. You broke the law. You were unkind to your brother. You neglected your natural dependants. You sinned away your opportunities. You know the reason why; so do not make a mystery of it and add to the distress consequent upon actual guilt the intellectual pain of making mysteries out of plain and indisputable facts.

Take another instance of the result of affliction, which will show a very pitiful aspect of human nature. "Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." That was the right result. Wherein, then, is the pitifulness of the aspect of human nature which is herein

disclosed? It is in the fact that Pharaoh's speech was the expression of an insincere spirit. He did not mean what he said. He was ready to repent in words, but not in deeds. If confession of the lip would placate the angry heavens he would utter any number of confessions. But far down in his heart was the untamed spirit of rebellion and alienation and self-idolatry. Is it not so with you? "If God will take away this pain that troubles my life and makes existence intolerable, I will confess my sin." "If God will be gracious this time, I will never offend against his law and sanctuary any more." "If the Lord will enable me to tear this lion in pieces, and rend this bear, then surely I will go up to his house, and mine shall be the loudest and sweetest voice in the holy psalm." You do not mean it. You want to get rid of a burden. This is not genuine repentance. You want to escape consequences, not to hate sin. And thus to the original criminality you add the petty offence of cowardice. Men do not like to walk in the hell which they enkindle. It is no love of heaven that makes them pray for a speedy and complete escape. But the criminal in every case is not a hero, but a coward. Sin is never valorous. Boastful it may be for a time; but valour, nobility, courage, and chivalry are inconsistent with its nature. It lights its hell, and then would flee away from the flames. That is the reason why you are so far back in your moral progress. When you were last afflicted you said, "If God will raise me up this time, I will devote to him so much of my income, so much of my strength, and so much of my time." God did raise you up, and from that day to this your vow has lain upon his altar a dead letter. Do not escape the impeachment; it is meant to be heavy, terrific, emphatic with the thunder of God's own anger. You will be laid down again, and prayer shall mock your pain, and the leaden heavens shall send back your piteous cry. Awake, thou that sleepest! Remember your obligations, and now say, I will no longer withhold performance of a vow plighted under circumstances that can never be forgotten.

Take another instance of the effect of affliction, also an instance of the lower kind. "The people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against

thee ; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us." What a mean request ! You breed serpents, and are then afraid of them. You are responsible for their existence, and then you cry to God to kill your own progeny. I cannot find one instance of valour and nobleness in all the ranks of sin. God teaches us by fear. It is impossible to look upon life in all its scheme and outline without seeing that fear has an important part to play in the education of mankind. The child is often ruled by fear. Imagination is called upon to magnify penalties in the case of the child. Many a threat, inspired by love, is directed to the child that the attention of the little offender may be more completely and usefully awakened. And no preaching can be complete that does not, now and again, remind the people of the terrors of the law. It is no light thing to sin ; and, come to what conclusion you may about the future of the wicked soul, there can be no doubt that that future is one of tremendous agony. Who will dare it ? Who will willingly go forward to it ? I know of no theory of the Future of the soul which by some point or other does not bring in the righteous punishment of offending man. You can only affect some persons through fear. Without imagination of the better kind, without high sentiment, without noble education, without generous impulses — they can only be touched along the line of fear. So I do not visit with criticism of an embarrassing kind the efforts of men who preach hell rather than heaven to certain classes of hearers. High discourse about the nobler spaces, the infinite liberties, the glorious sanctuaries yet to be revealed and enjoyed, would be lost on an audience so debased. God, therefore, has again and again in his process of educating the human race, availed himself of fear for the purpose of awakening the attention of the lost.

Take another instance. "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." Man can only be taught that lesson by suffering. Without suffering he would be as a worker in cold iron. He must be made to see that at the root of all suffering is sin. Hence the grandeur of the mission of Christ ; hence its royal sublimity and its divine beneficence. He came not to deal with symptoms,

but with realities—interior essences and facts ; so he taketh away the sin of the world. It is an inclusive act. To take away the root is to take away the branches. To remove the sin is to destroy the disease. To heal the heart is to bring the flush of health to the cheek that was blanched through suffering. Do not look at secondary causes, and so play the practical fool. Look at beginnings, at springs, at fountain-heads, and find in sin the one secret of all suffering.

Now let us go to the higher ground, and let us hear this good confession : “Thou art just in all that is brought upon us ; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.” That word “just” is a word which cannot be dropped out of the history of divine Providence without destroying the idea of Providence itself. “Thou art just.” Hell opens its lips and says, “Thou art just.” All sufferers who have come to the root and foundation of their suffering have said, “Thou art just.” The pain is intolerable, but it is just. The night is dark, but not so black as the sin which gathered the appalling cloud. Confession must be kept in its right place in every review of Providence. It is not enough that we confess that Providence is royal, divine, wonderful, mysterious, perplexing ; we must come to a moral word somewhere in our criticism and discourse, and that one moral word which is needful to give dignity to our survey and estimate is the eternal word, “*just*.” So says the suffering world ; not a pain too many, not an agony too keen, not a night too dark, not a wind too cold, not a stream too deep or swift, not a sting too burning—thou, O Lord, King of angels, only Potentate, thou art just. When a man can truly say that, with the emphasis of his intelligence and affection, he is not far from the kingdom of God.

Take a still loftier instance. “Thou, O God, hast proved us : thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net ; thou laidst affliction upon our loins . . . but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.” The road was difficult, but the end was grand. We came through thickets and thorns and stony places and rocky heights and over wildernesses, but the end is paradise—the end is heaven. A wealthy place here means a large place. God would enlarge our inheritance and add to our liberty, and no

roof that we can build over our heads is grand enough for us, so he builds the roof of the sky, and sows it with the beauty of stars. He means to bring you into a large place; into new ideas, new relations, new opportunities, new hopes. "In my Father's house are many mansions." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We are now learning the alphabet—hard work; it is difficult to bring together into picture and music and harmony; but presently a great light will shine upon us, and a new inspiration will seize our intelligence and our whole moral nature and lift it up to a sublimer plane, which shall read the revelation of God with new capacities and new sensations. Your affliction ought to have made you richer—richer in experience, richer in every department of life and thought; and if it has failed to do so God's design has not been successful.

Now let us hear an individual testimony. So far the testimony has been uttered in the plural number. Here is a man who will speak for himself, and in speaking for himself shall speak for the whole world. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." You cannot read the Bible in health with any true edification, or with any deep perception of its inner meaning. It is not in fatness and prosperity to deliver the music of revelation with effect upon the attention of those who are listening. The Bible can be best read when the throat is choked with some sob of penitence, or when the reading is made incoherent because the print is punctuated with falling tears. The Bible cannot be rhetorically read, so as to bring out its spiritual purpose and intent and force. It is best read when the voice shakes, when the eyes are dim, and when the whole heart is alive with conflicting joy and sorrow. Do not go to men of shallow and narrow experience to know what the Bible is. Religious questions cannot be discussed in cold blood. Religion, in the Christian acceptance of the term, is blood, is sacrifice, is agony, is life at its highest point. To refer to the figure just used—to come to the Bible in a merely cold and critical mood is attempting to unite pieces of cold iron by beating them. Without fire progress is impossible. So the flippant man can never be a great critic or a great preacher. The man destitute of veneration

can never make his influence deeply and lastingly felt in the review or the recitation of the divine word.

Then comes the crowning result: "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me." Here we have mellowness of character. Your dignity, your energy, have fallen into their proper places, and the supreme characteristic of your life and spirit now is mellowness. Affliction has been sanctified to us, and so the character is enriched, the tone is subdued, our judgment of other people is larger and nobler, our capacity of sympathy is enhanced and ennobled, and now we can speak out of the heart, rich with the manifold treasures of God. Once there was uppermost in our thinking and our speech a feeling of cleverness, sagacity, intellectual force, or even some gleams of genius; but since we have had the grave dug and filled, and another dug by its side—since the favourite flower has been blighted and the heart has been taken away; since the delight of the eyes has been removed; since the roof has been battered in by the fierce and destructive storm; since the sky has been blackened with one fatal night, our voice has become mellow, tender, sympathetic, and the touch of our hand has been as the touch of a redeeming, saving power. Are we the better for our affliction? Are we the richer in all the higher elements of character? Let each ask the question for himself. Or has the wine of God become sour through neglect or misuse? What then? What is the preacher's last cry? This: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Could a broader gospel be preached? Could a tenderer tone be uttered? "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Is there any voice to address us in far-away places in tones that can be well heard down in the soul? Yes. What does it say? "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." What then? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." These are great words, these are grand offers. All other words and offers become mean and commonplace and contemptible in the presence of a word which means

Love, an offer which means Pardon, and a return which means Heaven.

Let us next consider in what *spirit* affliction may be accepted. We have studied God's design in afflicting men, and we have seen some instances of the success of that method. Let us now see how variously as to spirit and interpretation affliction may be received at the hands of God. By "affliction" do not narrowly understand mere bodily suffering, but trial of every kind; yea, the whole burden and discipline of life. Understand that affliction in this large sense must be endured. The question is not whether we will have affliction or not. Affliction we must have. No door can be made to shut so closely as to keep affliction out of the house. Seeing, therefore, that in some form or other we must receive discipline; or undergo trial; or endure pain, the question is, In what spirit shall we receive the inevitable discipline of life? Here we have choice of methods. At this point what is called "free-will" operates most fully. We can be wise—we can be foolish. It is for us—grasping, so far as we may be able to include it, the whole purpose of God, in the constitution and education of our life—to say in what spirit we shall regard our subordination and the discipline which it inevitably implies. The question is a great one, and as it must come before every mind in some form, let us endeavour to give it adequate consideration and becoming reply.

We must go to history for our illustrations; and, turning to history for my first illustration, I find that the discipline of life may be received *impenitently*. Hear these words in solemn and decisive proof: "If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." That warning was addressed to impenitent hearts. The rain fell upon the rocks and melted them not. The sunshine poured its horn of light upon the sand, and it answered with no tiny flower. But the case is put with tremendous force. God will not yield. Who can last the longer, God or man? The Infinite or the finite? Whose arrows will give out soonest—his who has but a handful, or his whose quiver is the universe? Clearly understand that God will not yield, and understand that



his "will not" is not an instance of stubbornness or mere obstinacy. God cannot yield. Righteousness cannot give way. The standard of the sanctuary cannot alter its height. The balances of the sanctuary cannot accommodate themselves to conditions and circumstances. Right is right, and no tittle or jot of it can be abated. Not only so, God will increase punishment where affliction is misunderstood or impenitently received. "I will punish you yet seven times for your sins." That is, "I will give you sevenfold more punishment." He begins with the little penalty. He lays his finger-tip upon you to give you to know that you are on the wrong road. If you flee further from him, he increases the weight of his hand. If you repeat your sin, he smites you with cords. If you renew it, he chastises you with scorpions. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Now heed; say frankly with penitence and contrition, "Father, I have sinned; the blame is all mine; God be merciful unto me a sinner. I thought to make my way in the universe in spite of thee. I cannot do it. I do not yield because I am foiled, but because I feel my folly and I sink under my sin. God pity me and save me." Will you say that? Then your affliction shall become your strength. The night shall break into light and beauty, and the wilderness shall blossom as the rose; and the place where your pain was keenest shall be the centre of your surest and noblest joys. But I warn you, God will not give way—God cannot give way. The one thing God can do is to multiply your affliction seven times, and to cover up the arch of the sky with a night denser than has yet blackened the firmament.

Turning to history again, I find that affliction may be received *self-approvingly*, or self-excusingly, and so may fail of its benign purpose. The proof is in these words: "In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction. . . . Thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me." The correction has been administered, but has not been received. It has been misunderstood. It has been taken in hardness. It has been resented as an injustice. It has been treated as if it came from an enemy, and not from a friend. The deadly sophism of your innocence must be rooted out before you can be cured. The Pharisee must be destroyed before the man can be saved. Will you understand that? So long as you have one

little petty virtue that you indulge, and patronise, and exhibit, and trust to, God's back must be turned upon you. The difficulty of our life is our self-righteousness. The idea that we are good, and therefore do not deserve pain, sorrow, misfortune, loss, is the damning fallacy of life. We must die before we can live. We must feel ourselves to be empty-handed before we can be truly rich. Thou hast said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." God will not share the house of your trust with any rival deity. He is not one who will sit down upon equal terms with your respectability, and virtue, and excellence. Until we understand that we can make no religious progress. Here the superficial reasoner has the advantage over the Christian thinker, because he says to you, "It is impossible you can be so very bad; you are kind, you have good thoughts about people, you are neighbourly, you are hospitable, you are socially honourable, you are in good repute amongst your fellows, you are not ill-natured, but kindly disposed." The man is telling you lies. You are none of these things, except in a relative and superficial sense. In the sanctuary we deal with realities, not incidental relations. We go to the core and root of things, and not to surfaces and to passing incidents. Judging ourselves by ourselves, we are all that the non-christian thinker has described us to be. But we are not now instituting a comparison between one man and another, but between the best man and God. Let that idea get well into your mind and heart, and you will say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The great difficulty is for us to get rid of our respectability. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee lauded himself; the publican hated himself, and asked for mercy. The Pharisee was a Pharisee after his prayer; the publican was a justified man. Renounce excuses; drop the hollow plea of self-justification, and throw yourselves wholly into the arms, yea, into the heart, of the Saviour of the world. Then your afflictions will be like angels that have taken you home. Your discipline will be a minister of God. Your loss will be the beginning of your gain, and you will spring up into a new youth and a fresh immortal

strength, saying, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Other men have done it; why not we?

Turning again to history for illustration and argument, I find that affliction may be received *self-deceivingly*. The proof is in these words: "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." Heart-crying is one thing, and mere howling is another. To howl is not to repent necessarily. We have howled enough, but our howling has not been of the right kind. There is a selfish howling. When some people are in pain they never think that they are paining their friends. They limit the suffering to themselves. Their thoughts never go out to those who watch and wait. They do not know that their pain inflicts distress upon the whole household. They confine themselves to themselves. There is no charity in their lamentations. There is no breadth in their sorrow, and therefore it is a selfish and a lost distress. Then there is a cowardly howling. Do not imagine that you are repentant merely because you are crying out. Perhaps you are only crying out because you have lost your property, lost your health, lost your standing—not because you have offended God and grieved the Spirit of Righteousness. The Lord takes notice of the howling, but he says, "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." It was a selfish, cowardly, resentful howling, and not the sigh of penitence, or the storm of contrition. Here we have great difficulty. Men come to us with sad stories of distress, and they make long moans about pain and fear, about poverty and uselessness. They use the words which penitents might use, but not in a contrite spirit. Analyse their howling, and it is all selfish. Take their crying to pieces, so to say, and it is all because the place smarts on which God's whip fell. It is the flesh that complains; it is not the spirit that repents. When a bad man complains of his head, is he complaining of his sin? Is he not only waiting till he can gather himself together again that he may renew the contest against Heaven, and endeavour to find on earth a root that was never planted there?

One more point there is which I dare scarcely touch. How few know that the passage is in the Bible. It is a passage that proves that affliction may be received, in the fourth place, *despairingly*. Are there in any poems made by men such

words as these? Tell me if any poet dare write such words: "They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." "My soul, come not thou into their secret." Some man wrote these words who had seen hell. We lightly utter the word. We try to modify its force and its meaning. We do what we can to mitigate the pressure of that tremendous punishment, which is implied in the use of such a term; but when we have done our utmost at modification and mitigation, there remains this terrible fact, "They gnawed their tongues for pain," and with their gnawed tongues they "blasphemed the God of heaven." They felt their "pains and their sores," but they "repented not of their deeds," and God cannot give way. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;" but "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Do not endeavour by any means to make God's hell a pleasure. Do not trifle with the idea of future punishment. Whatever it be, it is the last answer of Omnipotence to rebellious man. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This is not a question to be argued. It is not a theme for speculation. When logician and speculatist have accomplished their task, there remains the unexplained word—hell!

How are we receiving our afflictions? "Come now, let us reason together." Ephraim of old was described as a "bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." In some countries the bullock is used for ploughing and for drawing vehicles. The poor ox is yoked, and, being unaccustomed to the yoke, it chafes under it. Its great shoulders protest against the violation of liberty. By-and-by the bullock becomes accustomed to the treatment, and submits itself to the service of man. Ephraim receiving the discipline of God was "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." We do not take kindly to our troubles, afflictions, distresses, and losses. It is not natural that we should do so; but, seeing that we have incurred them, we must receive them at God's hand, and become accustomed to the discipline; and eventually submit ourselves to the service of God, which is the true liberty. How did Jesus Christ conduct himself under the afflictions which fell, in a plentiful rain, to his lot? He was "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." His face was marred more than any

man's. He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. He bore the Cross. How did he deport himself under the daily affliction of his life? An affliction not self-incurred, an affliction borne for others, an affliction endured from before the foundation of the world? Answer that question. The reply is given: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Have we that long look? Is ours a narrow vision that sees the nearest wall, or a keen, far telescopic eye that sees the horizon and the land beyond? Take in more field, make the worlds balance one another and complete one another: life is not all earth. There is a future state, and the future must interpret and ennoble the present. How did Paul bear his afflictions? By looking at the things that are not seen. Keeping his heart's eyes fixed upon the invisible, he said, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment." "We glory in tribulations also." What an "also" was that! What an inclusive term! How it dipped in and absorbed and glorified all the processes and all the trials of this weary earthly life! "We glory in tribulations also." Only Christ can win that conquest! That field was never fought and won but by one Captain, and his name is Christ. Receive your afflictions as of the Lord's sending. Say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." I would kiss his bereaving hand. "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." "Thou hast been with me in six troubles, and in the seventh thou wilt not forsake me." All tribulations can be overcome in the grace and strength of Christ. "One of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. . . They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." It is enough! It is heaven!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou put thy Spirit within us; then shall we do the thing that is right, and walk steadfastly in the way of thy commandments. We would find the house of wisdom; her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. We would enter at her bidding, and partake of the feast which she has prepared. Yea, we would accept the hospitality which thou thyself hast offered: we would eat and drink abundantly at the table of the Lord, that we may renew our strength and be enabled to pursue our journey with fresh vigour, with burning zeal, with all-sustaining hope. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; yea, they shall become young again: the burden of the years shall fall away from them, and they shall stand up in all the freshness and power and buoyancy of early life. Such is the blessing which follows true and loving waiting upon God. We have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss; the fault is in the prayer, not in the Giver. We have mistaken thy purpose, or thou wouldst surely have answered our petitions with great replies. We have sought to renew our youth vainly at other sources,—yea, we have hastened as if with frenzy to forbidden altars, that we might light the lamp of life with false fire; and, behold, the wind has blown out the flame, and we have been left in oppressive darkness. We will return unto the Lord; we will arise and go to our Father, and speak the language of penitence, and shed the tears of contrition, and make mention of the Cross, and avail ourselves of all the love of God. Thou hast guided us all our life long; not one day hast thou been absent from our life. Thou hast led thy people by a way that they knew not, and by paths they had not known. When we could not open the gate, thou hast thrown down the barrier; when the mountain was too high for our weariness to climb, thou didst touch the hill, and it vanished in smoke. Thou hast dried up for us rivers and seas; thou hast made solid the softest ground,—yea, thou hast wrought great wonders in our life; many a miracle hast thou set up in it as a witness of thy presence and thy power, and we are here to bless thee with unanimous praise, with a psalm of gratitude, uttered with all the fervour which memory can throw into our service, remembering how great has been thy goodness and how tender thy mercy. We will not be ashamed of thy providence: we will own to it; though there be many who mock us, we will say,—This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes: this is our Father's will, and it is our desire to accept and obey it; this is the disposal of the Lord of the lot which we cast into the lap: we will accept his appointment and follow out his purpose. Enable us with heavenly strength so to say and so to do; then our life shall be no longer shattered and frayed out in weakness, but shall be gathered up

in great strength, and in holy power shall proceed to the execution of the divine behest. Guide us, O thou great Jehovah! Jesus, still lead on! Be thou our light by night, our Captain in the daytime, a high power to which we may continually resort, a sanctuary in the wilderness. Afflict our afflictors, and save us from taking vengeance into our own hands. We fall into thine hands, thou Loving One; we rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. The coming of Christ Jesus our Saviour shall be with the quietness of the dawn, and we shall not know it until a great light is round about us; we shall come with the silence of the growing corn, and we shall hardly be aware of the plentifulness of the divine bounty until we find ourselves standing in the midst of fields laden with golden wheat. Such blessings and honours fall to the lot of thy people—O may we be numbered in the host! Amen

### Deut. viii. 18.

“But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.”

### THE THEOLOGY OF MONEY.

A DEEP conviction of this fact would turn human history into a sacrament. Receive into the mind the full impression of this doctrine, and you will find yourself working side by side with God, in the field, the warehouse, the bank, the shop, the office, the pulpit. What a blow this text strikes at one of the most popular and mischievous fallacies in common life—namely, that man is the maker of his own money! Men who can see God in the creation of worlds cannot see him suggesting an idea in business, smiling on the plough, guiding the merchant's pen, and bringing summer into a brain long winter-bound and barren. In the realm of commerce the Most High has been practically dethroned, and in his place have been set all manner of contemptible idols: we have put into the holy place trick and cunning, and to these we have sacrificed as if they had made our fortune and enriched our destiny with sunshine. We have locked up God in the church; or we have crushed him into the Bible like a faded rose-leaf; we have shut upon him the iron gate of the market-place; we have forced commerce into a kind of religious widowhood and compelled trade to adopt the creed of Atheism.

There is always danger in endeavouring to adjust the influence

of second causes. The element of mediation enters very largely into God's government, one world being lighted by another, one man depending on another, and one influence diffusing itself in a thousand directions, and entering into the most subtle and complicated combinations; all this intercepts our vision of that which is original and absolute in energy. We have a difficulty in understanding anything but straight lines. If money fell from the sky like rain, or snow, or sunshine, we could perhaps more readily admit that it came from God; but because it comes through circuitous and sometimes obscure channels we do not feel upon it the warmth of the divine touch, and often we see upon it only the image of Cæsar. We are guilty, like an ancient harlot, on whose wicked head God poured out his wrath: "She said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." But God hedged up her way with thorns, he caused her to lose her paths, and said in a tone which combined complaint and anger, "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." He who gives the light of the sun gives also the oil which man enkindles into a flame, and supposes that result to be an invention of his own. Lebanon and Bashan are not more certainly divine creations than are the wool and flax which cover the nakedness of man. To the religious contemplation, the sanctified and adoring mind, the whole world is one sky-domed church, and there is nothing common or unclean.

God wishes this fact to be kept in mind by his people. In this instance, as in many others, God makes his appeal to recollection: "Thou shalt *remember.*" The fact is to be ever present to the memory; it is to be as a star by which our course upon troubled waters is to be regulated; it is to be a mystic cloud in the daytime, a guiding fire in the night season. The rich memory should create a rich life. An empty memory is a continual temptation. Mark the happy consequences of this grateful recollection. First of all, God and wealth are ever to be thought of together. "The silver and the gold are *mine.*" There is but one absolute Proprietor.



We hold our treasures on loan; we occupy a stewardship. Consequent upon this is a natural and most beautiful humility. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" When the trader sits down in the evening to count his day's gains, he is to remember that the Lord his God gave him power to get wealth. When the workman throws down the instrument of his labour that he may receive the reward of his toil, he is to remember that the Lord his God gave him power to get wealth. When the young man receives the first payment of his industry, he is to remember that the Lord his God gave him power to get wealth. Thus the getting of money becomes a sacred act. Money is a mighty power; wealth occupies a proud position in all the parliament of civilisation. Trade thus becomes a means of grace and commerce an ally of religion. In one word, the true appreciation of this doctrine would restore every act of life to its direct and vital relation to the living God. There are men who say that the voice of the pulpit should never be heard in the market-place. They forget that they could not move a muscle but for the grace of God: nor could they originate or apply an idea but for the mercy of Heaven. Let us hold, in opposition to this atheistic commerce, that every ledger should be a Bible, true as if written by the finger of God; that every place of business should be made sacred by the presence of righteousness, verity, honour, and justice. The man who can be atheistic in business could be atheistic in heaven itself. The man who never turns his warehouse into a church can hardly fail to turn the church into a warehouse. Even nominally Christian men are often unduly anxious that too much of what they call religion should not be introduced into places of trade. They speak about God with a regulated whisper, as if they were speaking about a ghost whose unfriendly eye was fixed upon them. When they refer to God it is with the motion of a trembling finger or an inflection of the voice which indicates anything but moral repose. Filial joy is wanting: the leaping heart is not known in the experience of such fear-ridden professors of Christianity. Men who make money with both hands, who run greedily after gain, and serve mammon with fervent zeal, are not likely to remember that the Lord their God gave

them power to get wealth. Memory is occupied with other subjects. The heart is foreclosed. The whole nature acts as if it had entered into a bond to entertain no religious recollections. In enumerating the happy consequences arising from a grateful recognition of God's relation to wealth, the check upon all wastefulness and extravagance might be mentioned. Christianity enjoins frugality upon its disciples; its command is, "Gather up the fragments." The man who wastes money would also waste his moral dowry. An extravagant Christian—that is, a man who outruns his resources, his business, and his life—is likely to become a subtle felony. Money is one of the limitations of power, and to overstep that limitation is a practical blasphemy, an unpronounced but most terrible reproach upon divine arrangements. The temptation is for men to put forth their hand and appropriate forbidden wealth. The point of interdict may be in the sum, and not in the quality of the thing which is forbidden. It may be sometimes easier to abstain altogether from the fruit of a tree than to stop at a particular point in gathering that fruit, and to say to desire and appetite,—This is enough, and to take more is to commit theft in the sanctuary of God.

This, then, is the fundamental principle upon which Christians are to proceed—namely, that God giveth man power to get wealth, and consequently that God sustains an immediate relation to the property of the world. Take the case of a young man just entering business. If his heart is uneducated and unwatched, he will regard business as a species of gambling; if his heart be set upon right principles, he will esteem business as a moral service, as the practical side of his prayers, a public representation of his best desires and convictions. In course of time the young man realises money on his own account. Looking at his gold and silver, he says, "I made that." There is a glow of honest pride on his cheek. He looks upon the reward of his industry, and his eyes kindle with joy. Whilst he looks upon his first-earned gold the Bible says to him, gently and persuasively, "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Instantly his view of property is elevated, enlarged, sanctified. He was just about to say that his own arm had gotten him the victory, and to forget

that, though the image is Cæsar's, yet the gold is God's. What, then, is the natural line of thought through which the successful man would run under such circumstances? It would lie in some such direction as this: What can be the meaning of this word "remember"? Does it not call me to gratitude? Is it not intended to turn my heart and my eye heavenward? As God has given me "power to get wealth," am I not bound to return some recognition of his goodness and mercy? A process of self-examination like this must drive away from the mind many thoughts and temptations which would subtract from its power and degrade its influence. For want of asking questions, the mind often goes without instruction and enrichment. The conscience should be required to put questions to the understanding and the reason, and should gently constrain these noble powers to make definite reply. Conscience is the great question-asking centre of our constitution. All its questions are of a moral kind, and a characteristic of them is that, however much they may be silenced at the time, they recur with intenser energy as life nears its solemn close. Better ask those questions at the outset, and come to a clear understanding respecting them, than stifle their purpose and condemn them to long speechlessness.

We speak of the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God, but often overlook those which apply to our so-called secular life. Is it to be imagined that Almighty God is an unconcerned spectator of our commercial life? Does he leave us without observation and sympathy in the field which is most thickly occupied with all manner of well-adapted and urgent temptations? The probability is that we need less protection in the public sanctuary than we need in the public market-place. Probably there is no point in all the mysterious line of life where a man is so persistently and seductively attacked as at the point of business. He sees how much he could do if he were not limited by moral considerations; he thinks that even moral breaches might be repaired by momentary compensations; he detects with too keen an eye to what religious uses money might be applied, whatever may have been the price of its acquisition. It is altogether improbable, therefore, that God would leave the tradesman without moral criticism and defence, and lavish all his divine attention upon those who intermeddle

with theologies and philosophies. Very distinct, and even wonderful, are the references which are made in the Bible to the matter of trade, commerce, and business of every kind. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase." Supposing this to be done, what is the result which is promised to accrue? That result is stated in terms that are severely logical: "So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." We have already seen that God has laid his claim upon the whole property of man in many an instance. "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors" (Exod. xxii. 29). "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God" (Exod. xxiii. 19). The very fact of Christians having been redeemed at an infinite cost is turned into an argument why all things, material and physical, to which they can lay claim, are to be sanctified and turned to religious uses: "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." God has made the outpouring of spiritual blessing dependent upon man's faithfulness in observing the law of tithes, and firstfruits, and religious tributes of all kinds: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." We may keep back part of the consecrated price, but the loss will be ours rather than God's. We may account ourselves even clever in making calculations as to how much we can save from the cost of piety and charity, but the great law of compensation will proceed disastrously in our case because of this calculated and irreligious penury: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly." This law of compensation operates also in the other direction with noble impartiality: "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." We imagine that all God's benefactions are spiritual; we have shut him out from the field and the vineyard; but hear his word: "The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." But we must not attempt to make an investment of our

charity: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven." God cannot be outwitted in this matter. Not only must we sow the right seed at the right time, we must sow it in the right soil; in other words, all the conditions must be right, or the harvest will end in disappointment and sorrow. What is the true motive of all such action?—"The love of Christ constraineth us;" "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;" "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." We must operate from an intensely spiritual and religious point of view: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

The text has called us to an act of remembrance, and in doing so has suggested the inquiry whether there is any such act of remembrance on the part of God himself? The Scripture is abundant in its replies to this inquiry: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Jesus Christ himself has laid down the same encouragement with even minuter allusion: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The Apostle Peter preached to Cornelius the same doctrine: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." Thus, on the divine side and on the human side there is an act of remembrance. God is always writing "a book of remembrance." We cannot work for God without reward, yet the reward must form no part of the motive under which we work. The sacred and awful ordinance of Heaven is: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Let us not suppose that we can ever owe anything to the oversight or forgetfulness of God. Everything is written down in the books which fire cannot consume, and we shall one day be called upon to face the minute and indisputable account.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we, too, are in trouble, and in our hearts there is pain. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? We have been looking in the wrong direction: we have been turning towards ourselves for health, forgetting that we are all weakness, without any answer to the accuser, without any justification of our conduct. God be merciful unto us sinners! We will not speak to thee of our righteousness, or of our claim, for we have none; we will speak of our unrighteousness and of our forfeiture of thy regard, and will not spare ourselves in the day of examination and account. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The whole life has gone astray; the life has become a lie. But thy mercy still beams above the sun; thy tender love is more gracious than the showers of summer; thy tears outnumber the dew of the morning. We come not to thy judgment but to thy compassion; we are sure of thy love; we understand it in some degree. Towards thy righteousness we dare not look; it has no voice for us other than the voice of rebuke: but our eyes are towards the Cross—the living, dying, rising immortal mercy of the Cross; there we cannot die; there heaven's door stands wide open. We look unto the Bleeding Lamb; we feel the ministry of his blood; we cannot explain or understand, but in our soul there is a mystery of peace, a sense of newness of life, a beginning brighter than the dawning day; and this we accept as a seal and pledge of a covenant eternal as thine own duration and sure as the pillars of thine own throne. Amen.

## Deut. ix.

### CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS.

THE expression of the first verse brings to our mind the truth that in life there are many days which are so special that they stand out by themselves,—points of history, glittering aspects of time. Moses says,—“Hear, O Israel: thou art to pass over Jordan this day.” Life focalises itself in a mere point. The preparation may be long and tedious, so much so as to tax our patience and sometimes throw our faith into sore vexation and trouble; but when God's providences do culminate they seem all to occur instantaneously, with a quite startling suddenness; and coming so we speedily forget all the waiting time

and are ourselves suddenly startled into new praise. God does specialise the time of life. Thank God for every day that has a distinct individuality and that shoots an influence into all the other days immediately behind and immediately before. Thus the Sabbath day treats the week: it makes us forget the dulness of the day that is gone, and it throws an influence of a consecrating kind upon the day that is about to come. In the family we have such days:—the birth-day, the wedding-day, the day when the belfry shook with the resounding metal—a great burst of music and gladness; the day when we saw heaven opened, and had all that great liberty of prayer by which we seemed to enter therein in all the fulness of its breadth and all the glory of its splendour: it was a day of victory, quite a day of the soul, when the spirit was more than the body—not in some vain metaphysical theory of its constitution, but in sweet consciousness, in noble dominance over all life's vexation, and trouble, and sin, and shame. His is a mind not to be envied who does not mark the speciality of time—the day that had so much light in it; the bright morning that raised our hopes from the dead; the time of the coming of the angel who rolled the stone away and sat upon it, and filled the immediate space with heaven's glory. We should see more of God if we looked for more of him. The day would be more distinct if we opened its gate with the right key and if we approached its duties in the right spirit. We need preparation for such special days. It is well that there should be men amongst us who have foresight and who know that to-morrow will be a fighting day, and the day after a time of trial by fire and by water, and who with this genius of prevision have also the courage of a prophet to announce the coming time to prepare those of duller sight for the immediate providence. There are such men, but they are always in the family of the old kings of the Church. Nothing ever transpires that is not to be found in hint, or analogy, or distinct announcement in the Bible. No Jordan flows that is not related to the Bible Jordan by some very distinct arm or outlet; and Moses may be taken as the type of those old men who, having understanding of the time, know what Israel ought to do, and speak their knowledge as Moses delivered his often severe Gospel. Men need to be girded up: they require the tonic word.

All sighing for comfort is an evaporating sentiment unless the meaning of it be that having received God's solace it shall all be turned into fighting material,—a determined and invincible strength levelled against the energetic weakness of hell.

Moses could not help preaching. It was not enough for him to make a bald announcement. Having stated all that was of the nature of law and commandment with sharpest clearness of expression, he went out into colour and exhortation, sentiment and impulse, towards heaven. He told the people in crossing Jordan and undertaking a severe task that "God is he which goeth over before thee." Having told Israel that the encountering people were "great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak?" he said,—remember, or "understand"—grasp the theology of the case—God is at the head of the army, and the Anakim are before him as the grasshoppers of the earth. Moses insists upon Israel having a right theology—not a science, not merely formulated opinion, but a distinct, living grasp of the thought that God is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. He will not have an arm lifted but in God's almightiness; he will have no atheistic generalship; he will not speak of himself as the leader of Israel: God first; God midst; God last. Nothing stirs a man like a grand theology,—that is a living, perpetual grip of the eternal. Be right with God, and then you are within the range and flow of the music of creation; moving with the stars and yet grander than all the host of heaven, the soul falls into all the mystery and benediction of perfect peace. It is well to understand the difficulty that through its magnitude we may see somewhat of the greatness of God. Moses will not run down the Anakim as if any child could beat them back with a straw; he indicates their stature: he revives the memory of their prowess: he speaks of them as men who are in no wise to be contemned in the matter of strength and soldiership; within human limits they are tremendous foes, worthy of any foeman's steel; then, having so pictured them, without one touch of exaggeration, he says, Now understand that the Lord thy God is he who commands this army, and when he smites the nations reel and stagger like drunken men; have faith in God; have confidence in the



covenant of Heaven ; abide under the shadow of the Almighty ; and when the Anakim fall—when they are brought down before thy face, when thou dost drive them out and destroy them quickly, remember a time of danger sets in. Give right interpretations to success ; do not become atheists through prosperity ; nor encourage the spirit of Pharisaism because all your little world seems ruled in obedience to your will.

Now the preacher takes his place. The legislator having given the law, the prophet begins ; hence we hear Moses saying, in the fourth verse, "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land." No Pharisaism is allowed, no sacrificing to your own net or drag. God will not allow his soldiers to fall asleep after the day's battle upon the pillow of their own righteousness ; nor will he allow them to say, See what virtue can do ; see what good character will accomplish ! behold, are not we men of clean hands ? and in cleanliness of hands is there not strength of battle ? Moses teaches that there is no righteousness on our side that can account for our success in life. God will not have boastfulness in his army or in his family. When we have succeeded we interpret the success aright if we regard it as having brought us one step nearer heaven. Are not men accustomed in the eventide, counting their gains and their successes, to say, This comes of sobriety, punctuality, attention to business ; these are the natural and logical sequences of forethought and industry ; how few there are who follow our path ! were they as good as we they would be as rich ? God will not allow such reasoning, if reasoning it may be termed. It is vanity ; it is a misunderstanding of the real conditions of the case. Within limits we might assign all such talk has in it a measure of truth. No wise man will bring good conduct, forethought, punctuality, and all the elementary virtues of business into discredit : he will rather magnify them ; but God does not pay us at night for the righteousness with which we have patronised him during the day. If we thus magnify our righteousness we would share the glory with Omnipotence, and God cannot permit us to divide the glory of his throne. Moses gives the true cause : "For the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before

thee ;" the nations are in error : they are inspired by the wrong spirit : they are animated by the wrong motives : their ambitions are perverted ; God could fight them with swords, God could blind them with the hot dust of the wilderness, God could touch their minds and make them reel so that they could not put thought to thought or utter one desire in words ; that, however, is not the divine plan, but in choosing other instruments those instruments must not imagine that God could not have done without them, and so imagining fall out of the humility of prayer and the reverence of trust.

Now the preacher will be severer still. He knows his congregation and he speaks to them of their immediate character and their assured and indisputable history. Moses says in the seventh verse, "Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness : from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord." Then comes the history of Israel's wickedness. Moses will have the people remember what their own character really is. He goes to the root of the matter. He will not allow them to be fascinated by a day's good conduct here and there, by some transient appearance of sound and honest religiousness : he says, You are a stiff-necked and rebellious people. There is a substance of character. There is a central quantity in man. For want of penetrating to that central quantity we misunderstand man and we misunderstand one another. The central quantity may be bad when all the fringework is of fine twined scarlet, lit up with spangles of gold ; and blessed be God, the central quantity may be right, though many of the changing circumstances and phases of life may be such as to bewilder observers and to occasion sore distress and trouble to the soul itself. Israel was stiff-necked and rebellious : Israel represented the hardness of the human heart in all time. Showers of gracious rain were lost upon that sandy people ; all heaven's sunshine produced no happy effect upon the rocky heart of Israel. Let there be no self-deception ; let there be no loss of history ; let the word be, "Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness." Keep such hold of your bad old self as will frighten you from repeating it. Do not carry it like a spectre to excite your

fear and drain your courage and your strength; but have such healthy apprehension of it, such a seizure of all its spirit and scope, as will help you to pray broader prayers and plead with humbler audacity all the promises tending in the direction of assured forgiveness. Men may carry their dead selves about with them so as to corrupt the present life and to take out of it all joy, and spring, and hope. In no such way are we to detain the past; we are to detain it in the sense of gathering its richest lessons, its best instructions; it is to be to us as a warning or as a finger pointing to dangerous places and to forbidden occupations and delights.

Now Moses will turn comforter. A wonderful man was Moses! A legislator with a hard mouth that could speak nothing but law; then a preacher whose tone softened into expostulation, here and there delicately hardened into rebuke,—a marvellous mixture of human tones. In this instance he will quote one of his own prayers, and through the quotation show the gentleness of the spirit which made him at once the severest and meekest man in history. Moses remembered his own prayers. There are those who would not have prayers published; nor need we wonder at their want of desire or approbation in this matter: they abuse what poor prayers they do offer; they turn them out and never inquire concerning their destiny or their reply; they are spoken and forgotten;—what wonder that they have no prayers to quote! Moses remembered every prayer he ever addressed to the ear of Heaven, and gathering Israel, as it were, closely around him, he says,—I prayed for you; and when God was quite near I availed myself of his condescension to say—“O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember—” Thus he would call God to recollection. The man's prayer was remembered by the memory of the heart; if he did not quote the exact words he quoted the precise substance. The petition went in this direction: for the people, for the covenant, for God's own sake; and if even new words were set to the music of the spiritual expression they in no wise altered the meaning of the suppliant's plea. This is the true consistency— not that a man shall remember his words, but that he shall be

faithful to his meaning. They who live in the consistency of words are pedants, harsh judges, companions who ought to be delighted with their own society and to be relieved of the association of other hearts. Consistency is in purpose, meaning, the fire of the soul; and where there is such integrity towards God the words will often seem to contradict one another: eye-witnesses can be called to make oath that such and such words were spoken on such and such days; it is false in the view of its want of the larger truth; it is exact without being true; it is precise without being philosophical and complete. A wonderful insight into prayer is given in this quotation. Moses pleads for present Israel on account of ancient Israel:—"Remember thy servants." What was their name? "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Here is a prayer with some leverage; here is a breathing that comes up from eternity. The plea is not to be argued within the present five minutes. We belong to the ancient time, and to-day reap the harvest which vanished men did sow. Answers are coming from eternity because of God's love of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. The light that struck the little earth but last night left the star whose gospel it brings some ten thousand years ago,—and it only arrived yesternight! Replies may be on their way from the Old Testament saints for aught we know to the contrary. The prayers we find in the Old Testament are so large it may well have taken all this time to receive adequate replies. The great prayers were offered in the Hebrew tongue—prayers that stormed the heavens, that seemed to hold in their entreaty the necessities of every possible age of time. Do not let us cut ourselves off by an unholy act of deletion from the ages of the furthest past. God's ministry is wondrous; God's providence is spread all over the line of life. The joy we had yesterday was the result of a reply that came from heaven in answer to a mother's tender intercession. Moses went upon the plea that Israel were still the people of God:—they are rebellious, they are stiff-necked, they have broken all the commandments, they made a calf and worshipped it; but they are still thine; they must not be damned on the detail: they are still thine: they are in the covenant, they are within thy gracious purpose. Were God to judge us by the incident and trouble of to-day, the lapse of yesterday and the trespass of to-morrow, his universe could not

cohere for twenty-four hours. He is a God of covenant, decree, sovereignty, meaning; and he is conducting the whole Church—old, new, present, to come—and whatever may be the intermediate steps, and difficulties, and provocations to himself, at last, the Lamb and the bride shall be wedded, and all heaven shall be the festal chamber.

### SELECTED NOTE.

*'Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, a people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak!'* (vv. 1, 2).—We seem to be looking on the remains of some Cyclopean city. These are scanty enough, but still sufficient to be remarkable. It is not merely, however, their size that strikes us, but their curiously mingled order and confusion, as they lie down in the ravine at our right, or rise above each other on the hill-slope at our left. We see no pillars, no ornaments, no inscriptions. Whatever city was here it belonged to a far antiquity, a time of rude, unadorned, but massive architecture, when men, few in number, and unable to apply any great amount of power, took advantage of natural peculiarities, such as the withdrawing cave, or the outstanding boulder, and instead of shaping their materials to their plan, shaped their plan to their materials. Yet the scene is not a bare one; far from it. There is no stream below, no rill trickling down the clefts, no moss vivifying the dead stone; but there is quite a wilderness of rich brushwood overspreading the whole. Not shrubs merely, but trees, have taken possession of every free inch of soil; the ballut, the privet, and the fir rooting themselves in each crevice, and forming an exquisite fringe, or rather network of green, through whose interminable meshes the grey patches of the old rock came up like the tombstones of some primeval cemetery.

It appears that this region was occupied at a very early period by the *Anakim*, who were of the *Rephaim* nations. Their chief city, Hebron, which we are just approaching, was one of the oldest cities of history, having been built seven years before Zoan, in Egypt (Numb. xiii. 22), the chief city of the Delta. The identity of the Anakim and Rephaim is of no consequence to our present statement; still, it is worth while noticing that Moses explicitly mentions this:—"The Emims dwelt therein in times past, a people great, and many, and tall as the *Anakims*; which also were accounted *Rephaim*" (in our translation, *giants*), "as the *Anakims*" (Deut. ii. 10, 11). Thus the Anakim branch of the Rephaim were the original occupiers of Southern Judea. They were the first that took possession of its mountains, building cities, and swaying no feeble sceptre over a large region around. They were evidently not only an ancient, but a warlike and formidable tribe. It was not of hordes of savage wanderers or herdsmen that Moses made mention (Deut. ix. 1, 2). And even though we may admit that the report of the spies was greatly coloured by their fears, still their language indicates the character of the Rephaim tribe (Numb. xiii. 33).

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how can we live so long as Satan is in our heart? It is not life: it is death twice dead. The pain is more than we can bear. All music is choked; all light is put out; all hope is killed. We are in fear of the enemy; yea, though we boast sometimes in his hearing we know that our boasting is vain. He is stronger than we are—older, wiser, more subtle than any beast of the field. He comes into Eden: he allures us by seductions which are fatal. This is our life's complaint; this is our heart's bitter testimony. When we would do good evil is present with us; the good that we would we do not: the evil that we would not that we do. We know this to be so, and who would tell us otherwise is but a messenger of falsehood, having come up from the depths of darkness to befool and curse us. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. We bless thee that we have not to fight the foe in our own strength. God is with us: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear: no breaking up of earth or time shall cause us to quake, for hidden in the almightiness of God we are at rest, and blessed by heavenly love we live in everlasting summer. We are always denying Christ: thrice a day we say we do not know him; whenever the knowledge would involve difficulty, persecution, loss, pain, then we do not know the Man; and when we can use him as a passport, a key wherewith to open difficult gates, then we know him, and are proud of him, and speak his name quite loudly. God be merciful unto us, sinners! We have learned the art of hypocrisy: we are skilled in that evil way. Oh that we might be courageous, burningly in earnest, invincible, resolute in all holy purpose; then surely the world would hear of us, and listen to us, and in some degree obey the word which thou dost inspire us to speak. How many blessings have we for which we ought to be thankful!—the home, standing on secure foundations; the table that is in the midst of it more than a table for bodily sustenance, a table of sacrament and memorial; and the lamps which shine upon it are let down from heaven; and the chair of peace, and the fire of comfort, and the bed of rest, and the word of love, and the bond of Christian fellowship—how can we speak of these things? We cannot speak of them: we must sing of them, call for an instrument of ten strings to help us to express inexpressible love. Thou hast given us a measure of strength and health and force; thou hast kept reason upon her throne, and the will is still under control; we are not altogether lost, even the worst of us. Say so to the bad man; tell him that even he may return, though so disfigured that none can tell who he is, and so utterly lost that it is impossible to miss him—even he may come back again: wide is mercy's door, loud is mercy's call,

tender are the tears of Heaven, yet red with blood. We bless thee for all Christian hope, for all Christian security and spiritual prospect. We are no longer prisoners : we hover upon the horizon as if ready to take flight over broader space, where the light is clearer and the day without an eventide. Inspired to do thy will, may we turn comfort into stimulus, may our consolations be the beginning and the seal of strength ; and wherein our tears have been dried and our hands have ceased to shake, may our watchfulness be the keener and our industry the completer. Take the bad man out of our way when he would hinder us ; let him go out into the night that we may have a word together about better things, and speak that word as it ought to be spoken.

Lord, hear us ! Christ upon the Cross, save us ! Blood of the eternal covenant, take out the last stain of sin ! Spirit of the living God, Holy Ghost, baptise us as with fire ! Amen.

### Deut. x.-xi.

#### EDUCATED TOWARDS SPIRITUALITY.

HOW to introduce the spiritual element into all this instruction of an external and formal kind was the difficulty even of inspiration. We have felt all along that the speeches and instructions delivered to Israel meant, as to their purpose and issue, something that was not expressed. We now come to find an indication of that which is intensely spiritual. The method of its introduction is—so it may be said, with reverence—ininitely skilled. Great prizes of land were offered, wonderful donations of milk and honey and harvest, and as for springs and fountains of water, they were to rise in perennial fulness and beauty. What wonder if considerable eagerness should mark the spirit of the men to whom such promises were delivered ? Who would not be eager for land flowing with milk and honey, green all the year round because of the abounding waters, smiling with fruitfulness because of the blessing of God ? But this could never be enough : the promises cannot end in themselves ; when they have been uttered they quiver with an unexpressed meaning. To bring that meaning under the attention so as to secure the confidence of the people God will set aside a tribe that is to have no land. That was a subtle revelation of ulterior design. Out of that arrangement was to come the inspiration that foretold the passing away of the heavens and the dissolution of the earth and the destruction

of all things material as no longer worth holding. All things have beginnings. The greatest literature traces itself back to its alphabet. Levi is set forth as a spiritual symbol. "Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren." Is he then poor? Read the answer in chapter x. 9:—"The Lord is his inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him." That was the lot of Levi. Is not that an anticipation of the words which make all other instruction mean—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"? It was well to have some men who had no land, no golden harvest, no storehouses rich with grain. They were the schoolmasters of the time—the great spiritual philosophers and teachers, not knowing themselves what they typified, still being there, the mystery of life, a symbol of the sublime doctrine that men shall not live by bread alone. Out of these incidental lines of history gathers a great apocalypse of progress. The one tribe will presently absorb the other tribe, and at the last we shall all be kings and priests unto God; and if globes were offered to us, constellations and whole firmaments of glory, instead of nearness to the divine presence, we should scorn the mean donation. To that height we have to grow; to that issue all things will come that yield themselves to the movement of the divine purpose.

We have read all the arrangements made for the ceremonial worship of Israel: what was the meaning of it? Here we come again upon the same thought of ultimate spirituality. Moses now, in the latter time, begins to reveal secrets. He gave Israel long space in which to kill animals and offer them by fire: he utterly wearied out the people by such impotent ritual, and when they themselves began to turn their very weariness into a kind of religious hope that surely something brighter would presently be revealed, Moses spake these words:—"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee?" That is the question. What does it all mean? Thou hast slain thousands of bullocks and rams and sheep and goats, "what doth the Lord thy God require of thee"—what has he been meaning all this time,—"but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the



Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (x. 12-13). That was the divine intention from the very beginning. God does not disclose his purpose all at once, but out of consideration for our capacities and our opportunities and our necessities he leads us one step at a time, as the wise teacher leads the young scholar. What wise teacher thrusts a whole library upon the dawning mind of childhood? A picture, a toy, a tempting prize, a handful to be going on with, and all the rest covered by a genial smile: so the young scholar passes from page to page until the genius of the revelation seizes him, and life becomes a sacred Pentecost. Such words spoken to Israel at first would have been lost. There is a time for revelation; as certainly as for man, so certainly for God, there is a time to speak, there is a time to be silent. It is a sublime addition to our knowledge to realise the divine purpose, that all letters, words, buildings, books, mean life, union with God, absorption into God. Preachers and books and pulpits and altars and buildings are of use at the time, for the time most useful, in many cases indispensable; but the issue of it all is perfect union with the Father of our spirits, knowing him from within, a perfect correspondence of our nature with his nature and his purpose; not a word spoken, a look exchanged, nor an attitude but becomes a sacrifice. This thought supplies a standard by which to measure progress. Where are we? To what have we attained? What is our stature to-day? Are we still among the beggarly elements? Do we still cry out for a kind of teaching that is infantile and that ought to be from our age altogether profitless? Or do we sigh to see the finer lines and hear the lower tones and enter into the mystery of silent worship—so highly strung in all holy sensibilities that even a word jars upon us and is out of place under circumstances so charged with the divine presence?

Still keeping by this same line of thought, notice how the promises were adapted to the mental condition of Israel. What promises could Israel understand? Only promises of the most substantial kind. Moses addresses himself to this necessity with infinite skill:—"Thy fathers went down into Egypt with

threescore and ten persons; and now the Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude" (x. 22). Israel cared nothing for thoughts: Israel cared for children: Israel knew not the poetry and the divinity of things: Israel understood acres, land upon land far-stretching, and harvests larger than any garner ever built. This being the mental condition of Israel, give Israel troops of children, thousands upon thousands outnumbering the stars,—a tumultuous throng, too vast for the space of the wilderness; as for harvests, let them grow upon the rocks, let the very stones burst into golden grain, for Israel is a great child and can understand only things that can be handled: let him have such things, more and more; God means them to be altar-steps leading upward, onward, into the place where there is no need of the sun or of the moon, no death, no night; Israel has a long journey to go, and he must be well housed and harvested on the road, or he will give way and fail before the time set for the fulness of the divine revelation. The same thought is expressed in many ways. It is given in chapter xi. 11, 12:—"But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." What a child was Israel; what an infant of days; keep speaking to him much about prosperity and wealth and harvests and the rain of heaven, and you can lead Israel as you please, like a hungry beast following an offered bait which is withdrawn that he may be led and be caused to submit to a higher will. This also supplies a standard of progress. Do we care for the sanctuary because of its God or because of its conventional respectability? To what end besiege we the altar of Heaven, to pray or to profit?

Still preserving the marvellous consistency of the whole economy, we cannot fail to notice how beautifully the sacrifices were adapted to the religious condition of the people. This explains the sacrifices indeed. What was the religious condition of the people? Hardly religious at all. It was an infantile condition; it was a condition in which appeal could only lie with effect along the line of vision. So God will institute a

worship accordingly: he will say to Israel, Bring beasts in great numbers, and kill them upon the altar; take censers, put fire thereon; spare nothing of your herds and flocks and corn and wine; have a continual burnt offering, and add to the continual burnt offering other offerings great in number and in value. Israel must be kept busy; leisure will be destruction. There must be seven Sabbaths in the week, and seven of those seven must be specialised by fast or festival or sacred observance. Give Israel no time to rest. When he has brought one bullock, send him for another; when he has killed a ram, call for a thousand more; this will be instructive to him. We must weary him to a higher aspiration; to begin this aspiration would be to beat the air, or to speak an unknown language, or to propound a series of spiritual impossibilities. Men must be trained according to their capacity and their quality. The whole ceremonial system of Moses constitutes in itself—in its wisdom so rich, its marvellous adaptation to the character and temper of the times,—an unanswerable argument for the inspiration of the Bible. It was the economy for the times. It could not be replaced, even imaginatively, to advantage, by the keenest wit of the brightest reader. It might be a profitable engagement now and then to try to amend the masonry of the Bible. Take out whole blocks of institutions, observances, and ceremonies, and put into the vacancies something better; let it be confessedly better in quality, but taken out of a further time and brought back to the early age. At once there is a sense of incoherence, unfitness, dissonance; the right thing is not in the right place; history is outraged; the genius of progress is misinterpreted. So with the Christian Scriptures. Take out, for example, the sermon upon the mount, and put into its place instructions regarding the building of the tabernacle. Men could not tolerate the alteration. The soul cannot thus go back. We have seen how wonderful a thing it was to write a New Testament: when the resources of language had been exhausted, when the sublimest poetry had been uttered, when the grandest altar had been built, it required a Son of God at once to begin the New Testament: begun by a feebler hand, the ages would have cast out the violence and the insult. The distributions of matter in the Bible are made by a divine hand;

the very placing of the materials is itself an argument—not, indeed, to the man who comes upon the Bible with effrontery and self-idolatry, beginning where he pleases, and moving up and down the sacred record with erratic will and taste, but to the man who makes the law his study, night and day, seeing how it looks in star-light, then how it bears the blaze of noonday, how it takes upon itself the fevers of the summer, and how amid the chills of winter it still thrills with forecasts of mercy. Only they ought to pronounce upon the Bible who have read it, and only they have read the Bible who have read it all, until it has swallowed up all manner of books and has become transformed into the very life of the soul.

So far the line has been consistent from its beginning, what wonder, then, if it culminate in one splendid word? That word is introduced here and there. For example, in chapter x. 12, the word occurs; in chapter xi. 1, it is repeated. What is that culminating word? How long it has been kept back! Now that it is set down we see it and acknowledge it; it comes at the right time, and is put in the right place:—"To love him." Then again in chapter xi. 1,—"*Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*" Moses is almost a Christian, even in the historical sense of the term, and it is well that his name should be linked for ever with the name of the Lamb. Jesus uses no higher word than "love." Paul thought he would pronounce it aright by repeating it often,—and repetition is sometimes the only proper pronunciation: the word must be spoken so frequently as to fall into a refrain and attach itself to all the noblest speech of life. "*Master, which is the great commandment?*" And Jesus answered,—"*Thou shalt love.*" Here we have Moses and the Lamb. It ought to be easy to love God: we are akin to him; damn ourselves as we may, we are still his workmanship, his lost ones. We wrong our own souls in turning away from God: we commit suicide in renouncing worship; we are not surrendering something outside of us, we are putting the knife of destruction into our own soul. We have once more a standard of progress. We are in relation to this word love! Love means passion, fire, sacrifice, self-oblivion, daily, eternal worship. Who then can be saved? The word love does not destroy other

elements which enter into the mystery of true worship. Moses says,—“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways . . . and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord?” The word love is found in this company. Recite the names that you may the more clearly understand the society of love. “Fear,” “walk,” “serve,” “keep,”—it is in that society that love shines like the queenliest of the stars. Love is not a mere sentiment, a quality that evaporates in sighing or that fades into invisibleness by mystic contemplation; love calls fear, walking, serving, keeping, to its side, and they all together, in happy harmonic co-operation, constitute the divine life and the divine sonship of the soul. We, too, have mystery; we have miracles; we have ceremonies; we have tabernacles and temples;—what is the meaning of them all? They cannot end in themselves; read the riddle; tell us in some short word which may be kept in a child’s memory—the meaning of all the cumbrous machinery—the gorgeous ritual of the olden time, and even the simpler worship of the passing day. What is the meaning of prayer, and faith, and gift, and service, and outward profession? Would we learn the word? We find it in the Old Testament and in the New: Moses speaks it, Christ speaks it, Paul speaks it, John speaks it,—they are all trying to say it—“Love.” Love keeps nothing back; love is cruel as fire in the testing of qualities; love is genial as Heaven in the blessing of goodness. Though we have all knowledge, all prophecy, and are marvels in gifts of eloquence, and though we give our goods to feed the poor and our body to be burned, and outrun ancient Israel in costly and continuous ceremony, if we have not love—pure, simple, childlike, beautiful love—our music is noise, and our sacrifice is vanity.

## PRAYER.

THOU wilt not show us thy glory now. Thou hast promised to show us thy goodness, and to make it pass before us: this thou art doing day by day; all things show the mercy of God. As for ourselves, goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life. We know this: our life speaks to this truth strongly and lovingly; therefore, we fear no evil: we smile upon the threatened darkness: the valley of the shadow of death is part of the way home. We have no real fear, no intense terror of heart; we are subject to passing dreads and alarms and foolish excitements, but all these do not touch the soul seated in the solemnity of an eternal covenant. Thou wilt accomplish all things; thou wilt not fail to bring on the topstone; having spent the ages in building the temple, the pinnacle shall not be wanting. Thou didst see the end from the beginning, and almightiness cannot fail. We stand in this security as within the munition of rocks; the wind cannot overturn our retreat; the tempest wastes its fury upon that stone; we are shut in by the hand of God. Help us to see the great beyond,—not to be too curious about it, but to use it as an allurements, a silent persuasion, a mighty compulsion towards stronger work, nobler purpose, larger prayer; thus the heavens shall help the earth; the sun shall be our light all day, and above it shall there be a brightness which the soul can understand. We bless thee for a sense of sin forgiven. Continue thy daily pardon. We feel as if we must be pardoned every moment, for since we have been pardoned and our eyes have been enlightened, we see more clearly, and we discern more critically: the things which once wore no face of offence now burn before us as if filled with all horribleness and as if carrying all shame. We would be pure as God is pure, perfect with the perfectness of God; but this end who can attain except through long ages, by the way of the Cross, by the ministry of blood, by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost? But our hope is in God: we shall yet be perfected; we shall stand before him without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, without a tear of shame in the eyes, without a flutter of misgiving or fear in the uplifted hands. The Lord have us in his holy keeping; the Lord build for us a pavilion in which our souls may daily trust; and when the end comes may we find it but a beginning; when the shadow falls may it be the background of many an unsuspected star; and when we stand before thee may we have on the robe of Christ—be clothed with him, not having on our own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness of Christ, the purity of the Cross.

If this prayer may be answered now we shall not know but that we are already in heaven. Amen.

**Deut. xi. 26-32.**

26. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse ;

27. A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day :

28. And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

29. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.

30. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh ?

31. For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein.

32. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day.

**PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVES.**

**T**HIS is the closing portion of a very long discourse delivered by Moses. The discourse begins in the twenty-second verse of the fifth chapter and extends to the end of the eleventh chapter. Within these points Moses rehearses the Decalogue and its leading principles ; beyond the range of principles he has hardly yet gone. The next chapter opens with details, and insists upon special and clear applications of the morals which Moses had heretofore inculcated. The preacher winds up this portion of his discourse with a solemn appeal ; he brings the great question to a point. He has not conducted himself merely as a lecturer upon moral philosophy, stating various theories with great learning and skill, and leaving his listeners to come to their own conclusions. There are no such lectures in an inspired book ; they are in their right place in strictly human literature—an ample field within which men may indulge their genius and exhibit the results of their investigations. Moses comes with a law. Rightly or wrongly, that is the position which he assumes. He is not an intellectual reasoner merely—an inventor of systems, a critic of extinct ages ; he says he has brought two tables written with the finger of God, measurable and intelligible as to letters and applications, but underneath them, and above them, and round about them is the mystery of Eternity. How does this

noble preacher conclude his expositions and rehearsals? He does not divide the people into two classes: he sets before them alternative courses:—proceed upon the line of obedience, and you come to blessing; proceed along the line of disobedience, and a curse is the inevitable necessity,—not a threatening, not an exhibition of fretful vengeance, but a spiritual necessity: a curse follows evil-doing, not as an arbitrary punishment, but as the effect, which can never be changed, of a certain, positive, operating cause. This, therefore, takes out the personal element. We are not divided as on the right hand and on the left. Instead of classifying the hearers, Moses classifies the alternatives; and thus grace follows law,—a species of mercy asserts itself in the midst of the severest and most critical of all moral legislation. The dart is not aimed at any particular man, nor is the favour dispensed in any spirit of selection and partiality; but two great courses are indicated, two distinct issues are classified, and it is for us, reasoning upon history and observation, to say whether the prophet of the Lord touched the vital line—whether he trifled with the occasion, or whether he spake that which is to-day confirmed by experience and observation or human development and progress. What if everything round about us be confirming the testimony of Moses? What if the Decalogue be written every day of the week? What if in the operation of moral influence it can be distinctly proved that the Bible is one, that the word of the Lord abideth for ever, and that, whatever changes may have occurred, obedience still leads to blessing, disobedience still leads to cursing, and it is not within the wit or the strength of man to change that outgoing of law and consequence?

A very precious thing it is that we have only to obey. At first it looks as if we were humbled by this course of service, but further inquest into the spiritual meaning of the matter shows us that in the definition of right and wrong, law and righteousness, God has been most tenderly-pitiful towards us, and law is but the practical and more visible and measurable aspect of love. Again and again we have seen that we are not moral inventors. God has not propounded a writing to us, to find out which is right and which is wrong; nor has he left to us the wild liberty, which would have been so full of disappointment and pain, of discover-



ing for ourselves which way we would take, not knowing the definite issue of either course. There is nothing arbitrary in the revelation of eternal law: by its very nature it is a quantity which lies beyond our vision, and which does not submit itself to the rearrangements of our invention. Things relating to mere convenience, momentary rights, boundaries which are being continually enlarged and contracted as civilisation may require,—with regard to these we are legislators, makers of law, having in our right the gift of reward and the infliction of penalty; but even these things are wrong if they are not built upon rocks we never laid, if they do not express the eternal harmoniousness, the infinite righteousness of God. In so far as they approach the divine thought, they will abide, they will daily vindicate their own justice; and in so far as they do not express the decree of Heaven, all time is against them; not a star in the wide heavens is on their side; they must go down by a pressure as irresistible as it is immeasurable and invisible. Happy is the man who has discovered that he is not meant to be a moral inventor—a maker of morals,—that he has to accept a revealed morality and an offered righteousness: that God has been so kind to him as to arrange the whole way of life, so that the wayfaring man need not lose the path. This down-letting of a moral revelation is an aspect of the grace of God. When we come into fuller grace, clearer apprehension of the divine mind, we call the law an assistant guiding us to school—not so much a schoolmaster, as the English has it, as one who takes us by the hand and guides us to the schoolmaster; but, even then we begin to see that the law, if written on stone, was written by a hand of love; if set forth in letters that seem to burn in the intensity of their purity, yet did those very letters light us into inner meanings, into the very hidden sanctuary of God. When will men learn this? When will they at once and for ever confess it, and so save themselves from endless and profitless trouble? The Christian position is that the whole scheme of righteousness is revealed: whatever is right, true, pure, good, lovely, honest, and of heavenly savour has been given by God, so that the disappointing exercise of invention is superseded or is rendered of non-effect. One who knows the universe, because he made it, and all eternity, because he inhabits it,

has condescended to tell us what is good, what is true, what is pure, what is right. If we were inspired by the right spirit, we would instantly stand up in thankfulness and bless the Giver's name, and ask but one other favour—that we might have eyes to see the innermost meaning of the law, and hearts trained, disciplined, and sanctified to accept and obey it, and express it in noble behaviour.

Is it true, within limits that we know, that obedience leads to blessing and disobedience to cursing? Sometimes we have to interrupt the divine reasoning that we may assist ourselves in its comprehension by the study of analogy upon lower ground. Is it true that there is a seed-time, which, if neglected, will be followed by desolation and death? Disprove that, and you will largely enable yourselves to disprove higher and more spiritual propositions. Is there a Bible of agriculture—a distinct revelation of the mysterious way of astronomic and agricultural and chemical forces? Is there a Moses of science—a man who comes to the ages with two tables of stone, telling us what nature has told him after waiting upon her day and night for many a year? The man abides by facts: he says, I have studied nature, I have been a patient student in her temple, and I have seen that this and that are essential to a harmonic association with her principles and requirements. He must leave the law; if he is wrong, he will soon be disproved; if he is right, then the critics cannot put him down. The appeal must always be to experience, to fact, to known circumstances, and provable assertions. A pity, indeed,—some might say,—that men cannot form their own opinions as to whether they will avail themselves of the day assigned to seed-sowing. Why should not men make a calendar of their own about these things? The calendars are copies: the writing of man is only what man has heard in the solemnity and silence of some Sinai. The appeal, after he has spoken, lies to earth, time, season, and by the issue—not by his pretence or claim—let him stand or fall. But may there not be many varieties of methods? Certainly; but the earth abideth for ever. We must study the effect of the central and eternal quantity within which we have no liberty, and then the changeable and adaptable circumstances and forces within which we may for the moment imagine

ourselves to be masters and governors. A marvellous, mysterious combination is our life of necessity and freedom,—an eternal quantity and a continually-changing atmosphere ; within that system we live. Is it true that there are laws of health—ten commandments, more or less, about the body ? Then there is a Bible of physiology ; there is a Moses who speaks with the authority of nature about the human system and its relations to all its environment. Is it true that want of exercise, accompanied by plentifulness of food, leads to the degeneration of muscle ? Why were we not left to settle that ourselves ? Is there a law upon this ? Is it true that children born in the spring-time and in the winter are marked by greater vitality than children born at any other period of the year ? Why were we not left to say in the family circle itself when children shall be healthy, when vitality shall rise and when it shall fall ? Is there a law of sleep and of labour ? If so, then, the Bible is a larger book than we supposed. If all these little outside Bibles are true and can challenge facts to prove their truth, it is not difficult to rise to the higher level, and to say, There may be a Bible meant for the soul ; there may be a revelation addressed to the reason, and to the higher reason called faith, and to the higher self called the spirit. This higher revelation has not the immediate advantage of the lower Bibles, because they deal with earth, body, space, time, measurable quantities : but the higher Bible deals with soul, spirit, thought, will, eternity ; by the very grandeur of its claim it dispossesses itself of that immediateness of proof which lies within the handling of the lower revelations and testimonies. But this must not be considered a disadvantage : this belongs to the glory and the necessity of the case. He who operates within a radius of a few inches can be, apparently, quicker in his movements, more precise and determined in his decisions, than the man who claims the globe as the theatre of his actions. So the Bible, having the disadvantage of dealing with spiritual quantities, must be judged, so far as we can approach it, by the spirit of the lower laws, or the laws applying to the lower economy. Is there any curse upon indolence ? Does indolence rise for a moment from its pillow to smile satirically at industry, saying, I shall be to-night as rich as you are :

mean to slumber and sleep and doze in many a happy dream, and when you come back at eventide from the field where you have been wearying yourself my hands will be as full as yours ; go your unprofitable and vexatious way ? When did indolence say so ? Or, saying so, when did indolence prove the truthfulness and reality of its doctrine ? When was not indolence stabbed by its own satire, and made to tremble under the infliction of its own scorn ? Then there is a Bible relating to industry, service, stewardship, faithfulness,—who does not uphold that Bible ? Is there an employer of labour in the world who would not say, Such a Bible proves its own inspiration ? And is there an honest labourer in the world who would hesitate to accept that Bible, being compelled to its acceptance by the very constraint of necessity ? So then, we cannot do away with this law of blessing and cursing : we cannot set up a rival system of nature ; we are bound to accept the very earth ; we are driven—account for it as we may—to accept the light of the sun ; we are so pressed and humbled that we must wait for the former and the latter rain. Yet what liberty man has ! What pranks he plays in chemistry ! How he amuses himself in the invention of lights ! How, having once invented a candle, he cannot rest until he has invented a larger light, and when he has invented his largest light he takes care to put it out before the sun rises, or the sun will put it out for him ! God will not allow two creators : he himself reigns. He is still creating, and man is left but to invent, and arrange, and adapt, and borrow : find him where you will you find man a debtor ; and the universe asks its brightest genius, “How much owest thou unto my Lord ?”

The argument is this : seeing that in the field, in the body, in the social economy, there is a law of blessing and a law of cursing, who shall say that this same reasoning does not culminate in a great revelation of heaven, hell ; “the right-hand,” “the left-hand ;” eternal life, everlasting penalty ? If the analogies had been dead against that construction, we might by so much have stood in doubt and excused ourselves from completeness of service ; but every analogy becomes a preacher : all nature takes up her parable and speaks the revelations of

her God: all life beats with a pulse below a pulse, the physical throb being but an indication of a growing immortality. We stand in a solemn sanctuary. We cannot get rid of law. The spiritual is a present blessing or a present curse. We cannot be happy with a bad conscience: it hardens the pillow when we need sleep most, it upsets all our arrangements, or makes our hand so tremble that we cannot clutch our own property; and we cannot be unhappy with a good conscience: without bread we are still in fulness, without employment we are still inspired by hope, without much earthly charity or largeness of construction of our motive and force we still retire within the sanctuary of an approved judgment and conscience. Blessing is not a question of posthumous realisation, nor is cursing. Heaven is here, and hell in germ, in outline, in hint, in quick, burning suggestion. Even now sometimes men know not whether they are in the body or out of the body by reason of religious entrancement and ecstasy; and there are men who, if they dare put their feeling into words, would say, "The pains of hell gat hold upon me." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;" "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished;" "Be sure your sin will find you out." Who can fight God and win the battle?

The last words of Moses in this paragraph show us that new situations do not necessitate new morals. This is proved by verses 31, 32: "For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day." Morals do not change. Methods change, systems vary, theology readjusts its statements and retranslates itself into the growing language of a growing civilisation,—all that is true; but the abiding quantity is the law, the revelation of God in Christ, the living Son of the eternal God—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We have no right that changes its claims according to the side of the river which it is upon: right is right on this side Jordan and on that side Jordan: there is no cis-Jordan righteousness and trans-Jordan morality. Right is right the universe through, because God

is one; evil is evil everywhere, because divine holiness is unchangeable. Look not to time, place, change of circumstance or situation, for the acceptance of a vicious morality: the universe is against it; eternity condemns it. Right is possible here, and only in one way: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. Availing ourselves of that one way we lose nothing; taking the very lowest view of the whole mystery, we gain much because of an expansion of our own view of human nature and human possibility, and, at the last, when the great leap must be taken, if we leap into nothingness, we have had a wonderful joy all the way we have taken—wonderful communion, marvellous blessing in good-doing, intellectual and spiritual enlargement, in growing power of prayer; but, if the leap be into life, judgment, an eternal state of consciousness and apprehension, who wins: the fool who has no God, or the Christian who has been trusting in the living God and his Saviour Jesus Christ? To that inquiry who will reply in words? To attempt an answer in syllables would be to lower the occasion. That is an inquiry which brings its own ineffable reply.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy Son Jesus Christ is our Saviour. He is mighty to save. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. We were lost: we were as sheep going astray, turning every one to his own way; but we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. We have been brought by a way we knew not and by paths we could not understand. This is the miracle of grace; this is the surprise of Heaven. Once we were blind: now we see; once we had no future: now life and immortality are brought to light. We long for the future; we live in heaven; we are the sons of God. We bless thee for a word of love and hope and joy: it fills the heart; it makes the spirit glad; it is the inspiration of heavenly grace. Meet with us when we gather together around thy Book, and help us to understand its best meaning, to feel its holy influence, and to respond to its gracious appeals. Thou knowest who are carrying heavy burdens, whose eyes are full of tears, whose hands are feeble and can no longer do life's pressing work; thou knowest also the prodigal children, thankless offspring, difficult to manage in business, in the home, and on the highway; our whole life is spread out before thee in clearest vision, and there is an answer in heaven to all the necessity of earth. Lord, answer thy servants; be gracious unto them who are clothed with the white linen of the saints. Thou wilt not see them put to shame; thou wilt try them with many a chastening sorrow, but in the deliverance of thy people thou wilt magnify thy grace. Wash us in the sacrificial blood; cleanse us from the condemnation of sin; make us pure with thine own purity; and in thine own due time gather us to the hills of heaven. Amen.

## Deut. xii.

### LIFE IN A NEW LAND.

**T**HIS chapter opens a new section of the Mosaic legislation. Up to this time we have had copious and urgent discourses by Moses upon the law, its principles, and its purposes—more or less abstract and philosophical discourses; now we come into practical instruction and exhortation. The people are about to move into new circumstances and to sustain new relations, and Moses condescends to particularise, and seeks by almost tedious detail to impress upon the mind of Israel what is right,

what is good, and what is expected of the people of God. The children of Israel could understand no other language. They were amongst the youngest nations of time. In studying their history we study beginnings, first lessons, and the proper methods of preaching to infantile minds—namely, methods of command, authority, illustration, and sparkling narrative. The people of Israel were called upon to illustrate in their own conduct the laws which God had pronounced from Sinai. The noticeable thing is that, although the circumstances were new and the land a strange land, no change takes place in the moral substance of the law. The law is one, the same in heaven as upon earth, the same in the dawn of earthly time as in the eventide of the terrestrial dispensation. Till heaven and earth pass not one jot or tittle of the law can be destroyed. It is in the very substance of the divine nature : it is the mystery of the personality whose name is God ; it is the secret of eternal righteousness. But there are adaptations, accommodations, methods of addressing the life to unexpected or unusual or temporary conditions ; in all these matters Moses is specially detailed, critical, and exact in his statements, sometimes dwelling upon what to us may appear trifles. But there are no trifles in moral education : every monition has a purpose, every hint is the beginning of a revelation. Let us follow Israel into new lands and circumstances, and mark the operation of law.

The first thing Israel had to do appears to be a work of violence. All idols were to be destroyed :—"Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree : and ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire ; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place" (vv. 2-3). Israel could understand no other language. This is not the language of to-day ; but the thing inculcated upon Israel is the lesson for the present time : words change, but duties remain. Violence was the only method that could commend itself to infantile Israel. The hand was the reasoner ; the breaking hammer was the instrument



of logic in days so remote and so unfavoured. Forgetting this, how many people misunderstand instructions given to the ancient Church; they speak of the violence of those instructions, the bloodthirstiness even of him who gave the instructions to Israel. Hostile critics select such expressions and hold them up as if in mid-air, that the sun-light may get well round about them; and attention is called to the barbarity, the brutality, the revolting violence of so-called divine commandments. It is false reasoning on the part of the hostile critic. We must think ourselves back to the exact period of time and the particular circumstances at which and under which the instructions were delivered. But all the words of violence have dropped away. "Destroy," "overthrow," "burn," "hew down," are words which are not found in the instructions given to Christian evangelists. Has the law then passed away? Not a jot or tittle of it. Is there still to be a work of this kind accomplished in heathen nations? That is the very work that must first be done. This is the work that is aimed at by the humblest and meekest teacher who shoulders the Gospel yoke and proceeds to Christianise the nations. Now we destroy by reasoning, and that is a far more terrible destruction than the supposed annihilation that can be wrought by manual violence. You cannot conquer an enemy by the arm, the rod, or the weapon of war; you subdue him, overpower him, or impose some momentary restraint upon him; fear of you takes possession of his heart, and he sues for peace because he is afraid. That is not conquest; there is nothing eternal in such an issue. How, then, to destroy an enemy? By converting him—by changing his motive, by penetrating into his most secret life, and accomplishing the mystery of regeneration in his affections. That mystery accomplished, the conquest is complete and everlasting; the work of destruction has been accomplished; burning and hewing down, and all actions indicative of mere violence have disappeared. Enemies are killed, false altars are burned, and graven images are hewn down, not manually but morally, not by some overpowering force of assault, but by the very men themselves who, having seen the hollowness of their gods, have deposed them from their sovereignty. So with all the other instructions with which the Bible is charged. Attention

must not be fixed upon the letter, often apparently so hot, angry, and even vindictive; we must get to the inner man, and there we shall find that God has all the while intended but one thing, namely, to establish the throne of righteousness, and to purge the firmament of every cloud that could obscure the brightness and beauty of his presence. It is but a perfunctory and unprofitable criticism that fastens upon outward circumstances, framings and settings of divine intentions; the true criticism is to penetrate to those intentions themselves, and history, observation, and experience concur in the solemn and grateful testimony that in every instance the intention of God has been a purpose of salvation.

But it was not enough to destroy. The negative word was to be succeeded by a positive service:—"But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: and thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: and there ye shall eat before the Lord your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee" (vv. 5-7). It would delight many reformers to confine themselves to a merely negative work, because they delight in criticism; their ability lies along that narrow line; they can see faults, they can detect discrepancies and inconsistencies, and with great fluency they can expose sophism of the subtlest kind, and with indignation they can expose outrages of a moral sort; but the great work of Christianising the lands is first negative, and then positive. Israel must be faithful to his own God if he would completely destroy the graven images of the heathen nations; Israel must go to the right sanctuary if he would pull down the noblest refuge of heathenism; Christians must keep up their personal Christianity if they are to become great ministers, missionaries, lecturers, and teachers. Men belonging to such high classes must never forget their own devotions, their own deep reading; they must maintain long periods of silence. If they are always

talking, what wonder if their talk should become suddenly and completely commonplace and tasteless, without savour, or accent, or unction? They must contrast their great thunder-bursts of appeal by prolonged silence in solitary places. They will preach as they have prayed: their public invectives, encouragements, criticisms, and expositions will take tone from their private and secret communings with Heaven. The reason that we sink into commonplace and outgrow our power is that we have been talking too much. Whole days of silence should punctuate the history of the week—long hours of solitude, until there comes upon the soul a desire to see a fellow-creature, a public assembly,—a kind of hunger in the soul for social contact, presence, and influence. The Bible is full of teaching regarding the uses of solitude. Israel must keep up his own religion; go to the place chosen by the Lord, bring his burnt offerings, and his sacrifices, his tithes, and heave offerings, and vows, and freewill offerings, and the firstlings of his herds and of his flocks, and eat before the Lord his God; and then go forth Heaven-nourished, Heaven-inspired, to burn false altars and grind into powder the graven images of heathen ignorance. Have faith in men who live in God.

Amidst all this assault, denunciation, and sacred fury there was to run a line of perfect self-control:—"Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (v. 8). Individuality has limits. Where are there any individualities? We know nothing about them in the great Christian society; individuality has undergone distinct modification: we belong to one another; we are parts of a complicated but sentient and indestructible body; we are branches in a living vine; the individual will is destroyed by the beneficent presence of a social responsibility. There was to be personal watchfulness: hence we read in the thirteenth verse,—*"Take heed to thyself;"* and in the nineteenth verse again,—*"Take heed to thyself;"* and in the thirtieth verse,—*"Take heed to thyself."* That is where individuality comes in, every man watching himself. The Apostle Paul could use no higher form of words in charging the young soldiers of the cross: said he to one and another,—*Take heed unto thyself; and again,*

speaking to the Church, he said, Let every man examine himself. Where are there instructions binding upon us in the direction of social criticism—the examination of other people, and keeping guard over the consistency of our brethren? We are admonished to look after them along another line—to see that they want nothing that is for their good, to care for them, to put our strength at the disposal of their weakness; but there is no responsibility thrown upon us in the matter of watching other people in any critical or suspecting sense. Each man must look to himself: his head may be right whilst his heart is a thousand miles away from the path prescribed by God; his head and his heart may be comparatively consistent, and yet appetite, passion, desire, may be set on fire of hell. Every man must watch himself at his weakest point, and must suspect himself where other people least suspect him. No attempt, therefore, is made to do away with individual responsibility; that will grow in proportion as there is personal watchfulness, personal severity with our own judgment, heart, and conduct. Let a man try himself as by fire. He who beats himself, to use the apostolic expression, “in the eyes,” that he may the less see the faults of other people, is in least danger of becoming a castaway. If all public criticism and all social contempt could be turned in towards individual uses, there would be an outgoing from the self-suspected and self-disciplined heart of a stream of beneficence and charity and Christian hope towards all the prodigals of the world.

Now there will be an act of marvellous condescension: there will be a tone of mercy amid all this outflow of legislation; the burden will not be made heavier than Israel can bear. Read verse 21:—“If the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then—” And here comes the divine condescension, the concession of Heaven to the limitations of earth. Calvary is in the Old Testament. The condescending, saving Cross is in the books of the law. Love was never absent from the inspired record. If the place be too far; if there be local difficulty; if there be a weight to carry too heavy for thy poor strength, God will meet thee: he will make thy weakness the basis of a new negotiation; instead of standing away upon the hills of eternity and

frightening little earth by all the thunder of infinity, he will come down and see what can be done,—measuring, adjusting, and arranging, so as to suit human weakness. When there was no eye to pity; when there was no arm to save, his own eye pitied and his own arm brought salvation. Grace and truth go together; pity follows law; the iron statute is bedewed with tears: God is love. Nor is God concerned only about the living: he is concerned about those who have yet to appear in life. So we read in the twenty-eighth verse,—“Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the Lord thy God.” God is concerned for posterity. We may mock the suggestion, and put foolish questions concerning the generations yet to come, but the Book of God is as careful about the child unborn as about the old pilgrim born into the higher spaces. God does not insulate himself by the little present; he contemplates the end from the beginning. All souls are his. He also puts it into our care to regard the welfare of our successors. There is a sense in which we all have a posterity—some in a narrower, some in a larger sense; but we all have a succession: we are influencing to-morrow by our spirit and action to-day. How mad are they and how guilty of the cruellest murder who go on indulging every desire, sating every appetite, satisfying every wish, forgetting that they are involving the yet unborn in pain, weakness, incapacity, and dooming them to life-long suffering and distress. Here is the greatness of the Bible, the noble condescension of God, the infinite solicitude of the eternal Father. His speech runs to this effect: take care: not only are you involved, but your child and child's child, for generation upon generation: your drunkenness will re-appear in the disease of ages yet to come; your bad conduct will repeat itself in a long succession of evil-minded men; your behaviour appears at present to be agreeable, to have some aspects that might be called delightful, but things are not what they seem: actions do not end in themselves: every bad thought you think takes out some spark of vitality from your brain—robs you, depletes you, leaves you nearer lunacy; be careful: have some regard for those who have to succeed you;

learn from those who went before you how evil a thing it is to have sown bad seed, and by what you have learned from them conduct yourself aright; if you are true, wise, pure, generous, well-conducted altogether, generations will arise to bless you; if you take care of the poor, if any of your succession should be doomed to poverty, with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you and them again; blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy; with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. Life is one: touch it where we may, we send a thrill, a vibration, along all the vital lines. The law is two-fold: sow evil, and reap evil; sow good, and reap good. This is no partial law, dealing with penalty and shame only: it is an impartial righteousness, dealing with reward and glory, and promising delight vast and tender as the heaven of God.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

The consequences of parental wrong-doing fall on the offspring, as we plainly see in the case of the drunkard; the laws of heredity have been carefully studied during late years with many remarkable results.

The belief in the transmission of penalty to offspring was in ancient times very widely extended, as may be illustrated by the following extract from the laws of Menu, the most ancient lawgiver of the Hindoos:—

“Even here below an unjust man attains no felicity:

Nor he whose wealth proceeds from giving false evidence:

Nor he who constantly delights in mischief.

“Though oppressed by penury, in consequence of his righteous dealings,

Let him (the good man) never give his mind to unrighteousness;

For he may observe the speedy overthrow of iniquitous and sinful men.

“Iniquity committed in this world produces not fruit immediately;

But like the earth, in due season, and advancing little by little,

It eradicates the man who committed it.

“Yes, iniquity once committed fails not of producing fruit to him who wrought it;

If not in his own person, yet in his sons,

Or if not his sons, yet in his grandsons.

“He grows rich for awhile through unrighteousness;

Then he beholds good things; then it is that he vanquishes his fear;

But he perisheth at length from his root upwards.”

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our eyes are fixed upon the Cross of Christ. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We crucified him; we mocked him; we cast all taunting condemnation into his teeth. We do not discharge ourselves of the tremendous responsibility: we hang down our heads in mourning and shame and self-reproach which burns to agony, knowing that we murdered the Son of God. We crucify the Son of God afresh, and every day we put him to an open shame. The white robe of his holiness is not safe in our keeping; the purity of heaven we stain even by our highest thoughts. Do thou have mercy upon us day by day, ever being more merciful than before, because our sin is aggravated by time, and we sin to-day more deeply than we could sin yesterday. God be merciful unto us sinners! Only thy mercy can reach our estate: the best of us is a lost, dead man. But we have read thy word, and we have heard it uttered by lips of sympathy, and it is a word which comes into our life like an angel from heaven,—the very angel of the divine presence, the angel of the covenant, the all-present and all-directing spirit that has ruled the destinies of the race. We bless thee for words we can understand—simple words, notes of music, speeches of love. When our pain burns most acutely, then thy Gospel is most to us; in our fatness and prosperity and abounding strength we forget God, and look upon ourselves with approbation and delight; but when we see one glimpse of our real self—the evil one within us, charged with the poison of malice, disfigured by the passions of hell, helpless because of self-destruction—then rises the Cross upon our vision, the very beauty and glory of God. We bless thee for thy day, sanctifying all the week; for thy Book, giving life to all books that are good, and drawing them back to itself to have all their beauty renewed; for all friendships that lift us higher in the scale of thought and being; for all hopes that drive the darkness away and plant flowers upon the tomb; for all the lights which outshine the stars and give us hope of a day yet to come;—these are thy mercies; these are thy benefits; these are thy appeals to our souls; and our souls would answer them in rising gladness, because they are gifts ineffable and everlasting. Give us the quietness of the sanctuary in our own soul; breathe the peace of heaven upon us, every-one; give release from anxiety, from tormenting memory, from foreboding fear; and in one moment of vision of better things and heavenly gladness we shall bury a lifetime of sorrow, and recover ourselves, and claim the future with all the conscious ease of strength divinely sustained. Let thy mercy be our inner day; let thy love in Christ Jesus be our secret thought;

let the whole priesthood of the Saviour be to us as bread on which the soul may feed, and wine sacramental, the drinking of which shall be as the utterance of an oath. Amen.

### Deut. xiii.

#### DANGER AND SECURITY.

THIS passage, by the inspiration of God, touches upon all the possible points of danger in a religious course. Suppose, for the moment, we do not admit the inspiration, still there remains the fact that in a book so old as Deuteronomy some master hand has touched the three great points of vital danger in religious progress. We bow to genius: we acknowledge power: we say it is but decent to uncover the head in the presence of superiority;—bound by this law, we cannot read this chapter without feeling that, be the writer who he may, he was a man who knew human nature: he saw clearly every point of danger, and with delicate, but resolute, courage pointed out the only course which such dangers involved and required.

What are the points of danger? The first may be described as being somewhat after a philosophical sort. There is nothing rude in the assault, nothing violent, or startling, or shocking, from a merely animal or physical point of view; it is a very delicate encroachment upon religious thought: it is shadowy as a vision: it is impalpable as a dream, and the speaker of his dream assumes, with amazing appearance of innocence, a total want of responsibility in the matter, forasmuch as he is simply relating, with a child's ingenuousness, what he saw in the dark and what he heard in the silence. What creature could be less objectionable? Here is no blatant vulgarity of denunciation, no audacious assault upon conservative piety. Who would not allow a man to relate a dream? Who does not like to have his imagination touched as by fire, and invited to the hospitality of spaces boundless and lights that outshine the sun? What harm can come of a trip to the upper air? What possible injury can come from a survey of clouds which break now and again to let the glory through? Surely this is harmless: it is more than harmless: it is instructive: it may be a lesson in the deeper



philosophy; it may be the beginning of a widening revelation. Besides, an approach of this kind is marvellously graded so as to suit human nature: you do no harm to your cause by assuming that the man to whom you are speaking is a fellow-dreamer, a brother-poet, gifted with the same imagination, and by gently insinuating that he may have had still higher experiences of the night-scenes, the star-fields, the glory-lands that burn above. A man likes to be accosted as if he were an intellectual gentleman. To tell him a dream is to beget his confidence; to ask him to listen to the minor tones of the soul is to confer the highest of favours upon his manhood. The mischief is this, that a man who would listen to such a dreamer, or seer of visions, and allow his religion to be affected by the nightmare, would turn the man out of his presence if he attempted to offer him a single idea upon any practical subject under heaven. We are easily beguiled from the religious point. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" Surely this is a mystery of a profound and solemn kind, that we are always ready to listen to dreamers and visionaries concerning the faith of Christ, and give them credit for penetration amounting almost to inspiration, and yet upon all other subjects we withdraw the confidence of our judgment and heart from such men. We allow any thief to steal our religion,—mayhap, because we want to get rid of it; we lay it where the thief can purloin it without trouble: he knows where to find it. In politics we laugh at him; in business we deny his right to speak, and call it impertinence if he cough in the presence of commercial men; and were he to offer a judgment upon literature, propriety would shudder, intellectual dignity would recoil lest the man should stain its purity; but let him tell a dream or a vision that will imperil the faith of the rising life of the country, and he may be listened to. It would seem as if it were easier to murder the soul than to kill the body. The first point of danger, therefore, is thus clouded in a golden veil; and the man who may be said to be preparing for that danger is dreamy, hazy-minded, speculative, always looking into a mist if, haply, he may find a star: such a gentle, dozing creature, so harmless, and really so very attractive in many qualities of his character.

What is the second point of danger? It is not at all philosophical; it may be ranked among the social forces that are constantly operating upon life:—"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee" (v. 6). All kindred would seem to be written under this designation, and the friend who is akin to the soul,—your very other self,—he of whom you ask no questions even when you least understand him, because he is golden gold, true as the geometry of the universe, —upright, square, thoroughly well-related in all the parts and qualities of his nature,—a building of God. Social influences are constantly operating upon our faith. The youngest member of the family has been reading a book, and has invited the head of the house to go and listen to some new speaker of theories, speculations, and dreams: the service is so beautiful: the idea is so novel: a great deal of the rush and tumult common to elementary religious life is totally escaped; the intellectual brother—the man supposed to have all the brains of the family—has got a new idea,—an idea which in no wise associates itself with historical churches and traditional creeds, but a bran-new idea, altogether sparkling and daring, and whosoever professes it will at once take his place in the synagogue of genius; or the darling friend has caught a voice down some by-way, and he will have his other self go with him in the evening to hear this speaker of anti-Christian ideas,—a man who has undertaken to reconstruct so much of the universe as will allow him to touch it: a person of exquisite mind, of dainty taste, and of quite latent power. The subtle purpose is to draw men away from the old altar, the old Book, the God of deliverance and beneficence, of mercy and redemption, to another god who will condescend to be measured for a creed, and who is not above sitting for his portrait. So we blame the family for alluring us from old centres: the older members of the family would not have gone, but under pressure from the brother, the son, the daughter, the wife, or the family friend. Why betake yourself to such cowardly language? Why add insult to injury when you leave the old altar, saying you would not have gone but that some other man enticed you? The fact is you have gone: better stand straight up and claim your going to be the expression of a conviction, the out-working

of what you believe to be a true inspiration. Do not follow a multitude to do evil. Do not always be at the string end, led about by those who are of more forceful and energetic will than yourselves. Be sure as to what they are taking you to; have a clear understanding before you begin. You would not allow those persons to interfere with anything practical: when the discussion of commercial questions arises, you stand at the front and say,—There I can bear testimony, and there I ought to be heard. Why claim such a solemn responsibility in the settlement of nothing, and allow anybody to settle for you the great questions of religious truth and personal destiny? There is no need to violate courtesy, or to suspend friendly relations; but it ought to be needful to every man to know exactly what is proposed to be done with his soul by the prophet who has dreamed a dream, or the member of a family who has been seized with a desire to entice other members of that family from the historical altar.

What is the third point of danger? It is not philosophical; it is not, in the narrow sense of the term, social; it is a point of danger which may be characterised as public sentiment, public opinion,—a general turning round, and a wholesale abandonment of old theologies and old forms of worship:—"If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there," that the cities have turned round, as it were, *en masse*, and have gone after "other gods, which ye have not known" (vv. 12-13). Some men may have courage to laugh at the dreamer: others may have virtue enough to resist the blandishments of the nearest friend; but who can resist the current or tendency of public opinion? Say to some men,—Public opinion is against you; you are talking a forgotten language; you have not associated yourself with the tendency of the times; all your speech is not without benevolence and the attraction of quaintness: there is an archaic flavour in your speech that is very touching and that might for a moment bring with it a species of rest to the soul, but new thought has arisen, new language has been coined, new music is expressing a new worship: the whole city has turned round—obey that public opinion; to be in a minority is to invoke mockery and contempt; and they will instantly yield.

Thus the writer of the chapter has given the three points of

danger,—philosophical, social, and public. The great advantage of all seducers from the true faith lies in the marvellous mystery that some people like to be in danger. A species of capital is made out of the religious vote. Various candidates for the throne of confidence ask you what you will take for your vote. It places men in an interesting condition to be regarded as intellectual invalids, spiritual convalescents, and in some degree of danger from the fever of heterodoxy; it pleases them to lay their empty heads upon their indolent hands, and to be regarded as persons whose condition excites the solicitude of Christendom. A marvellous human nature this! And the persons who so pose—not knowing whether they will vote for Barabbas or Christ, the living God or the god of wood and stone,—such persons are utterly wanting in moral robustness, intellectual health, spiritual vigour that begets confidence and assures security.

What is the course to be taken under circumstances of danger? Moses had no difficulty about his reply: let us see what it was, and consider whether we can adopt it. “And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death” (v. 5). The seducer in the family brings upon himself this penalty. “Neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him”—(vv. 8-9)—“thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die” (v. 10). And as for the city—representative of public opinion,—“Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again. And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand” (vv. 15-17). That was a drastic course: there is no touch of compromise in that stern provision; there is no line of toleration in that tremendous answer. The same course is to be taken to-day, as to its spiritual meaning. Physical violence there must be none: the day of physical pains and penalties for spiritual offences has closed; but the great lesson of destruction remains for ever. We have just seen that the truest destruction is moral; we have admitted to ourselves that no conquest is

worth achieving that is not based upon the consent of the conquered man or nation ; we must destroy by spiritual influence, by moral dignity, by such assuredness of conviction and simplicity of faith on our own part as will be as a burning fire to every suggestion bearing upon apostasy or treason.

Why are such temptations permitted ? The answer is given in the third verse :—"The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Every man's faith must be tried. Every man is tried in business, so that the honest man is known from the dishonest, and the power of temptation upon the integrity of the trader is estimated with appalling accuracy. We are tried by success ; we are proved by prosperity ; the thief may actually be sent to us that we may know whether every door and window has been fastened. We close the house night by night with simple confidence : the round has become so monotonous a course that we take it for granted that all things are secure. The thief will find out the one point of weakness ; and the night after we shall be much more careful than we were the night before. It is a notable feature of human nature that after the property has been stolen it is quite excited with new solicitude. Such is the noblest creature that traverses the little mean space called earth ! After he has lost all he had, he puts in every bolt he can lay his hands upon, and turns every lock with expressive violence. O that men were wise ! In such an hour as ye think not the thief cometh. If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have been sitting up waiting for him armed. We live in circumstances of uncertainty, in periods full of excitement ; the voice of Christ is—"Watch."

But are we not living in the days of toleration ? Is there not, in some countries at least, an Act of Toleration ? There is : toleration has still its place ; but toleration must not be misunderstood. Who are the men who claim the exercise of toleration ? Are they consistent men ? From point to point in all the line of social intercourse and confidence do they carry out this idea of toleration ? Let us test. They are very large in their toleration of aberrations and eccentricities in theology ; along that line there is no end to their sublimity. Are they consistent ? Let us try them by the standard of

life. Here is a man who says,—Morality is quite a parochial term : morality is a question of circumstance ; as to right and wrong, they vary with latitude and longitude ; morality must be considered a variable quantity. Do you tolerate that man ? Would you leave him in charge of your business for one calendar month ? Would you allow him to have full control over your family circumstances for the same limited period of time ? Would you trust such a man with signed cheques, the money lines of which were blank ? You are lovers of toleration ; you preach toleration ; you would die (if you could not help it) for toleration. Are you consistent ? Where does your toleration begin ? Where does it end ? Here is a man who comes with a new creed, untouched by ministerial fingers, unpolluted by pulpit senility and ignorance ; he says,—Weak people have no rights : strength is right : he who can get has a right to get, and the weak must go to the wall ; the weak are an offence to nature : they are out of harmony with the constitution of things ; they must be got rid of ; strength, health, force,—these are the masters of the world. Do you tolerate him ? Would you like him to sit up for the nights of one whole week with your little sick child ? Would you like him to take out, in its little perambulator, the pale-cheeked one of the family—the little creature whose life trembles in the balance ? You love toleration ; you are fond of toleration ; you clap your sweltering hands in applause of infinite nothings mouthed by irresponsible speakers about toleration. Where does the toleration begin ? Where does it end ? We make people welcome—a thousand welcomes—to all the theology ; but when they touch our money, or our family, or our little ones, we say we must have the very highest references about them. Why refer ? Why submit to such pointless routine ? Refer!—be tolerant, be magnanimous, be trustful. You, who can afford to let a man do what he pleases with theology, ought not to be so scrupulous as to what he may do with your bank-book. Here is a man who lays down the doctrine that property is robbery. His creed is,—Share and share alike. He says he is a “democrat” ; he says he will have no boundary walls, and no entails and primogenitures and rights and deeds and Chancery injunctions and decrees ; he would have all equal.

What a splendid man! What an original thinker about all things created! What an administrator! What a Daniel come to judgment! Shall we tolerate him? Shall we be very gentle to him?—and shall we begin by handing him over whatever we have about us? We are tolerationists! As for theology, you may turn into that field all the beasts you own, and let the quadrupeds trample the fair gardens under their hoofs; but you will not tolerate the man who says,—What is yours is mine, and I have a right to it, and I claim it now. We admire toleration: we think it is an excellent abstract idea: we believe there is a whole heaven of beauty in it, if anybody could discover it; but, in the meantime, we will have no toleration of liars, thieves, evil persons, who seek to disturb the foundations of society and property. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

What penalty, then, shall we inflict upon men who seek to destroy our faith? I hesitate not in my reply: Avoid them; pass by them; they would injure your soul. Wherever there is matter of mere opinion there should be the largest measure of toleration—not upon one side, but on both sides. It is a marvellous thing that the men who cry out for toleration are often the most reluctant to exercise it. There is much mockery addressed to the Christ of to-day; there is not a little penalty inflicted upon the Christian thinkers of the time; there are disallowances and disabilities and disqualifications of many kinds attached to deep religious conviction. Do not suppose that toleration is a one-sided quantity; when it is established it will operate from two opposite centres. Meanwhile, what are our religious convictions? If they are large, vital, well-reasoned; if they have borne the burden of the day; if they have sustained the heat of noontide; if they have survived the thick rains of night;—if our convictions have been potent in life, comforting in affliction, inspiring in death, he does not violate the genius of conviction who says,—Beware of any man who would tamper with those convictions, who would kill your spiritual enthusiasm, who would tempt you from the service of passion into the passivity of indolence or the uncertainty of insincere confession. We are not intolerant.

We believe, and therefore speak. Our convictions are our life. If they were mere opinions, we should compare them, compromise with others, make arrangements for the settlement of controversies; but where convictions are positive, either on the one side or the other; where they are real convictions men must abide by them, and beware of the thievish hand. This is our position; we have tested it by manifold experience.

### SELECTED NOTE.

"*Thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die*" (v. 10).—The mode of capital punishment which constitutes a material element in the character of any law, was probably as humane as the circumstances of Moses admitted. It was probably restricted to lapidation or stoning, which, by skilful management, might produce instantaneous death. It was an Egyptian custom (Exod. viii. 26). The public effusion of blood by decapitation cannot be proved to have been a Mosaic punishment, nor even an Egyptian; for in the instance of Pharaoh's chief baker (Gen. xl. 19), "Pharaoh shall lift up thine head from off thee," the marginal rendering seems preferable—"shall reckon thee and take thine office from thee." He is said to have been "hanged" (xli. 13); which may possibly mean posthumous exposure, though no independent evidence appears of this custom in ancient Egypt. The appearance of decapitation, "slaying by the sword," in later times (2 Sam. iv. 8; xx. 21, 22; 2 Kings x. 6-8) has no more relation to the Mosaic law than the decapitation of John the Baptist by Herod (Matt. xiv. 8-12); or than the hewing to pieces of Agag before the Lord by Samuel, as a punishment *in kind* (1 Sam. xv. 33); or than the office of the Cherethites, כרתים (2 Sam. viii. 18; xv. 18; xx. 7-23), or headsmen, as Gesenius understands by the word, from כרת, "to chop off" or hew down (executioners belonging to the body-guard of the king); whereas execution was ordered by Moses, probably adopting an ancient custom, to be begun first by the witnesses, a regulation which constituted a tremendous appeal to their moral feelings, and afterwards to be completed by the people (Deut. xiii. 10; xvii. 7; Josh. vii. 25; John viii. 7). It was a later innovation that immediate execution should be done by some personal attendant, by whom the office was probably considered as an honour (2 Sam. i. 15; iv. 12). Stoning, therefore, was probably the only capital punishment ordered by Moses. It is observable that neither this nor any other punishment was, according to his law, attended with insult or torture. Nor did his laws admit of those horrible mutilations practised by other nations. For instance, he prescribed stoning for adulterers (comp. Lev. xx. 10; Ezek. xxiii. 25; xvi. 38-40; John viii. 5); but the Chaldeans cut off the noses of such offenders. Mutilation of such a nature amounts to a perpetual condemnation to infamy and crime. Moses seems to have understood the true end of punishment, which is not to gratify the antipathy of society against crime, nor moral vengeance, which belongs to God alone, but prevention. "All the people shall hear and fear, and do no more so presumptuously."



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, help us to understand thy law and to do it obediently and lovingly, that we may enjoy the happy issue of such action, and find in experience a light upon many a mystery. If we do the will, we shall know the doctrine. How hard it is to do the will thou knowest. Thou understandest us altogether—in the mystery of the mind, in the peculiarity of the whole constitution; thou knowest how sensitive we are to evil suggestion, how profoundly we love the darkness, and how we love to be liberated from the restraints of law. Yet herein is our greatness as well as our infirmity. Thou hast made us in thine own image and likeness; but we have lost our uprightness and sought out many inventions, and now we are following after wind and vanity, and grasping energetically at the nothings of time. So we come before thee to mourn our fall, our personal apostasy, and to utter our personal prayer for pardon, liberty, and hope. We rejoice that there is a door standing wide open, and that within the opened home is our Father waiting to be gracious, his great love tarrying for us, his infinite compassion ready to welcome us. This is the Gospel we have heard; this is the good news which has filled our life from the very first. We have heard that God is love, God is light, God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, God says—Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?—and he stands at the door of the heart and knocks, and asks to be admitted to the guest-chamber of the soul. Behold, we delight in this Gospel: it is music to our ears—a sovereign balm for every wound. We need such speech, for the darkness is often very burdensome, and the wind so cold, and the pit-falls so many, and our readiness to go astray so eager. So we require to hear, now and again, of thy love and tenderness as revealed in the sacrifice of Christ, the oblation of the Son of God, the atonement wrought for sin. We reply to such Gospel by new vows and oaths and utterances of thankfulness; may we live this utterance in all obedient and noble life. Amen.

### Deut. xv. 1-11.

“At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord’s release” (vv. 1-2).

### THE PLACE OF BENEFICENCE.

**G**OD is putting lines of mercy amid all the black print of the law. It would seem as if wherever God could find a place at which he might utter some word of pity or compassion

he filled up that place with an utterance of his solicitude for the welfare of man. Loving words always look beautiful; perhaps they look most beautiful when surrounded by contrastive words of stern righteousness, of unyielding law, of severe prohibition. Flowers look lovely everywhere, but what must be the loveliness of a flower to the wanderer in a desert? So these Gospel words are full of charm wherever we find them, but they have double charmfulness being found in connection with institutions, instructions, precepts, and commandments marked by the severest righteousness. In the midst of time God graciously puts a year of release. Time needs to be jewelled; time is an appalling monotony. What can be so dull as the days that have no business, no pleasure, no special engagement for faculties which have been prepared for specific work? How dull the time is then, without a sparkle of dew, without a glint of superior light, without a note of supernal music! But God will mark off special periods; the very boundaries shall be gold; the very limits shall glitter with diamonds. How many beautiful days (as we have already seen) has God set in the commonplace of life:—the restful Sabbath, the hilarious festival, the time of family joy. Memory will supply many such dates and engagements which fill the heart with highest gladness. The poor man must have his year of release—the debtor, the slave, the servant, the disappointed heart. The rich have many friends—they can turn the whole week into a gala-day; but the poorest and weakest of mankind must have a year set amid the succession of the days to which they can look with religious expectation. It is something to know the limit of one's endurance. When no date of liberation is fixed, the heart aches because of the burdensome monotony; but when a time is appointed—a specified line laid down—courage rises: the spirit says,—Now I must be brave; every day brings the year of release nearer; I must fire my courage and heroically try again. We know what this is in various departments of life. How often have men sighed, expressing the thought, which they could scarcely put into words sufficiently delicate, that if but a limit could be assigned—say a year hence, or seven years, or ten—they could grapple with a given quantity: they could face a specific and measurable

difficulty ; but to look upon the everlasting when that everlasting is one of darkness and trial crows the spirit, subdues and humiliates the soul.

We must have the element of hopefulness in life : without hope we die. To-morrow will be a day of ransom and liberty—if not to-morrow by the clock, yet to-morrow in feeling : already the dawn is upon our hearts, already we hear noises of a distant approach : presently a great gladness will descend upon the soul. The child will be better in a day or two ; when the weather warms (the doctor assures us), the life will be stronger. When arrangements now in progress are consummated—and they will be consummated presently—the whole house will be lighted up with real joy and thankfulness. So the spirit speaks to itself ; so the heart sings songs in the night-time ; so we live by hope and faith—the higher Self, the grander Reason. Nor is this pitiful dreaming on our part. There is something in man that will hope. Blessed be God for the singing angel ; when we quench his song, we quench ourselves. There is a pressure, as of prophecy within us, so that in our degree we are all foretellers : we have each a gleaming vision on which the soul's bright answering eyes are fixed ; we know that right will conquer, that light will chase away the shadows, that truth will be enthroned, and that earth shall yet be beautiful with her Maker's blessing. This is the larger hope, the Christian expectation, the evangelical prophecy. We have but to multiply what is in ourselves, instinctively and educationally, to find in the expansion of that great power all that is brightest in prophecy, all that is gladdest in Christian forecast. What applies to the individual life applies to the associated life which is denominated the Church.

We find in this year of release what we all need—namely, the principle of new chances, new opportunities, fresh beginnings. To-morrow—said the debtor or the slave—is the day of release, and the next day I shall begin again : I shall have another chance in life ; the burden will be taken away, the darkness will be dispersed, and life shall be young again. Every man ought to have more chances than one, even in our own life. God has filled the sphere of life with opportunities. The expired week is dead and gone, and Christ's own resurrection

day comes with the Gospel of hope, the Gospel of a new beginning, the Gospel of a larger opportunity; and the year dies and buries itself, and the new year comes with silver trumpets, with proclamations from heaven, and Life says, when it is not utterly lost,—I will begin again: I will no longer blot the book of life: I will write with a steady and careful hand. But where moral questions are concerned a process must be indicated which is indispensable. Institutional arrangements can be changed at given dates, but moral releases can only be accomplished by moral processes. The man who is in prison must take the right steps to get out of it. What are those right steps?—repentance, contrition, confession—open, frank, straightforward, self-renouncing confession; then the man must be allowed to begin again; God will, in his providence, work out for such a man another opportunity; concealment there must be none, prevarication none, self-defence none. Where the case lies between the soul and God—the higher morality still—there must be an interview at the Cross—a mysterious communion under the blood that flows from the wounded Christ. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” With regard to this higher order of release we may say,—“Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation;” the year of jubilee has come; the year of release is shining upon us; whosoever will let him rise—a man. It is well, notwithstanding, to accustom the mind to all the lower revelations of release, forgiveness, new opportunity, that so, step by step, we may ascend the ladder the head of which is in heaven.

All this being done on the part of the creditor and the owner, what happens on the side of God? The answer to that inquiry is:—

“The Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it” (v. 4).

God never allows us to obey the law without immediate and large compensation. We cannot obey the laws of health without instantly being the healthier; we cannot obey the laws of cleanliness without the flesh instantly thanking us, in stronger pulsations and wider liberties, for what we have done to it.

A blessing is attached to all obedience, when the obedience is rendered to law divine and gracious. The reward is in the man's own heart: he has a reward which no thief can take away from the sanctuary in which it is preserved: heaven is within. None can forestall God, or outrun God, or confer upon God an obligation which he cannot repay; he takes the moisture from the earth only that he may return it in copious showers. No man can serve God for nought. The devil has found this out, as in the case of Job; the enemy sees that round about the true life there is a hedge and protection, not planted by man, and by man not to be uprooted. But the commandment is most critical and exacting. The commandment is marvellously adapted to certain infirmities of the human mind. For example, as the seventh year was nearing, men might abstain from doing things that would terminate in the year of release: they could postpone arrangements which would be to their advantage the day after to-morrow; but the spirit of the law foresaw this, arranged for this, and specifically cautioned the heart against this obvious temptation. In the ninth verse we read:—

“Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought.”

The book which contains this caution by so much vindicates its own inspiration. A book which so knows human nature, understands its every pulse and thought, is a book which was written by more than human wisdom. In incidental instances of this kind we see into the real quality of the book. It is comparatively easy to make broad laws and to give general directions without following them into their issues and all their involutions of consequence and relation; but here is a book which searches the heart, tries the reins,—sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow: an awful book of judgment. “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand”—so I will slacken my endeavours; I will begin the next period of seven years lavishly; then I will show my true nature; but seeing this obligation is just running off and will exhaust itself in a week or two, I will withhold, and stand still, and wait for the new time. God

denounces such reasoning as selfish, vicious, hostile to the spirit of the law. We are to work up to the last moment: to-morrow is the time of release, yet this very eventide is to be marked by the richest generosity, the tenderest regard for human rights, and the seventh year is to end with a benediction. Beware that there is not a thought in thy wicked heart, not a speech upon thy tongue, not a broad, open confession of indifference and carelessness; but a thought in thy wicked heart—speechless, formless, a little spectre on the man's horizon,—beware! God searches the heart: "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do:" "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he;" though both his hands be full, if the spirit of grudging is in his heart, his oblation is a worthless gift.

→ A marvellous expression occurs in the eleventh verse:—"The poor shall never cease out of the land." That is a remark which is not understood. Poverty is not an accident; there is a moral mystery connected with poverty which has never yet been found out. The sick-chamber makes the house; the infirm member of the family rules its tenderest thinking. Poverty has a great function to work out in the social scheme; but whilst we admit this we must not take the permanence of poverty as an argument for neglect: it is an argument for solicitude, it is an appeal to benevolence, it is an opportunity to soften the heart and cultivate the highest graces of the soul. It is perfectly true that the bulk of poor people may have brought their poverty upon themselves; but who are we that we should make rough speeches about them? What have we brought upon ourselves? If we are more respectable than others, it is still the respectability of thieves and liars and selfish plotters. We, who are apparently more industrious and virtuous and regardful, are not made of different clay, and are not animated by a different blood. It is perfectly true that a thousand people may have brought to-day's poverty upon themselves, and they will have to suffer for it; but beyond all these accidents or incidents there is the solemn fact, that poverty is a permanent quantity, for moral reasons which appeal to the higher instincts of the social commonwealth. We have that we may give; we are strong that we may support the weak; we are wise that we may teach the ignorant. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." No

man has the slightest occasion or reason for reproaching any other man, except in relation to the immediate circumstance. If the assize were on a larger scale and we were all involved in the scrutiny, the issue would be this: "There is none righteous, no, not one." It seems ruthless to dash the painted cup of personal respectability out of the hand of any Pharisee; but the Pharisee, with all his praying and fasting and criticism, is a bad and all but unpardonable man; his prayers aggravate his perfidy; because he is a Pharisee it will be difficult for him to be saved.

Very handsomely had the poor man to leave on the day of liberation. The Hebrew man and the Hebrew woman were to leave under happy circumstances:—

"Thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him" (vv. 13, 14).

It was God's before it was yours; it is only yours in the sense of stewardship. When the poor slave leaves, he is to leave with both hands full, and with a gracious burden upon his bended back, and with a blessing in his thankful heart. Law may be obeyed perfunctorily, arbitrarily, grudgingly; or law can be carried out with all the beauty of blossoming fruitfulness, and all the joy of music. Whatever we do we must do handsomely, graciously, not with ungratefulness and begrudging, for work so done is not done, and the blessing is neither with him that stays, nor with him that goes. After this inquiry we may well ask, Where, then, is the superiority of Christianity over Judaism? Perhaps there is no institutional superiority. I know of no finer laws than are to be found in the Mosaic economy: they are laws of righteousness, and laws of mercy—a wonderful line of grace running through all the severest legislation. Judaism was, as to all these blessings, local and limited: the stranger was not always involved in the spirit of grace: certain blessings or benefactions were limited to the Israelites; Christianity asserts its superiority by viewing the world as one, the human family as one,—God having made of one blood all nations of men; Christianity recognises neither Jew nor Greek, neither Barbarian nor Scythian, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither bond nor free; its spirit is universal; its love seeks out that which was lost that it might be saved: "This is a faithful

saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;” “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” There is nothing local, nothing limited : wherever there is a sinner there is an offered Saviour ; wherever there is abounding sin there is superabounding grace.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

“*There shall be no poor among you ; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it*” (v. 4).—The design of the jubilee is that those of the people of God who, through poverty or other adverse circumstances, had forfeited their personal liberty or property to their fellow-brethren, should have their debts forgiven by their co-religionists every half-century, on the great day of atonement, and be restored to their families and inheritance as freely and fully as God on that very day forgave the debts of his people and restored them to perfect fellowship with himself, so that the whole community, having forgiven each other and being forgiven by God, might return to the original order which had been disturbed in the lapse of time, and being freed from the bondage of one another might unreservedly be the servants of him who is their Redeemer. The aim of the jubilee, therefore, is to preserve unimpaired the essential character of the theocracy, to the end that there be no poor among the people of God (Deut. xv. 4). Hence God, who redeemed Israel from the bondage of Egypt to be his peculiar people, and allotted to them the promised land, will not suffer any one to usurp his title as Lord over those whom he owns as his own. It is the idea of grace for all the suffering children of man, bringing freedom to the captive and rest to the weary as well as to the earth, which made the year of jubilee the symbol of the Messianic year of grace (Isa. lxi. 2), when all the conflicts in the universe shall be restored to their original harmony, and when not only we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, but the whole creation, which groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, shall be restored into the glorious liberty of the sons of God (comp. Isa. lxi. 1-3 ; Luke iv. 21 ; Rom. viii. 18-23 ; Heb. iv. 9).

The importance of this institution will be apparent if it is considered what moral and social advantages would accrue to the community from the sacred observance of it. (1) It would prevent the accumulation of land on the part of a few to the detriment of the community at large. (2) It would render it impossible for any one to be born to absolute poverty, since every one had his hereditary land. (3) It would preclude those inequalities which are produced by extremes of riches and poverty, and which make one man domineer over another. (4) It would utterly do away with slavery. (5) It would afford a fresh opportunity to those who were reduced by adverse circumstances to begin again their career of industry, in the patrimony which they had temporarily forfeited. (6) It would periodically rectify the disorders which crept into the state in the course of time, preclude the division of the people into nobles and plebeians, and preserve the theocracy inviolate



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we need great words to cheer us. Our life is dark and dreary. Where can those great words be found but in thine own book? They were made for our sin; they are shaped by our sorrow; they are attuned to our grief. We know that this is thy word because it meets our sad necessity. This is no light of man's enkindling, for such light can struggle but feebly with the heavy darkness. This is the light of the Lord, for it fills the whole sky, and all night flees away, in terror and in shame, from its infinite brightness. We know thy word by the inward witness. A stranger will not we follow, we know his voice to be strange. It has not in it the love-tone which lifts it up to the level of thy speech. We turn away from it, for it would lead us into solitude and danger and death. Let thy voice fill the heart. Let thy music sing in all the chambers of our life and make the life-house glad. We rejoice that the heavens do stoop to the earth, and that God holds converse with man. This is the work of Christ and none other. This is the incoming of the Son of man unto our life, bringing with him morning and liberty, pardon and growth in grace. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Take up thine abode in our heart; turn our tears into precious jewels. Make music of our sighing! When our heart is ill at ease quiet us with thine own peace. Undertake for us altogether, cleansing away our sin, redeeming us from all captivity, sanctifying us by the continual ministry of grace, and ennobling us by daily inspiration. We are very frail: let our feebleness become a cry unto the clement heavens. We are poor—let our poverty be its own prayer. We are sinful exceedingly—not wholly with the hand, but oftentimes wholly with the heart. Let our sense of sin be a cry for mercy and for pardon. Let this hour be a memorable one in our history. May men see angels to-night. May the worldly spirit be liberated from its bondage and have entrance into the upper places, where the light is cloudless and where the music is clear. Let backsliders return with heavy hearts but eager feet, and let the door of thy grace be found already open to every prodigal who would come home again. Strengthen every heart that has made a good vow. Thou knowest how difficult it is to live up to the sacred hope. How prone we are to the earth, how beset we are by temptation, how old associations gather around us and form themselves into a body of attack. Thou knowest us altogether. Sustain us, therefore, in the great fight, and, at the last, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, may we be able to speak of a well-fought field, and of a crown of glory laid up for us. Give us great thoughts, noble aspirations, pure and heroic impulses; and, in all things, make us like thy Son Jesus Christ, brightness of thy glory, and express image of thy person. Amen.

**Deut. xv. 12-18.**

"And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee" (v. 12).

**GREAT PRINCIPLES APPLIED.**

**I**T appears, then, that even bondage does not destroy brotherhood. Observe how the permanent and the temporary are joined in this verse. The brother continues for ever. It is not brotherhood but slavery that ceases. When the man goes out he goes out a brother: his old yesterday of bondage is a cloud blown away; but the fraternal instinct and the fraternal responsibility can only end with life. Yet how wonderfully accidents or temporary circumstances modify all things and create somewhat curious and often difficult relations between man and man! Why should one brother be master and another brother be bondman? The question cannot be answered abstractly or argumentatively. We must recognise facts as they are. Of all the most obvious facts which appeal to our attention there is none more obvious than that one man is set over another, that one man is destined, for a period at least, to be the servant of another. Were we creating a society upon a philosophical basis we might try to create some other kind of structure; but we are not called to the creation of society but to its interpretation. We are servants one of another. The Queen is the subject of her kingdom. No man can be a true king who is not first a subject. There is a greater king than any merely nominal monarch who represents an individuality: a kingdom of humanity, the royalty of right, the princeliness of strength helping weakness and being the guarantee of weakness against unjust and overwhelming oppression. Let the situation be accepted. To chafe under the yoke is to destroy some of our best faculties and to render progress simply impossible. Good is to be obtained from servitude. We learn to rule by learning to serve; we learn to be good men by being good little children. There is a period of bondage in every life. Even those who are apparently born to great masterliness and even royalty have to stoop and serve and accept discipline and find their way to any throne worth occupying through a process of labour and self-denial.

“And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty” (v. 13).

Duty on the one side does not end with service on the other. We ought to be careful how we apply this word duty to our life. Duty is in some respects a cold word, and quite measurable: it begins at a certain chime of the clock, and ends with a certain other and nameable chime; it lives within the day; it does not carry its work home with it, or dream about it, or discover the poetry and religiousness of service; it is in some respects duty—mere duty, very severe duty, performed to the last jot and tittle; but still it is only a hireling's service. The Lord would add love to duty; he would add beauty to strength. The value of the gift is at the point where it begins to run over. What we give is to be given after the fashion of a vessel filled, filled to the brim, pressed down, running over; with somewhat of the poetry of wastefulness about it—wastefulness, that is, as interpreted by dull and worldly eyes, but quite celestial poetry and music after the fashion of the Cross of Christ, when viewed by him who is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. We cannot do our duty to a good servant; there must be more than duty; there must be remembrance, thoughtfulness, gratitude,—downright, frank affection: for the work has been well done: no hireling fingers have touched it, but a devoted heart has thought about it, dreamed about it, planned it in a hundred different ways, and loving attention has been given to every detail. Let no man leave your life empty-handed. You may give him at least a flower, a smile, a grip with meaning in it, a look charged with the radiance of gratitude. Do not regard life as a temporary arrangement, and all social relations but so many mechanical puttings together for transient and vanishing ends; life should be a religious solidity, a complete unity, so that whether one member suffer all the members shall suffer with it, or whether one member rejoice all the members shall share its gladness. Towards this happy consolidation of social relations and rights all things under Christian inspiration are tending; whilst they are tending in this direction there will be misunderstanding, jarring, somewhat of bitterness of criticism, it may be, and a good deal of exasperation and reproach: yet all the while the central line is moving towards understanding, sympathy, confidence, liberality.

All good work should be well rewarded, and all human connections should be so conducted that it costs the heart grief to give them up. Men have been so brought into unity of mind and feeling in a short Atlantic trip that the good-bye spoken the last day on the ship has quite made strong men quiver with tender emotion. The breaking-up of the ship's company seemed to have in it the breaking-up of all things; men go on their different ways: they see one another no more; they remember the days and the nights, and the talks upon the dreary waste of water, and one touch of the hand dissolves the company. How sad to part in ill-feeling, with misunderstanding and bitterness of heart!—and how sadder still—only with a solemn and noble pathos—to part in real friendship, genuine love, mutual, unquestioning trust and confidence! The parting *will* come; we can so arrange our relations now that when the parting comes its sorrow shall be sweet, its sadness shall be but a cloud for a moment veiling a celestial light.

The same idea is continued in the fourteenth verse:—

“Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress.”

He who has served well should be treated well. That must be the law in all our life. We must have done with all merely mechanical and hireling relations if ever we are to realise Christ's idea of society. There should be no orphan children; there should be no unattended sick; there should be no outcast city. It is worse than vain—it reaches the highest point of profanity; it aggravates itself, indeed, into an appalling blasphemy—that we should first cast out the city and then make a charity of attending to the city we have outcast. Something has to be done within all operating social arrangements that will prevent the catastrophe. Service has no right to end in poverty. After a man's day's work is done he should carry with him liberally out of the flock, and out of the floor, and out of the winepress; this he should do by right: the issue should not be a happy accident but a logical and just conclusion. The idea is of universal application. If any man be mean enough to serve as a man-pleaser and with a view to the ultimate bounty, he ought to be disappointed—and disappointed he certainly will be. All such men will exist to the end of time;

but we cannot arrange society upon a basis of suspicion and distrust. Whoever has served well should have a quiet eventide, no wolf of hunger pursuing him, no dark cloud lying over the roof like a burden which the house can but ill bear. Preacher, merchant, thinker, writer, tradesman of every kind, master, servant—the time of labour completed—should go into green pastures, and walk by still waters, and have a quiet watching and waiting time, bread being given and water being made sure, and a “Well done, good and faithful servant,” floating upon the whole life like a blessing from heaven. Many men render this impossible by their own misconduct. Misconduct would ruin creation; a selfish and rebellious spirit would render heaven impossible, on earth or elsewhere. Why fix attention upon the exceptions—unless it be with a view to reduce their number? Our love-duty remains the same. If we would be well served we must rule well. It seems as if we escaped with all our bounty: we allowed the good servant, of whatever name or degree, to go, and we gave nothing; the arrangement that had existed for years—two, four, six, seven years—was dissolved without a single gift out of the flock, or the floor, or the winepress; and we have reasoned that therefore we have saved so much. It is a fallacy. That is a selfishness that lives upon its own life-blood. Only generosity can be happy; only liberality puts the top-stone on justice. In forgetting the liberal donation we have laid up wrath against the day of wrath even for our own souls: we have shut out light from the south: we have wronged our own spirits.

“And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to-day” (v. 15).

Memory should be called in to the aid of duty. We must not forget the great general principles in looking at the momentary details. One man is master, we say; but only in a very narrow sense. The master now was himself once a slave. We were all slaves. If any man now is good, he must remember the mire out of which he was lifted, and the hole out of which he was digged. No man amongst us has come down from the untainted clouds, and is conferring a favour upon human society by mingling with it. The whitest robe is blackness compared with the snow of celestial righteousness. We are respectable as

amongst ourselves and between ourselves, and in contrast with other namcable people ; but boasting ourselves amongst ourselves we become foolish : the standard is not with us :—" Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The great principle of this direction involves all life. Memory is to play a wonderful part in the education of the soul. When we see a prodigal, are we to gather our skirts about us and assume a relation of severe respectability to the poor sore-footed wanderer ? Remember we are all prodigals. One man is seen more upon the road than another, and is more obviously departing from the Father's house ; but movement is a very subtle action. Some men move in the night-time,—ay, they move at flying pace ! In the day they are at church : in the light they are demure : in society they are irreproachable ; but no sooner does the cloud curtain out the sun—no sooner does night come than they fly : their feet are swift in the way of destruction. Remember ! When we hear of men getting wronged in this way or in that way—in the city, at home, in all the various relations of life—it suits our illicit and calculated piety to sigh over the ruin which we have perceived. It may be a hypocritical sigh. Remember ! We need not go into words ; reproach is useless. Let the soul look backward—steadily, closely, fully, critically—and in that retrospect there will be fire enough to light a hell. We are cursed through not looking back far enough. We now have "respectable" people in the Church—the Church that ought to be the gathering-ground of prodigals, broken hearts, shattered lives,—a place of tears ! It has become a boasting-ground—the paradise of a Pharisee. We have forgotten the Egypt of our own bondage and humiliation.

"It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee ; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years" (v. 18).

Religious inspiration should be mightier than selfish instincts. Man must be conquered by God. That which is natural must be chastened out of the soul : "Ye must be born again." Does it not seem a hard thing for a servant to be taking away liberally out of the flock, and out of the floor, and out of the winepress ? Does it not seem a hard thing that the servant should have both hands filled and should be blessed with a sense of fulness and

prosperity? It all might have been saved. Such is the reasoning of the hard heart. Whatever you save as against righteousness, justice, and love has no lasting in it: there is a ghost among the money. God's judgment or blessing rests upon the whole flock, floor, and winepress. The money saved from the man who had a right to it shall be lost. Do not imagine that God has abandoned all the commercial relations of life and handed over marts and exchanges to the dominion of the devil. The Lord still reigneth, and all history, interpreted by a Christian spirit, ends in this: that whoever endeavours selfishly to upset the divine regulation is never really the richer for the money he has stolen. We dare not spend stolen money: we are quite sure if we lay it down on the counter that the man who looks at it will see written upon it—"This money was stolen." We dare not unroll the sheaf of stolen notes: in the very crinkle of the paper there is an accusation. Honest money goes far, and brings sweetness with it and light and hope, and a blessing full of unction may be asked upon the little loaf bought by the honestly-earned penny. Whatever we have let it be honest money, and then the more we have the more everybody else will have, for we shall be but trustees and stewards, sowing with both hands and reaping with both hands night and day. This is God's law; this doctrine lies at the very root of divine legislation and social economy.

All this would be interesting in itself, and would be full of holy and happy impulse as mere matter of history—Hebrew, or Greek, or Roman; but the matter does not end there. The legislator is seen in the legislation. You find the mind of God in the law of God. What does God ask? He only asks what he has first given. The fourteenth verse proves this:—

"... of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him."

We do not create property; we do not create gold. It pleases us to think ourselves creators and proprietors, and it delights our misguided spirits to constitute ourselves into boards of directors and managers and comptrollers: whereas we have nothing that we have not received; a Voice sounds from heaven, saying,—The gold and the silver are mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills; all souls are mine. God opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. God only asks what he has first

given; the Giver condescends to become the Suppliant. Reading such legislation, how easy it is for us to believe that "God is love"! It required a highly spiritual Christian to put that revelation into words: "God is love"—but all such sayings go back over the whole field of history, and express in their conciseness what all the best men have been long thinking. One of the greatest of our departed statesmen defined a proverb as "the wisdom of many, and the wit of one." So with this sentence, "God is love"; it is the instinct of many; it is the experience of many; it is the utterance of one. The Old Testament is as full of love as the New Testament. The legislation of Moses culminates in the redemption of Christ.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

*"And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to-day"* (v. 15).—The Israelites were frequently reminded, after their exode from Egypt, of the oppressions they endured in that "house of bondage" from which they had been delivered by the direct interposition of God. The design of these admonitions was to teach them justice and kindness towards their servants when they should become settled in Canaan (Deut. v. 15; viii. 14; x. 19; xv. 15; xxiii. 7, etc.), as well as to impress them with gratitude towards their great Deliverer. The Egyptians had domestic servants, who may have been slaves (Exod. ix. 14, 20, 21; xi. 5). But the Israelites were not dispersed among the families of Egypt—they formed a special community. They had exclusive possession of the land of Goshen, "the best part of the land of Egypt." They lived in permanent dwellings, their own houses, and not in tents (Exod. xii. 22). Each family seems to have had its own house (Exod. xii. 4; comp. Acts vii. 20); and judging from the regulations about eating the passover, they could scarcely have been small ones (Exod. xii., etc.). They appear to have been well clothed (Exod. xii. 11). They owned "flocks and herds, and very much cattle" (Exod. xii. 4, 6, 32, 37, 38). They had their own form of government; and although occupying a province of Egypt, and *tributary* to it, they preserved their tribes and family divisions, and their internal organisation throughout. The service required from the Israelites by their taskmasters seems to have been exacted from males only, and probably a portion only of the people were compelled to labour at any one time. As tributaries, they probably supplied levies of men, from which the wealthy appear to have been exempted (Exod. iii. 16; iv. 29; v. 20). The poor were the oppressed; "and all the service, wherewith they made them serve, was with rigour" (Exod. i. 11-14). But Jehovah saw their "afflictions and heard their groanings," and delivered them, after having inflicted the most terrible plagues on their oppressors.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast set apart a time for worship, and a place for the sacrifice of praise. This is the day the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it; this is the place where the Lord's name is recorded: here he will be and show himself unto those who lift up towards him eyes of expectation. We bless thee for the holy time, for the holy place, and for the holy book,—a time that is separate, a place that is made a sanctuary, a book that stands above all other books, alone in its completeness and authority. May we understand these appointments, and respond to all their meaning: may the time be as a jewel among the days; may the place sanctify our habitations; may the book inspire and direct our thought and feeling and action. Thus, may we be the better—not the worse—for our meeting together in thy name: may we feel the mystery of sympathy; may we enter into the joy of fellowship; may we have communion one with another and with our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus, united in thy love and worshipping at thine altar, we shall be prepared to endure the burden and the suffering of life, and to wait with expectancy and hope the day of thine appearing. We bless thee for the flowers in the wilderness, for water among the rocks, for a cooling breeze at noonday; for all the mercy and lovingkindness, so tender and abundant, which have followed us all the days of our life, and made it a time of sunshine and liberty. That we have not lived up to all this call of thine, enforced by providences so tender, and ennobled by a pathos so wondrous as the sacrifice of thy Son, is our bitterest complaint: we accuse ourselves; we know that we have come short in all things, and that we have offended against thee. But thy mercy is great to forgive as well as to provide; thy lovingkindness is a redemption as well as a providence; so we come to the Cross, owning our sickness of heart, our rebellion of will, our whole evil-mindedness, asking for the pardon of God. Comfort us according to our necessities; how many they are thou knowest, how bitter and sharp thou alone canst tell. Withhold not thy consolations: let thy solaces be more in number than our sufferings; then shall we magnify God in the house of our affliction. Regard our loved ones for whom it is our delight to pray. Some are not here: they are far away upon the sea, or beyond the sea, in strange lands, in difficult places; or they are in the chamber of sickness, or in the shadow of a great sorrow, counting their loss, and not able to find the gain which thou hast hidden amid its tears; the Lord look upon them, be tender and gracious unto them, comfort them with stimulus, that they may be stirred up to nobler service and not be allowed to sink under the burden of their grief. Make the old young; make the

young glad with a double joy ; and may business teach us that we are children of heaven and not of earth, of eternity and not of time, and that there are no good things to be found below which can satisfy the capacity of the soul.

The Lord hear us in these things : his attention shall be a blessing ; his condescending to listen shall be a help ; and as for the reply—the holy answer, the gracious response of Heaven—will it be less than the Cross ? Will it be more than the earth and time can receive ? Will it be a surprise of benefaction ? We know it will be worthy of the name in which our prayer is prayed, and there we rest. Amen.

### Deut. xvi.

“ Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God : for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night ” (v. 1).

## CONDITIONS OF WORSHIP.

THE time is specified, and the reason is given. This is the law, rather than a mere accident. The law is: that every month has a memory, every day has a story, every night has a star all its own. Selected instances help us to ascertain general principles. Acting upon those instances, we become familiar with their spirit and moral genius, so much so that we begin to ask, Are there not other memorable events ? Are there not other times of deliverance ? Have we been brought out of Egypt only ? Are not all the days storied with providential love ? Thus, from the particular we pass into the general, and from the general to the universal ; and thus all time is lighted up by the divine and comforting Presence. The time is only dull when we make it such. If the events of our life had been brighter, then our moments of temporal rejoicing would have been more numerous : every day might have been a birthday ; every hour might have been labelled with some deed of love ; the whole week long we should have had festival as well as fast, the sound of trumpet and mirthfulness as well as the voice of groaning and confession of sin. The Lord knows what he has done for every month of the year. It would seem as if the calendar were kept in heaven. We may not consult the diary, but God looks at it, and according to the time of day and the time of year he expects the psalm and hymn of earth. Why do we blur the pages of the daily journal so that we cannot tell

what happened this day twelvemonth, so that the day shall be but a moral vacancy in the life? Who died this day year? Whose death does this day for ever commemorate—what martyr, what apostle, what great leading thinker, what sweet life at home? Were these questions asked at every dawn, what time in the whole year would there be that might not be an "Abib"—a "time of putting in the sickle," a reaping time, having even in the winter a touch of harvest gladness? We should try to make the time more memorable. This is impossible to some, if heroic and chivalrous deed be required, but it is possible to all who can love and serve and think and patiently endure.

If God is so careful about time, has he any regard for place?

"Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee:

"But at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (vv. 5, 6).

This is morally consistent with God's claim for gracious recollection of definite times. May we not slay the passover where we please? The answer is, Certainly not. May we not insulate ourselves, and upon little church appointments of our own creation carry out the ceremony of our worship? The answer is, Certainly not. We should strive to move in the direction at least of unity, commonwealth, fellowship, solidarity. The sacrifice is the same, the man who offers it is the same; but because it is not offered at the place which God has chosen the sacrifice and the sacrificer go for nothing. That is in harmony with all the social arrangements which experience has approved. There are fit places for all things, as well as fit times. Has God chosen a place? There can be no hesitation as to an affirmative reply. God has always been solicitous about a house for himself: he would have a building put up from foundation to pinnacle for his own service—a house that should be called by his own name, and that should owe all its dignity and worth to his presence and sanction. But, whilst all questions of locality have their importance within given limits, the great doctrine of the text is that there is an appointed place, where God and man shall, so to say, face one another in solemn and joyous interview. There is only one place, and all related places are only of

importance and value in proportion as they are vitally related. What is that one place? It is called Golgotha—Calvary,—the place of the Cross, the shadow of the altar on which the Saviour died. We can only meet God at the Cross, if we have to meet in the name of mercy, compassion, hope. If we would meet on Sinai, we have no answer; if we would meet on Golgotha, the answer is with God—an infinite reply of love and pardon and release. It is wonderful how God has fixed certain great centres and allowed us liberty only within the radius. Dwelling upon that radius, we call it liberty; but, fixing the mind upon the centre, we call it law, divine sovereignty, heavenly supremacy. The centre is not fixed by us, but by the Lord; and our liberty is also determined by his wisdom. There are, then, holy places, and there are holy times. There are holy places without referring to the Church, distinctively so called; and there are holy times without referring to the Sabbath day. The grave is a holy place. Blessed be God, there are yet men who cannot play a fool's game within the boundaries of the churchyard filled with the sleeping dead. There are places marked by moral strife, which happily ended in conquest wrought by righteousness and truth. There are altars where we prayed victorious prayers; there are times of light—well-remembered light: we know just when the light came, how full it was, how it struck us to the earth for one moment, and how amidst its lustre we heard appeals and directions, out of obedience to which came our noblest life. Want of veneration is want of dignity. To be able to treat all places and all times alike is simply to be able to say that we have destroyed the very faculty which may become the beginning of the noblest life and service.

The time having been fixed and the place having been determined, what remains?

“And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee” (v. 10).

Here is the beginning of another kind of liberty. A wonderful word occurs in this verse; there is no larger word in all the language of devotion and service. That word is “a freewill offering.” Reading the Scriptures carefully up to this point,

we would suppose that everything had been claimed, taxed, and insisted upon that could possibly be given to God's altar ; yet we are reminded that such is not the case : the very opportunity of giving unto the Lord a "freewill" offering shows that still something has been left. How wonderfully God educates the human race : he will insist upon definite claims and obligations being answered, and yet he will also give opportunity for freewill action, as if he had said,—Now we shall see what you will do when left to yourselves ; the law no longer presses you : the great hand is lifted, and for the time being you shall do in this matter as it may please your own mind and heart. That is an element in the divine education of the human race. God gives us opportunities of showing ourselves to ourselves. He only would count the gift : no one should know what had been done : the sweet transaction should lie between the one soul and the living Lord. The Church could not live upon that to-day. Here and there instances would occur of almost superhuman liberality—instances amounting to complete devotion and sacrifice : blessed be God for these ; but remove public opinion, public criticism, and all the other considerations which operate upon human action, and then stand in amazement at the result which would accrue. The soul must be revealed to itself ; the man must be compelled to drag up the coward that lies asleep within his own nature, and he must look that coward in the face, and call that coward by his own name. We are not to be permitted to live in rush and tumult and such tempestuous excitement as shall lead to false estimates of ourselves. At given periods of time we have to see what we are in God's sight ; and whether we be saint or sinner, coward, liar, or hero and truthful man, we must know the reality of the ase. What is given under pressure is not given : what is given to a subscription list in order to keep up the harmony of the numbers is wasted money ; only that is given which cannot be kept back ; only that is accepted which carries with it the blood of the heart.

Another singular word occurs in this tenth verse :—"a tribute." The literal meaning is that the gift is to be proportional. It is a word with a strong arithmetical or numerical aspect : not only is there a gift, but the gift is the result of thought, calculation, and expresses the serious and responsible judgment of the giver.

That consideration alters the whole case. It would have been easy to throw a dole to the Lord that had no reference whatever to what was left behind : that would be a broad, easily-opened gate to heaven ; but such is not the condition stated in the bond. Even the freewill offering is to be tributary : it is to be based upon the original substance, the actual property, whatever is in the hand as momentary possession. Thus, sacrifice is to be calculated ; worship is to be the result of forethought ; nothing is to be done of mere constraint or as consultative of ease and indulgence. A word of taxation touches the very poetry and pathos of oblation.

“And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there” (v. 11).

This gives us the joyous aspect of religion. An ancient Jewish annotator has made a beautiful remark upon this verse, to the effect that “thy four, O Israel, and my four shall rejoice together.” Observe how the numbers are divided into fours, and how the one four may be said to be man’s and the second four may be said to be God’s. This is the distinction drawn by Rashi, the Jewish commentator : “Thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant”—let them rejoice, let them be glad in response to music, and let them call for more music to express their ever-increasing joy ; but my four must be there also : the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow ; they represent the divine name as authority for admission to the feast. The religious servant, the poor stranger, the orphan, and the widow,—they sit down, in seats divinely claimed for them, at the festive board. So the company shall be representative :—son, daughter, manservant, maidservant ; priest, stranger, orphan, widow ;—this is the typical company sitting down at the symbolical feast. God will not have our small house-parties, made up of people of one class, equally well-dressed and accosting one another in the language of equality ; he will have a large feast. We can have no true feast that some orphan child does not partake of. If the desolate and the stranger eat nothing of our feast, the feast will be but an evil memory to the

very appetite which it has sated. Every man should have connected with his house, however small the house may be, some child, or poor creature, or outcast dog, that looks to him for crumbs, or cup of water, or caressing hand, or stimulating word. Your house is not a little structure of four walls: it is only four little walls that it may typify, as by an arithmetical symbol, an inexpressible quantity. There should be no waste meat in the house; there should be no vacant seat at the table; and if there are some who cannot come to the table the table must be sent to them. Wherever there is hunger, however brought about, it claims to be a guest at the best man's table.

The Lord will have joy, as well as law and tribute and appointed time and defined and circumscribed space: "Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God." A wonderful turn of events is indicated by this permission. Instead of the word being one expressive of fear, hopeless solemnity, and utter dejection of mind, it is a word which could be used upon birth-day, wedding-day, midsummer-day, when the flowers are richest and greatest in number. "Thou shalt rejoice"—rejoice and be glad; rejoice and give thanks; rejoice and dance and sing, the very ecstasy of love and worship. Where there is such joy the stranger and the fatherless and the widow must be included. It is not in the nature of joy to exclude. We wait for each other to be in some happy temper that we may ask permission to introduce the exiled child or friend; we say we must watch our opportunity; when the master of the house is glad, when his heart is overflowing with love, when he must sing because of the fire that is burning within him—a holy fire of joy—then, at the critical moment, we will ask if he will not see the face he has not beheld for many a day; in his joy he will say Yes; in the festival of his heart he will forgive. Joy does not shut doors and close windows and silence birds that sing and children that laugh; joy says, Let the strangers hover at the door, and look in: they will do no harm; and if they come forward a pace or two, so be it; this is a night of gladness, a day of banqueting; turn none away; if you can spread the table far enough to take in some outsiders, spread it; the day is bright, the day is a day of heaven. Joy must be inclusive; joy

must have large things. The critical thought is often severe. In calculating moods we number our friends and our guests; but when the great wave of gladness rolls through the heart—rises, swells, breaks, and rises again, who could be critically exclusive or meanly particular? Who would not say,—Yes, that other child may come in: by sitting closer together we can make room for two poor friends still? Who does not lift up the goblet and say, There remains enough in it to satisfy the thirst of yet another wanderer; go into the highways and the hedges, and compel the people to come in with the sweet compulsion of love? That is the meaning of the Church. It is not meant for “thy son, and thy daughter,” seated in one respectable place, and “thy manservant, and thy maidservant,” seated in a secondary and inferior place; but it is meant for thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, and the man who has no inheritance—a glorious Church! Each Church should ask what it is doing for the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, and the man who has no definite position or inheritance in society. It is no Church that does not spread a table every week for the very poorest people in the district; it may be a congregation—a set of persons who luxuriate in what they believe to be excellent provisions; but it is not a Christian Church. The Christian Church should have tables spread for the fatherless, and the stranger, and the widow, and the lost, and the weary. The measure of the hospitality should be the measure of the hunger of those who come. But if we should be taken in? Thank God for it! to be taken in sometimes is educative, and is not without some moral advantage. The counterfeit proves that there is a good deal of reality; the counterfeit is a tribute to Christian generosity. We may never have been taken in, and therefore may laugh the pharisaic laugh over our own shrewdness; but in proportion as we laugh that pharisaic laugh are we ourselves trying to take in omniscience. In the Old Testament, therefore, there were times of joy. It has been pointed out as remarkable that the Feast of Tabernacles was proverbially a time of rejoicing: the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the commencement of the second temple, and the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, all took place in or about the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.



“Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the Lord thy God hateth” (vv. 21, 22).

Thus, imagery is forbidden—even religious imitation and attempted reproduction of things divine and inexpressible. We are prone to do something to show our handiwork in God's sanctuary; it pleases us to try to add something to the circle; it delights us to run one rim of gilt around the refined gold which burns with the image and superscription of God. We are told not to interfere; we must keep our hands off everything. We must learn to stand still; sometimes to do everything by doing nothing; and we must learn to rebuke our inventive faculty and become learned in the utterance of simple prayer. God will have his altar untouched: he will have human attention undistracted by any human devices. The altar is to stand alone in its simple dignity—most adorned when unadorned. There must be no attempt to link true religion and false religion, inspired worship and idolatrous worship, groves humanly planted and altars divinely built. The Lord will have a time for himself, and place for himself, a gift for himself, an altar for himself. Why for himself? Because he is the Lord, and because he means to train the human mind and heart without distraction towards the highest sublimity of law. Who will not set up his reason against the altar, and delight because his religion is rational?—as well hold up a candle to the sun, because all fire is of the same quality; because there is but one fire in the universe, and that is GOD. The sun says,—Thou shalt not light a candle in my presence. We do it, but the candle is literally of no service in the presence of the mid-day sun. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world—the Sun of the great firmament of the soul—and he alone can light the space that is to be illumined. Who will not throw the little flower of self-approval upon the altar, saying,—I am not as other men: I fast, I pay tithes, I do not practise extortion: I am not as the publicans are? The Lord has forbidden all groves and all images and all distractions. Only one man is permitted near the altar; only one soul is heard in heaven. His name?—*the broken-hearted sinner!*

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy word is a living word, coming into our hearts from heaven, full of promise, full of consolation, and full of stimulus. We cannot read it without answering it; our souls know it to be a divine word, so tender, so full of music, calling us upward to broader and nobler life. The word of the Lord abideth for ever: amid all changes it is the same: it changes not; its great word is a word of love, and hope, and forgiveness, for the erring sons of men. Thy word is a gospel; if there is in it the severity of judgment, it is that sinners may be affrighted out of evil, and brought under the blessing of condescending and redeeming Heaven. The terrors of the Lord are meant to persuade men. May we—by terror or by love—all be brought to thyself, thy house, the Cross of Christ the way, and Christ himself the Truth. We bless thee that we have hope in this direction. We thank thee that when we are most overcast, brightness arises from the Cross; we rejoice that when the burden is heaviest, it is Christ's almighty hand that lifts it from our weakness. In thy house we have security; in the temple of God we have the beginning of heaven; in the light of the Sabbath we have the dawn of eternal rest. For all these mercies we bless thee with united heart, with fervent love, with undistracted attention and will. Our heart is fixed, O God, our heart is fixed. For these suggestions we bless thee. Once we were as children, tossed to and fro, driven about; but now, being men in Christ Jesus, we stand in the security of thy love, we are blessed by the tenderness of thy grace, and we are made strong by all the promises which thou hast addressed to us. We give one another to God. We ask for one another blessings suited to the need of each life. Thou knowest us altogether: thou knowest the weakest and the poorest, the man who has no words with which to utter his desire, and the soul which bends itself down in burning shame before thee because of remembered sin. We pray thee to look upon us according to our need, and out of the unsearchable riches of Christ do thou supply all our wants; how many they are we do not ourselves know: thou knowest every necessity; thou hast numbered the hairs of our head, how much more hast thou considered the necessities of our soul! We leave ourselves in thy hands; they are mighty, they are gentle, they are full to abounding with all heavenly riches and grace. Send none unblessed away: may our homes be the happier for our having been to church; may our business life be the nobler for our having bent at the altar; and may our whole course upon the earth be upright and straightforward because we have been with Jesus and learned of him, and are inspired by his spirit and illumined by his mind.

The Lord hear us; the Lord come closely to us that we may whisper our prayers; and may we know that our prayers have been heard through the blood of the everlasting covenant, because of deep peace, and sacred joy, and radiant hope, which only are the gifts of God. Amen.

### Deut. xvii.

"If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded" (vv. 2, 3).

### TRUE WORSHIP.

THIS makes our relation to God very definite. There is to be no intermediate worship. Closeness—almost visible closeness—is to be the rule and standard of our communion with God. Nothing must stand between. We are permitted to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. There must be no intervening system of priests, or officers of any kind, or angels of any degree: every soul must have right of way to God, and must not stop on the road, but go straight up as it were to the presence-chamber of the king. This honour have all the saints; this delight is the portion of all broken hearts and contrite spirits. The publican may stand with eyes down-cast and breast smitten as if in reproach, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Only two parties are named in the covenant—God and the sinner himself. Observe the definiteness of God's command. There is to be no counterfeit; there is to be no pretence. Even the sun is not to be worshipped, nor the fair moon, nor any of the stars that make night rich. The temptation is very strong. If anything visible might be worshipped, surely it would be the sun, at any point of what we call his career—in the whitening east, in the dazzling noontide, in the solemn westering of that day-making glory. God foresaw this. It was dangerous to make a sun: it looks so like a God. Other spirits might find in the soft moon somewhat of motherliness and gentleness, and condescending interest in the affairs of men—a sweet, sweet light that has come out in the darkness, that is never seen in the mid-day glory; a seeking mother, a solicitous sister, a gentle

friend that may and dare come out in the night ;—who could fail to fall down and say,—Bless thee, thou spirit of light, thou art at least a symbol of the living God? And some of the stars seem to speak : they glitter so ; their sparkling is so vivid ; their appeal so direct, as if we must answer such voices. God has said,—Sun, moon, and the host of heaven are not to be worshipped. So much for nature-homage ; so much for the altar of the universe, as represented by things bright and beautiful and most alluring in their tenderness. All altars, but one, are thrown down. Those who believe the Bible have, therefore, no alternative. They hear poems about nature, about sun-light and moon-light, and babbling brooks, and sparkling dew, and bending corn, and birds trilling out their very throats in song ; and they say,—If the Bible had not spoken so definitely, we might have been persuaded to halt and build a tabernacle and worship the host of heaven and the singing tenants of the air and all the beauty of the bespangled carpet under our feet ; but the Bible is emphatic and definite : we are not to stop at the creature, but to go up to the Creator ; we are not to uncover our heads in the presence of the lamps at his gate, but are to pass on that we may find himself, and in prostration of heart worship only his living Majesty. It comes to this, then : Is the Bible our guide? Are we intelligent and resolute believers in a divine revelation, which is now given to us in our own tongue, and the substance of which we can all understand? We must take care how we defraud God of his rights. God will make up to us for any loss we may sustain in obeying his commandments. The green field is alluring : where the sunshine plays surely there must be a ladder the head of which reaches unto heaven ; but if we have honestly said,—We leave all these things and betake ourselves to the appointed place, and worship in the appointed way,—God will make up to us for all the green fields we have forfeited, and as for the light of the sun, a light above its noontide brightness shall delight the vision of the soul.

“Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die” (v. 5).

The letter has passed. He who lives in the letter lives in the shell or in the bark, as the old Roman law has said. We must

live in the spirit, and not in the letter, so though all physical pain and penalty have disappeared, death is still and ever must be the result of false worship. He who worships the wrong deity does not worship. That is a suggestion which has risen into a fact by reason of multiplied and even immeasurable observation and experience. It is not the body that dies: it is the soul that pines, withers, decays, and gradually sinks away, —a notable truth, a profound thought indeed, most solemn, and one which can be tested. The meaning simply is this: Lose touch of God, and you cannot live. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . Without me ye can do nothing." The thought, therefore, is not extraordinary as to its claim upon our attention or arbitrary in its authority: it simply means: Leave hold of God, and you must wither; abandon the centre of life, and though you may go forward for a moment or two by reason of the impulse derived from the original contact, you must halt and die. It is so intellectually, it is so morally, it is so socially; in all these departments there are living centres, recognised authorities, and if we neglect or despise them, the result is seen in intellectual, moral, and social feebleness, pollution, and death. We are not made to invent our own gods, and be as healthy and robust of intellect as if we were worshipping at the true altar. We are seeking by foolish worship to establish a lie: we are endeavouring to show that being mortal we can become immortal; that being fallible we can find out and worship infallibility without going to the living God; that being ignorant we can write for ourselves a law and constitute for ourselves a light and guide. The man who has no Bible may talk so, and he forfeits nothing of consistency; but the man who holds to the Bible must hold to the true God, the one altar, the only Priest, the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. We cannot have a Bible, and yet live as if we had it not; to have seen it is to have incurred a responsibility; to have read one of its living chapters is to separate by an infinite distance our souls from all the ignorance and bondage of the past. Although, therefore, physical death is no longer to be inflicted and outward stoning is happily unknown, there remains the eternal truth that false worship is death, misconceived worship is loss of soul, and right worship

is daily sustenance and the continual enhancement of highest strength.

In the fourteenth verse we have an instance of God's deep reading of the human heart. It is a verse full of forecast ; it is, indeed, charged with surprise, and must have come upon the people startlingly :—

“ When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me.”

This opens up a marvellous sphere of divine operation in the affairs of men. It would seem as if God himself had almost suggested the evil that has been committed. Take the instance of our first parents in the days of their innocence. God said unto them, “ Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat : but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it : for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” And here God indicates a rising in the mind of his people of a rebellious spirit against himself, expressing its purpose in a desire for a king. The thought had not occurred to the people at this moment ; no such idea had ever touched the minds of the people to whom these words were addressed. Here, then, we are called upon to distinguish between foreknowledge and predestination. That there is foreknowledge in God is a necessity of his being God : without foreknowledge he is without Godhead ; but when he predestinates he predestinates to caution, to vigilance : he calls men to be upon their guard, and to pray with increasing energy and precision of meaning, that they may be saved from false issues and from criminal acts. To fore-know is not to fore-determine. The eating of the fruit of the tree was not an act of predestination, nor was the call for a king in Israel to be traced to the decree of God ; in both instances there was warning and there was a call to vigilance, and to certain lines of policy and conduct in the case of the choosing of a king.

Very beautiful is the portrait of a king that is given by God himself. God will have a king of his own creation :—

“ Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose ” (v. 15).

Royalty must be created by divinity. This is the same principle that we have laid down in regard to worship. We must have God at the head, the Creator upon the throne; there must be no settlement with intermediate causes and influences: in all things we must have direct communication with the living Creator, the eternal Sovereign of the universe. Have a king, says God, but have one of my choosing. In other words: If you will insist upon having a monarch, call upon me to name him. A marvellous condescension in the one case and a complete submission in the other. There cannot be two Gods, equal in authority and power, ruling over the human mind. The Lord reigneth; all kings are his subjects: he is Lord of lords; the crown is God's creation, if a crown of righteousness, justice, purity, and charity.

The Lord is pleased to go into detail about this possibly coming king that should reign over his people. He was to be fraternal:

“One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee” (v. 15).

The basis was a basis of equality: there was to be no idea of a heavenly descent or a coming from some other and invisible world with superhuman and impossible claims. There are such kings, and there always must be such kings, in every republic, in all time and in all space. Republics do not destroy kings; only they indicate and worship with loyalty the right kind of king. There will always be larger men, elder men, wiser men; men in whom there is a greater quantity of manhood than in others; far-seeing men; men whose hands combine the grasp of strength with the caress of gentleness. God will, therefore, have the fraternal principle asserted. We live in brotherhood: otherwise we live in bondage and in fear and in distressing humiliation.

But the king must be guarded: he will have his temptations. Against two of those temptations God guards his people. The king shall not be a vain man:

“He shall not multiply horses to himself” (v. 16).

Horses were the symbols of power. To have many horses was to be a right royal king, according to conventional construction of the situation. The horse was supposed to be the image of power, the seal of great might and glory. God cautions the king that is to reign over his people against trusting in horses—

against the whole strength and genius of worldly vanity : being a king, he must not be foolish ; being royal, he must not be unwise ; his very greatness should make him ambitious to be greater still in moral qualities—in fraternal solicitude and in beneficent action.

Not only was he cautioned against vanity, but against self-indulgence :

“ Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away : neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold ” (v. 17).

These are the temptations of the great ones of the earth—to have many horses, to gratify every appetite, and to have all that money can buy, and to boast themselves that they can purchase what they wish to possess. All these impulses must be kept down ; the whole desire of the man must be chastened. The king must know himself to be the vicegerent of God, the messenger of Heaven, the errand-bearer of the eternal covenant. How is this to be brought about ? Only by the inculcation of great principles, by the spread of spiritual knowledge, by a truer estimate of the scope and function of law.

But all this is cautionary, and may be described as largely negative. What more must take place in the history and government of the true king ? He must be a student :

“ And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites : and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life : that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them : that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left : to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel ” (vv. 18-20).

The law is divinely given. Any laws we may make, if they are to be righteous and beneficent, must be of the quality of law which has been already revealed from heaven. Whatever is not of that quality must go down. False worship leads to death ; false legislation leads to social dissolution. The Book has been written ; everything that human life can need is in the Bible : there is no law touching human life, property, interest—past, present, future—which is not to be found in the Book of God. This is not a claim set up on behalf of the Book : it is the



record of the world's profoundest reading ; it is the testimony of the world's amplest and purest experience. We must make laws for momentary purposes that we may direct into proper channels certain actions and relationships ; but all the law which we make must be of the nature of the law which is revealed. That being so, we must study the revealed law : we must read it by the dazzling noontide light, and read it by the lamps which men have made to dispel the darkness. The law must be read in all lights, day and night, from beginning to end, in all its varieties, relationships, and issues ; and he who reads the law so will instantly discern the spirit of all human law, and be able to say with authority,—This is right ; this is just ; this is true. Or,—This is unrighteous, unjust, untrue, and must, as such, be done away. Great Bible readers are great reformers. We cannot have any profoundly beneficent change in social life, custom, and usage, except we have it through the inspired revelation. Spread the Bible ; make all men read the Bible so that they may understand it ; spare no expense in circulating the Book ; those who can explain it, devote yourselves to it day and night : turn the Book of God into the language of the people, and thus create in them, under the blessing of Heaven, a true spirit, a keen discernment, a sure touch that knows in the darkness as in the light what it is that claims attention and confidence.

We are called to true worship. "God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." "For the Father seeketh such to worship him." True worship inspires and ennobles character. No man can pray well and live badly. He may pray well in a literary sense : the structure of his sentences may be perfect : the flow of his poetry may be as the running of a river ; but to pray well, with sense of divine nearness, with all the trembling pathos of self-accusation and self-conviction, is to live well. We must never own it to be possible that a man can worship truly and live iniquitously. He may direct his eyes to the right heavens, he may name the name of the right God, he may be found in recognised and honoured sanctuaries ; but his worship—the inner action of the soul—is wrong : otherwise it would be possible to construct a perfect hypocrisy, by pleasing God at one end of life and out-

witting him at the other. Where the true worship is the true life must be—not the perfect life, not the ideal life; but the life that would be right—the life inspired by noble purpose directed to the highest ends, the life that longs to be like the God it adores. To such worship we are called. We lose when we do not worship; we go down in the volume and quality of our being when we cease to pray. To pray is to multiply life; to pray to the right God, to bend before the appointed throne, to cling to the one Cross in which alone there is virtue, is to increase the volume of life, intellectual capacity, moral emotion, and every attribute that gives purity and dignity to man. For this reason we uphold the sanctuary, we open the book of revelation; and we must not be allured from the altar where we renew our youth, and where we daily read the record that can alone make wise.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

*"He shall not multiply horses to himself"* (v. 16). It appears to be substantiated that the horse was derived from High Asia, and was not indigenous in Arabia, Syria, or Egypt. They are not mentioned among the presents which Pharaoh bestowed upon Abraham, and occur in Scripture for the first time when the patriarch Joseph receives them from the Egyptians in exchange for bread (Gen. xlvi. 17)—evidently as valuable animals, disposed of singly, and not in droves or flocks like cattle and asses. They were still sufficiently important to be expressly mentioned in the funeral procession which accompanied the body of Jacob to his sepulchre in Canaan (Gen. l. 9); and, for centuries after, it does not appear that, under the domestic management of the Egyptians, unless the murrain had greatly reduced them, horses had multiplied as they would have done in a land more congenial to their habits, since only six hundred chariots appear to have pursued Israel (Exod. xiv. 7)—even admitting that there were other chariots and horsemen not included in that number. In the sculptured battle-scenes which are believed to represent victories of Sesostris, or Thothmes II. and III., over nations of Central Asia, it is evident that the enemy's armies, as well as the foreign allies of Egypt, are abundantly supplied with horses, both for chariots and for riders; and in triumphal processions they are shown as presents or tribute—proving that they were portions of the national wealth of conquered states sufficiently valuable to be prized in Egypt. At a later period, the books of Deuteronomy (xvii. 16, for the future kings of Israel are forbidden to possess many) and Joshua (xi. 4) furnish similar evidence of abundance of horses in the plains of Syria; and in Job occurs a description of a perfect war-horse, couched in the bold, figurative language of inspiration, such as remains unequalled by any other poet, ancient or modern.

## PRAYER.

Oh that we might do thy will, thou loving Father of us all! Not our will but thine be done; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. It is not the will of our Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. Thou hast no pleasure in death; thou art the God of life and immortality: thou dost live for ever, and thou hast offered us life eternal in Jesus Christ thy Son. This is life eternal: to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Give us such knowledge of thyself as we are able to receive. May we know thee by thy love, thy tenderness, thy daily compassion; may we feel thy nearness and answer thy touch, and return thy whispered love in many a vow of consecration. Thou hast been very kind to us, and merciful even unto tenderness; thy kindness has been lovingkindness; thy mercy has been tender mercy. Thou hast caused us to invent new words to meet the beauty of thy revelations; so we speak of thy lovingkindness and thy tender mercy, and say that thy mercy endureth for ever. May we realise this; may we answer this; may our whole life show that this is no mere assent to what we do not understand, but the utterance of a soul that has tested its own faith. We bless thee for all thy care: thine arms are round about us. The old man's journey is not yet concluded, because thou hast more light on earth for him to see; the little child is nursed and caressed and comforted that he may become strong in moral quality and noble in moral temper; the man of business is still taught that life is not in the ground but in the sky, and thou art offering to descend from above and make him live. Our houses are precious to thee: thou dost send the sunshine upon them; thou dost surround them by protection; and we are here to-day in thy house in a common language and with a common feeling blessing the one Father of the race. Thou hast raised up a Prophet for us: thou hast sent a Teacher from thyself to teach us. We know that Jesus has come from God, for no man could do the miracles which he did except God were with him; and we say to him every time we draw near to his feet,—Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher sent from God. May the hearer meet the Teacher in a right spirit, in a sweet temper, in an expectant mood of soul; and between the Teacher and the taught may there be a bond of vital sympathy; and may we all sit together at thy table, and eat and drink abundantly according to the terms of thy welcome. Amen.

### Deut. xviii. 15-22.

15. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?

22. When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

### THE PREDICTED PROPHET.

A WONDERFUL desire is this—no marvel that it elicited divine commendation:—

“Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not” (v. 16).

On hearing these words the Lord himself said,—

“They have well spoken that which they have spoken” (v. 17).

The divinity that is in a man seems to lie a long way down. Great circumstances are required really to rouse a man that he may see for a moment *himself*. It needed Sinai to make the people of Israel know that God could not be known. When God thundered upon them and spoke to them as it were face to face they begged that the interview might close. The very thing we desire is the very thing we could not endure. Why do we not learn from history, and draw wise conclusions from events within our own knowledge? But for the clouds, and the atmosphere, we could not bear the very sun without whose light and warmth we die. We seem to owe the sun to the very atmosphere that attempts his shining. It would occur to us that if God would speak directly from his throne all mankind with one consent would say, “The Lord he is God.” That experiment has been tried; and the very people who might be presumed to have

required it were the people who prayed that it might be concluded; they prayed that there might be no repetition; to have come so near to God was to have come too near in their then condition of mind and heart. All our plans have been tried, and they have failed. Some of the most obvious plans have been pronounced unwise, unnecessary, or fruitless. Once a man prayed a prayer to which many might have said Amen; but he was told from heaven that he was wrong. His idea was that if one rose from the dead his brethren, five in number, would repent; but he only saw part of the case. We see points, not lines; roofs of our own building and decorating, not skies arched and lighted by Deity. The Voice replied in effect,—Your plan seems to be natural and good; in reality it is worthless for all practical purposes: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” We cannot amend God’s way of coming to us; he made us, and not we ourselves; he knows what we can bear; his revelation in all its method and scope is not the least proof of his lovingkindness and tender mercy. Our own plans we should be the first to wish to have forgotten. We are called to acceptance, obedience, acquiescence with the divine will,—to say all prayers in one prayer: “Not my will, but thine, be done.” How God seems to be pleased when we say anything that is really in the soul of it along the lines of his own thought and purpose! We speak so many foolish words in his hearing, and do so many unwise deeds under his observation, that when we do touch the right chord the vibration is answered in heaven: when we do happen to speak the wise word in the right tone God himself descends upon us and leaves a new benediction. “They have well spoken that which they have spoken;”—they do not know how wise they have been. This is inspiration in its practical expression—to come to right conclusions regarding divine disclosure, divine approach to the soul, to have a right distance set between man and God. In such a temper God can deal with us, and enrich us largely with noble and unimagined riches.

The prophet who can do us good must be akin to us:

“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee” (v. 18).

A beautiful word is the “like unto.” It is a word frequently

used in the New Testament by the predicted Prophet himself. We have been educated by analogies, examples, and pictorial representations of things. "Like unto"—then Moses was the analogy. Solomon likened his loved one to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot. Jesus Christ likened the kingdom of heaven unto a thousand things beautiful, vital, poetical, apocalyptic,—things whose history was known and yet whose issues were immeasurable. So it must be in every degree. The teacher must be akin to the scholar or no good will be done—evidently not, if only on the ground that the language which is spoken by the teacher is not known to the wonder-struck scholar who listens to him with amazement and partial stupefaction. There are many languages within the bounds of the same language. All words are not the same words, even though they belong to a common tongue; moreover, the meaning is often in the emphasis, not in the word, the word being a mere convenience or starting-point—something on which the soul strikes its thought into accent and expression, which must be done in a moment or the whole idea is lost. Words are tormentors. Words are the occasion, as also the cause, of endless controversy. No two men pronounce the same word exactly alike in the ear of God. Tone holds meaning; the revelation is in the emphasis; and except we speak a common language, in the spiritual sense, there will be no increase of intellectual light or moral understanding, how eloquent soever may be the exposition of the unknown prophet. The scholars must exclaim, "How hear we every man in his own tongue, wherein we were born . . . the wonderful works of God?" This is the secret of the masonry between the teacher and the scholar: the one understands the other. The teacher can afford to be elliptical, because he knows the acuteness and the sympathy of the scholars to whom he is speaking: they can fill in all the vacant spaces: they know exactly the words which the speaker himself would have chosen but for pressure of time; so the lesson, though short is long, though brief as to words is endless as to suggestion. The teacher of the highest truths must speak in the language of sympathy. It is probably of no consequence in what tone a man expounds the physical sciences: they are not resentful in this matter of vocal expression: they will permit rudeness and violence of tone: the teacher need not

study the music of expression in endeavouring to make clear some geometrical problem; but Christ must be preached in Christ's own tone. The wise teacher will spend, if need be, days in trying to find out how to say: "Our Father, which art in heaven;" or "God is love;" or "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Words like these might be spoiled by the speaker; such heavens might be robbed of all their stars by a felonious interpreter of the higher things. We read: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." But the word surely would be there whether the tongue was learned or unlearned? In a narrow sense that is true: the word is there, composed of so many syllables and so many letters; but there must be a soul of its own quality to repeat the syllables, to give the letters force, to turn the printing into music, and by subtle persuasion tempt the soul to receive the celestial solace. God must, therefore, give not only the word but the tongue; and the true learning is in sympathy, kinship, unity of mind, and that peculiar knowledge of human nature which if it be not born in a man never can be put into him;—this is the gift of God.

Israel prayed that some other method of communication might be established between heaven and earth, saying,—Do not repeat this awful process, "that I die not:" let the life be spared. I can hear nothing—says the soul—because the thunder is so loud, and there is nothing in thunder to hear. At the great torrent of Niagara the one thing you cannot get is a draught of water. The traveller could quench his fiery thirst at a cool spring or a gentle stream, and lift up his head and be glad with religious thankfulness; but who dare, in the very agony of thirst, approach that infinite cascade? So God must not come to us in great thunder-bursts and torrents: he must not plead with us with his great power; he must conceal himself, dwarf himself, unmake himself in a sense known to the soul but difficult to explain in words; he must humble himself and take upon himself the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death;—in this quiet way, in this gracious approach, we make vital acquaintance with God. We do not know what we owe to quiet influences and to almost silent ministries. When the prodigal son—not the vulgar

criminal, but the prodigal son who has been wasting his life in any way you please—goes back to his mother—not his father, but his mother Nature—the *alma mater*, the loving mother, —all she wants him to do is to lie upon some sunny height, and think nothing, plan nothing, and release himself from the torment of his own genius and inventiveness, not to say anxiety and memory : she says—Poor prodigal, all you have to do is to do nothing : I will do it all ; lay your weary head down on some grassy knoll and have no mind : dismiss your great intellectual self and be a little child in your mother's house. Then with soft breezes and summer light and the ministry of birds far away yet near at hand, she will seem to be doing nothing, yet all the while she is pouring life-blood into the wasted one. Presently he will look around and feel himself a giant refreshed ; and he who thought he was spent feels the old spirit stirring within him, saying,—I must be back to the city, to the scene of legitimate strife, the places where the prizes are won ; my old mother has had me in her lap and has nursed me into thankfulness. They never recover who cannot do everything by doing nothing : they are diseased with the spirit of superfluous energy ; they are overweighted with the demon of fussiness ; they cannot lie down absolutely and say,—Mother Nature, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, by sitting up too long, by wearing out my poor energies ; I have almost committed suicide, and I have struggled home : now I am going to say nothing and do nothing but lie down here, and I know you will not let me die. What profit we might attain in the house of God if we could leave our genius outside—our cleverness, our theological prejudices, our mental sharpness, and say to the living God,—“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall !” Then the sweet music, and the nobler music of the read word, and the tender prayer, and the exposition, alight with so many glories, would all combine to renew our youth, and after the service we should mount up with wings as eagles, and ask the runner to compete with us, and walk down the young man in the pride of strength. Thus God teaches us by gentle prophecies, by apparently undemonstrative ministries—above all by One whose voice was not heard in the street, who did not lift up nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard more than was really necessary, who adapted the



thunder of his infinity to the weakness of our mortality. We should do more if we did less. We do not come to hear the prophet for the purpose of entering into disputation with him, but for the purpose of receiving streams of vitality, without name, without measure, too subtle for analysis, too delicate and divine for controversy. Thus, we must come to God's Book. If we come to it merely as literalists and critics it can be as silent as speechlessness itself; if we come with the broken heart it will heal our diseases.

If the prophet is not hearkened to, penalty will follow :—

“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (v. 19).

An opportunity of reading the Bible is an opportunity of increasing manhood. The hearing of any vital exposition of God's Book creates a responsibility in the life of the hearer which is absolutely immeasurable. If the people will not hearken unto the divine word spoken in the divine Name their not hearing shall be accounted an aggravation, an offence, and a sin. This must be so philosophically as well as morally. To have been near a great teacher is to have been close to an open gate, the entrance of which would have brought one into a kind of paradise; but to have been near a great teacher sent from God, and not to have observed him or profited by him or blessed him in the name of the Lord, is to have gone down in the volume and in the quality of manhood. Do not imagine that men can despise the Bible and be as good as ever. To scorn the divine is to lose the human. Not to pray nobly is to live narrowly. We do not only offend God by our impiety, we wrong our own soul.

The false prophet was to be known by the thing not coming to pass which he spake (v. 22). That is a right test; that is a proper standard. If the proof is not in the result there is no proof. If the wicked man be really and truly happy in his soul the Bible is a falsehood. If vice can create heaven—the heaven of purity, innocence, and the rest which comes of harmony—then the Gospel is an exaggeration and a pretence. Let everything be judged by the result. Christ himself said so: judge the tree by its fruit. He would have no praise of the tree; he will not have himself spoken of merely from a horticultural point of view,

nor will he have his people described as trees only—large trees, noble in height, umbrageous, the refuge of singing birds, beautiful in leafage: such compliments are hateful to him: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” The Bible is thus the most rational of all books as to its judgments. The issue is plain and clear. If the thing the prophet says—meaning by prophet a teacher sent from God—does not come true, then he has not spoken the words God told him to speak. Christianity must lay claim to this same standard: she must consent to be judged, not by her metaphysics but by her beneficence; not because she has a theory of the Godhead, but because she can redeem humanity.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

Deut. xix. 1-13.—Moses set apart out of the sacerdotal cities six as “cities of refuge.” There were, on the eastern side of the Jordan, three, namely, “Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country of the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead of the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan of the Manassites” (Deut. iv. 43); on the western side three, namely, “Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah” (Josh. xx. 7). If found desirable then other cities might be added. To *any* of these cities a person who had unawares and unintentionally slain *any one* might flee, and if he reached it before he was overtaken by the avenger of blood, he was safe within its shelter, provided he did not remove more than a thousand yards (Numb. xxxv. 5) from its circuit, nor quit the refuge till the decease of the high-priest under whom the homicide had taken place. If, however, he transgressed these provisions, the avenger might lawfully put him to death. The roads leading to the cities of refuge were to be kept in good repair. Before, however, the fugitive could avail himself of the shelter conceded by the laws, he was to undergo a solemn trial, and make it appear to the satisfaction of the magistrates of the place where the homicide was committed that it was purely accidental. Should he, however, be found to have been guilty of murder, he was delivered “into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he might die.”

And the Israelites were strictly forbidden to spare him either from considerations of pity or in consequence of any pecuniary ransom. This disallowal of a compensation by money in the case of murder shows a just regard for human life, and appears much to the advantage of the Hebrew legislation when compared with the practice of other countries (Athens, for instance, and Islam), in which pecuniary atonements were allowed, if not encouraged, and where, in consequence, the life of the poor must have been in as great jeopardy as the character of the wealthy.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who can find out the meaning of thy word? It is exceeding broad. Thy word is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword; it hurts us whilst we read it, but it kills that it may make alive again. Thy word is full of gentleness, though so severe. If thou hast torn us, thou wilt heal us; if thou hast rent us, thou wilt bind us up again: in a day or two all will be well: the wound will be healed and the pain will be forgotten. Thou dost give life: thou art the God of immortality; thou healest disease; thou hast written thy condemnation upon death; thou lovest health and life and growth and all beauty and fruitfulness;—towards the creation of these all thy ministries tend: we would be found within the sphere of their operation; we would obediently submit ourselves unto their requirements and laws, that, being brought into the harmony of thy movement, we might respond to thy word with delight and turn thy statutes into songs. But who can do this for us? Is not Jesus Christ thy Son able to work even this miracle? We now pray that the miracle may be accomplished. Lord, that we might see! Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make us clean! Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on us! Other men have passed by and paid no heed to us: they could not touch our inmost complaint; but thou art almighty: the key of the house of David is upon thy shoulder: thou hast all power and all grace, and thy love will accomplish our redemption. We bless thee that there is no case beyond thy reach. Thou knowest altogether what we are and what we need, and fulness of provision has been made in the Gospel: the Cross of Christ healeth the diseases of the soul. We return to the Saviour. We have gone after other leaders, and they have led us into the ditch, for we were both blind; but now we come to Jesus Christ again and again, and he is gracious enough to forgive our wanderings and receive us home. We would that thy word might be made plain to us, that we might see somewhat at least of its meaning and feel its unction and acknowledge its power. Thy word is truth. Truth will touch our life at every point, granting unto our necessity an answer of fulness, to our pain an answer of ease, to our desire an answer of contentment. Lead us into all truth—the infinite palace of God, the inner universe towards which all other things point in wonder and with delight. Pity us in our weaknesses, and count them not against us in the judgment. Thou wilt not pity our sin, but thou wilt pity the sinner; and as for our sin, what is it compared with thy grace? Where sin aboundeth grace much more aboundeth, pouring itself in ocean fulness over all the marks of the wrong-doer. Help us to live our few remaining days well: we will be gone to-morrow, and the day after is the judgment; we walk along the brink over which we must presently slip: we are seen a moment, yet in a little while we are not seen—but with the eyes of recollection.

May we work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work. We are not needful to thee. Thou dost take us away, and behold the world is not aware that we have been removed. Thou dost so teach us not to rely upon one another, but to live and move and have our being in thyself. Thou art the same, and thy years fail not: amid all rising, flourishing, and dying thou lookest on in eternal youth. Regard our loved ones; if they will not make prayers for themselves, Jesus, our Intercessor, will surely pray for them, and they will receive replies without having offered requests. Thou doest exceeding abundantly above not only what we ask but what we think: our thought is left below, and the fountains of thy grace are opened in the skies, and great rains of blessing are poured out upon the thirst of life. Hear us in these things. Hear us for the land we love, for the throne to which we are bound, for all the institutions that represent the highest thought and best ambition of life; and overrule all things to the inbringing of the kingdom which is all purity and sunshine and music. Amen.

#### Deut. xix.

“When the Lord thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the Lord thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses; thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it” (vv. 1, 2).

#### DIVINELY-PROVIDED REFUGE.

WHEN a blessing has been conferred a duty is to follow. This would seem to be the method of the divine kingdom. That kingdom does not consist wholly of blessing, sentiment, ease, and honour; the kingdom of God is a kingdom of duty and discipline, calling upon its possessors to be faithful and gracious, to obey certain commandments, and to hold the kingdom feudally, —not as of right, but as from the Lord, to whom an account must be rendered. Whenever the Lord gives us cities we have a work of separation to do. The cities are not given to us wholly: they are only given to us partially. The Lord still maintains his position upon earth, though he is throned in heaven; he has cities upon the earth that are peculiarly his own. Whatever city is given to us must have part of it set aside as God’s, for God’s use, and concerning which an account must be rendered to God. Had the message been all upon one side, how subtle and tremendous would have been the temptation addressed to human vanity and ambition!—the Lord will give you cities; he will cast out the heathen and the stranger before you; you shall enter into the palaces of their kings and enjoy the riches of all their

generations. Had the message run in that line it would have been an evil. There is nothing really in the very soul of it good that does not involve the element of discipline. Regard it as a fact established by all history and approved by all the philosophy that is founded upon experience, that at some point man must bow the knee, and acknowledge lordship and divine right and claim; and wherever he thus bows the knee man sets up an altar. Human will must be broken. This is a doctrine which benevolent but foolish parents endeavour to evade: they bring up their children with an unbroken will, and call it graciousness and good-nature;—it is baseness, selfishness, cruelty: it is leaving that to be done by a stranger which ought to have been done by the spirit of home and the genius of love. We are called upon to acknowledge God in all our possessions, to have our will broken in the sense of rejecting the idea of sole proprietorship or absolute claim, and in the sense of saying concerning many a fair city,—This is God's, not mine;—concerning many a wedge of gold,—This is the Lord's, not mine. When the human spirit has been brought to that concession, and can make the surrender graciously, lovingly, and thankfully, the miracle of grace has been accomplished in the reluctant or obdurate heart. Israel could keep the cities, and include the three that ought to have been separated in the bill of ownership; but the Lord could have withheld the rain, and no city could live without the clouds: the Lord could have shifted the wind into the quarter whence cometh blight, cold, and desolation; no city can live without the south-west wind. We may claim all, but we cannot keep all. To put the three cities into our bag and lodge them with the usurer is not to outwit God: the Sovereign will take out his claim in health, or wealth, or peace: but his claim must be recognised and satisfied. Listen not to the sophism which says that all cities are God's: there is a morality which is too grandiloquent; reject the suggestion that all days are God's: there is a liberality that gives nothing. God has always secured three of the cities or more, part of every harvest-field, a few grapes at least out of every vineyard, one day in the week; the claim has not been great in extent in relation to the territory which has been covered, but the making of it is the assertion of sovereign right, and the satisfaction of it is an expression of human obedience.

“Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither” (v. 3).

There was to be public proclamation of the existence of the cities of refuge. The picture is a very striking one. There were signs put up along the road leading to the cities of refuge, and on the signs was written the word “miklot”—refuge. What a sign to come upon in the hour of despair and oppressed weakness! The man who was fleeing, having shed innocent blood, looked anxiously around that he might observe the standard bearing the magic word *miklot*; seeing that word, he fled along the road which was indicated by the gracious term. Fix the mind upon the picture until the picture itself glows into a beautiful gospel. A man has done wrong: he knows the consequences of his wrong-doing, even though the wrong was a misadventure: instantly he flees for refuge; he did not make the city of refuge: he may not know in what direction the city of refuge lies; but here and there and again the standard is lifted up and on it written—*refuge*. The man does not run the other way, or ask who wrote the *miklot*, or enter into discussion as to the form of the letters and the right of those letters to be where they are; nor does he ask the age of the standard, or why it is not on the other side of the road: the man is in earnest: the avenger is behind him: he has no time for questions or controversy about the refuge;—Where lies the city?—and seeing an indication of its position he “flees for refuge” to the city that is set before him. Our public roads should have no lack of standards of a higher and nobler kind: the wrong-doer should have no doubt left upon his mind as to what direction to take in the time of self-accusation and self-despair. Every Christian should be a stranger, having written upon him “miklot”—refuge; every church should be an open door, opened towards heaven, pardon, and peace. We must not be afraid to say that all our Christianity exists in the first instance for the purpose of saving the wrong-doer who wishes to be saved. That is the primary purpose of the Church; other purposes are no doubt included, but the one initial, all-commanding object of the Church is to be a city of refuge, a place where the lamp of hope burns brightly, a sanctuary where the gospel words are spoken with

gospel fervour and unction. The Church of the living God should resound with the cry :—Flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel. The enormous—the incalculable—difficulty is that men do not recognise themselves as in need of refuge. We must have destroyed within us the sophism that we are fit to be at large. So long as we walk up and down the city complacently approving ourselves and quoting instances of our own wisdom and virtue, any standard bearing the word *miklot*—refuge—is an offence to us. The Gospel was never meant for any man who can take care of himself: it is a city of refuge; and men only ask for refuge when they hear the pursuit of the avenger, or know themselves to be objects deserving punishment. Where do we find the refugees in the church? Men are not there as refugees: they are there as upon equal terms with the Lord of the sanctuary; they patronise that Lord: they subscribe to his reputation upon the earth: they light his lamps for him, and they expect to be rewarded for their loyalty;—whereas men ought to be in the church in a state of breathlessness, then in a state of thankfulness for security; then, sometimes, as if hearing just outside the stroke of the avenger, they should pray more mightily and sing their praises more fervently, knowing that the avenger may smite the wall and hurt himself, but can never reach those who are hidden in the place of refuge—“Jesus, Refuge of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly.” We should realise this conception of the Church, and doing so we shall not be slow to put up in the city the sign-post and the index-finger; nor shall we scruple to use the word “refuge,” or the word “salvation,” for we shall speak the word with the emphasis and the unction of personal gratitude.

“And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past: as when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live: lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past” (vv. 4-6).

Here is the principle that actions as between man and man are to be discriminated. Everything depends upon motive. The

action is not complete in itself, and remains a mystery or an enigma until the motive has been penetrated and understood. This discrimination of actions would destroy many a sacred phantasm. The law applies in both directions. Supposedly good actions are to be examined in the light of this law as well as actions that are supposedly vicious. If everything depends upon the motive, what becomes of the fabric of a life-time? How much easier it would be to live from the outside than to live from an interior centre! The hand can do so many things easily as an expression of skill and mechanical cleverness, whilst the heart may be away committing murder and theft, and breaking all the commandments at one tremendous stroke. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. What temples of charity are thrown down because the action of an evil motive was in the midst of them!—the action itself was beautiful, reputable, and was accepted by society with applause; but the spirit of the Book asks for the motive which originated the charity or the action, and finding that to be of base quality the action itself goes for less than nothing, and in the great book of account is set down against the doer. If our good actions are set down against us, who can pay the sum-total of the debt? Thus, we are thrown back upon spiritual thoughts and spiritual considerations. All our mechanical and outside arrangements and institutions go for nothing: the Lord asks but one question,—What is your motive? What do you really mean? What is your purpose?—and the answer to that inquiry being in the right tone, all the rest will be accounted to us: even our dreams shall be temples, and our cup of cold water shall be as a goblet of wine.

But there was another kind of man-slayer—what was to become of him?—

“But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee” (vv. 11-13).

The universe was not constituted to give security to murderers: there is no shelter for a man-hater. He may get into a city of



refuge, but he is to be dragged out of it: the evil-doer may make a profession of religion, but his cloak, though of velvet and gold-braided, must be torn from his shoulders. The universe has no lodgment for the man of malicious heart and murderous spirit; the city of refuge in Israel was not built for him: he has no right in it; to pity him is to despise the law: to pity the murderer is to forget the murdered. The eyes of justice are fixed upon both points in the case. When justice weeps, it weeps over the murdered life, not over the hand that killed it. It is an evil sentiment that spares the wrong-doer and forgets the wrong-endurer, the sufferer of wrong. There is one place appointed for the murderer. Who is the murderer? Not the shedder of blood:—whoso hateth his brother without a cause is a murderer. We must have frank speech in the sanctuary. The terms themselves are awful, but they are disinfected by the very spirit of the sanctuary in which they are uttered; and it ought to be possible in God's house to speak any word that can be spoken by human tongue, so that it may be approved or condemned—acquitted or sentenced to unquenchable fire. The only place for the malicious man is hell,—and hell cannot burn out the spirit of malice. The spirit of malice is the spirit of evil, or the evil spirit,—the stranger from God, the further from the spirit of love. This is the great law not of Israel only, but of the Church of Christ in all ages. Beware of malice! It does not always begin in its broadest form, or leap at once in all its intensity into human action: it begins in little frets and spites and jealousies; it starts out of a root of criticism, of fault-finding, and investigations into consistency; it may begin as a clever action, showing the spirit of judgment, and proving itself to be equal to the analysis of the most hidden motive; but it grows; disappointed, it begins to justify itself; foiled in its attempts to succeed, it retires that it may increase the supposed evidence that is at command; then it returns to the onslaught; it grows by what it feeds on; at last, philanthropy—love of man—dies, and misanthropy—hatred of man—takes its place. Then is the soul a murderer; and, thank God, there is no city of refuge for the murderer of life, of hope, of love, of trust!—open the door and thrust ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness!—the sun will not spare a beam to

bless the murderer. Again and again ask the question,—Who are the murderers? There are murderers who never shed blood—men who are killing their household circle every day, mothers who are killing their children every hour, supposed friends who are living upon the agony of those whom they oppress with their kindness. Let the word of God have free course in the soul—not only as a blessing, but as a criticism and as a judgment; and let us, hearing the sentence, obey the command.

Then is it even so? May accidental sins be provided for, but is there no provision made for those who cry out in the bitterness of their souls, each for himself,—I am a murderer: I have slain the good; I have entertained malice where I ought to have entertained nothing but gratitude; I have been unjust and cruel;—is there no refuge for me?—the *miklot* is a mockery to me if the city be meant only for those who are chargeable with misadventure? Now comes the great gospel speech: Christ is the city of refuge—but understand in what sense, lest the very goodness of God be profaned and prostituted. Christ is not a refuge in the sense of a criminal being able to outrun justice. The picture in Israel was the picture of a man fleeing for refuge and an avenger fleeing after him, and if the avenger were swifter of foot the man-slayer might be killed outside the city. There is no such picture in Christianity. In Christ we do not outrun justice: justice itself, by a mystery we can neither understand nor explain, has been satisfied by Christ. This is not to be made a matter of words: the controversialist is not here to offer his impertinent opinion; the question lies entirely between men who are in agony and Christ who offers refuge. There is no place for controversy or criticism, or coming to an understanding with all the factors in the case; this is an instance of self-convicted men, conscious of having done wrong and only wrong, asking if there is no *miklot* in all the universe for them, when they hate the wrong and repent it with bitterness of soul. Christianity is not a clever contrivance for outwitting justice. The mystery of the Cross lies within that thought. What that mystery is we cannot say. Now and then we seem to see somewhat of its meaning. God is just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly; Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree; he suffered the just for the unjust; he was wounded

for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him. We do not know what it means; but there are times when we need just these words and no other: they are full of rest, hope, music; to analyse them is to slay the life that you may find its secret. The soul can but hear them now and then, but when they are heard, suddenly there is with the soul a multitude of the heavenly host singing,—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.” Do not ask to have that great light brought within the sphere that is visual and comprehensible: let it stand in its own place, fixed by the hand of God; and when we are weariest, saddest, and most severe with ourselves we shall see that light and call it heaven. The refuge in Christ is based upon confession, repentance, and restitution. Let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. The action is one of intensity. We are not loitering upon the road, talking upon indifferent subjects as we ramble along: we are fleeing—running at our utmost speed: if we attract attention at all, it is by the swiftness of our motion and the eagerness of our action. How does a man run when the wolf is pursuing him over the snow?—how the horses plunge and urge forward then! How do men flee when fire is following them?—when the whole prairie is ablaze and the wind is a weapon of fire? How do men flee from a building that is tottering and might at any moment fall? From all such images gather some hint of the meaning of the words:—flee for refuge: make haste: heed nothing but the attainment of the sanctuary which has been built by God: its open door is a welcome: it was meant for sinners, it was built for sinners: it was not set up for righteous men, but for men unrighteous and lost. This is the Gospel which Christianity has to preach. It has no other Gospel; and it can only preach it with effect to men who are conscious of having done wrong. If any man say,—I have no sin,—the Gospel has no speech of welcome to make to him, but a speech of condemnation, saying,—He is a liar; “if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But we cannot understand the mystery: the evil deed was done, and God in his omnipotence says to us—Leave me to expunge the evil; as for you—flee for refuge!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, though we dwell in tabernacles of clay, yet dost thou not withhold thy light from our window, but dost surround us with the morning glory, and call us, in the midst of all the joy of light, to the joy and sacrifice of labour. Though we are consumed before the moth, to teach us how little we are, yet are we also conscious of being immortal in God: so shall we outlive all stars and suns and worlds, and be for ever with the Lord. We thank thee for this lifting up of the heart in sacred rapture: it makes us feel thy nearness when we yield to thy power, and it gives strength to our confidence when we hear the voice of thy grace. Surely thou art nigh unto them that call upon thee, and thine hand is outstretched in almightiness to those who put their trust in thee in the time of fear and danger and great distress. It is our joy to believe in thy nearness, in the tenderness of thy love, in the long-suffering of thy patience, in the all-helpfulness of thy power. We have heard of thy Son—that this Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. He came to seek and to save that which was lost: he did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. We confess our sin: we mourn it with bitterness; yet we cannot but rejoice that Jesus Christ came in answer to it. Our sin brought thy Son into the world that he might save us from its guilt and consequence. A wondrous mystery this in thy rule! We see the stars in the darkness, not in the light: we see all thy mercy, compassion, love, and tears in the darkness of our sin. Oh, how the stars glitter! How great their number! Blessed be God, all these are witnesses of thy care for us. Thou wilt not willingly see the sinner die: thou hast no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?—is a word which has been traced to thine own lips. We accept it now; it is addressed to ourselves; it is an inquiry of love. Lord, by thy grace we will not die: we will arise and go to our Father, and speak words of penitence and self-loathing. We know that whilst we are yet a great way off thou wilt see us, and run and have compassion and fall upon our neck and kiss us, and adopt us into the family again;—this is the exceeding love of God; this is the mystery of infinite pity. God be merciful unto us sinners! The Lord magnify his grace over our guilt that we may see how great is the compassion of God, and how infinite the resources of love. We pray that thine house may be as a door opening upon heaven. We desire that this elevation may enable us to see beyond the boundary of time and behold somewhat of the gleaming and beauty of the city that lies beyond. O fair city! beauteous home of beauteous souls! We yearn for its purity, we weary to enter its rest, we long to know the mystery of its service. We bless thee that thou hast

set a city of allurements before us—a fascination in the skies, a Jerusalem above, a mother city, waiting for us and bidding us come up higher. We need such exhortation and comfort, such stimulus and solace, all our days; and this great privilege we attain and secure through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who died for us and rose again, and is able to make intercession for us at the right hand of God; he is our Surety, our Saviour, our Propitiation; we flee unto him as pursued men flee into a city of refuge. Jesus, Refuge of my soul, let me hide myself in thee. This is the cry of the heart;—to such a cry thou wilt send a great answer. Amen.

### Deut. xx. 8.

“And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart.”

### FAINTHEARTEDNESS.

**I**N order to see the full beauty and meaning of this charge we must read the words which lead up to it. Arrangements are being made in view of possible battle. It is well in life always to be prepared for war even whilst we are praying for peace. The question might arise in the minds of the children of Israel,—What shall we do in the day of battle? Instructions having distinct reference to that inquiry are given in this chapter.

“When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (v. 1).

There is an exhortation:—“Be not afraid of them.” Following the exhortation is the reason upon which it is founded: “For the Lord thy God is with thee.” No matter what the number of the enemy; it is of no consequence how many horses he has, and how their necks are clothed with thunder: there is One who maketh the mountains smoke before him; thy God is the Almighty and Eternal God, and he will see that the battle ends on the side of right. This verse calls us to take the religious view of every engagement in life. We must be sure that we start aright,—that is to say, that our cause is good at the core—just, wise, reasonable, and generous. The cause being right, everything in the universe that is right is of necessity on its side: the stars of heaven fight for righteousness. Whatever may be the nature of accidental or temporary circumstances, the issue

is perfectly certain :—he shall come and reign, whose right it is. Ever the right comes uppermost. Acting upon this conviction, how calm is the man whose conscience approves him! He knows that the waves can only come to a certain line; he says, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" "The Lord reigneth;" the God of heaven is the God who battles on the side of right. This exhortation does not apply only to national wars, but to all the controversies which constitute the action and the tragedy of life. Every man is called to battle in some way, at some place, at some time. Life itself is a battle: we wrestle not against flesh and blood, it may be, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world—the invisible host banded in a common oath to destroy the kingdom of truth. "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." This is the foundation upon which all further instruction given in this chapter is based. The battle puts our religion to the test: we do not know whether we are religious or not, in the profound sense of the term, until we come to battle. It is easy to sing at midsummer, when all visible nature challenges us in gracious tones to lift our voice in solemn praise. There is no strain upon a man to thank God when he sits under his own blossoming trees and hears the birds trilling their incoherent hymn. That is not piety: it is selfishness of the vilest kind—the selfishness which electroplates itself with piety: the mean, personal consideration which cloaks itself with a sentiment thin as a morning cloud. See what men are when they are under stress—when the storm pours upon the roof, when the enemy thunders at the door, when death takes away the delight of the eyes, when every room in the house is a sick-chamber, when business is unprosperous, and all things seem to conspire in a desperate confederacy against the progress of life;—it is then we know whether our religion is solid, healthy, rational, and built upon eternal foundations.

The officers were commanded to order off certain people :—

"What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it" (v. 5).

He might be thinking about his new house and its appointments, its luxuries and manifold enjoyments, and thus he would cease to be a soldier. A soldier must have no home, or find a home wherever he finds a field.

“And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it” (v. 6).

He will be thinking about his grapes, and wine, and luscious delights, and by so much he will lose the quality of a soldier. A soldier must have no vineyards, no wine-goblets, no table at which to satisfy the desires of the epicure: he must drink the living air, he must eat the food he finds at his foot; he must always be ready for the sound of the trumpet calling to battle.

“And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her” (v. 7).

We must have no softness, no sentiment, no yielding stuff in this army,—nothing but steel, iron, adamant, determination, incorruptible and invincible.

Having ordered off all these people, the officers proceeded still further to weed the army:—

“What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart” (v. 8).

The army might thus be greatly reduced; we must remember, however, that reduction may mean increase. We do not conquer by number but by quality. One hero is worth ten thousand cowards. Cæsar is in himself more than all his legions. Quality counts for everything in the greatest battles and the most strenuous moments of life. Given the right quality, and the issue is certain. Quality never gives in: quality is never beaten; quality flutters a challenge in its dying moments, and seems to say, I will rise again and continue the fight from the other side. So the army was reduced, and yet the army was increased in the very process of reduction. To-day the great speech is made over again:—“What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.”

We cannot deny the fact that most Christian professors are fainthearted; they are not heroic souls. The great proportion of Christian professors are people who are "not well." The number of invalids in the Church would surprise the imagination of the most audacious dreamer. This is not a world for the fainthearted: it is a world of strife, wear and tear, conflict, tumult, trial by fire, and temptation by the chief intellect of hell; it is a rough world; it has well been described as being out of joint. Those who would take hold of the world aright must be inured to hardship: they must "endure hardship as good soldiers of Christ." We are not speaking of the weak, but of the fainthearted; not of men inflicted with an infirmity, but of hearts that have lost—if ever they had—the heroic nerve. The Church is now the most timid of all influences in the world. Granting that there are sections of the great Christian Church marked by marvellous energy—for which we thank God—yet, speaking of the Church as a whole, it is suffering from faintheartedness, timidity, fear: that spirit which cannot live in the society of love, that gruesome, dark-faced thing that dare not look at love: for love would slay it with light. What is the explanation of faintheartedness? Want of conviction. Given a convinced Church, and a heroic Church is the consequence; given a Church uncertain, unconvinced, and you have a Church that any atmosphere can affect and any charlatan can impose upon. We must, therefore, return to foundations, to central principles, to primary realities; and having made sure of these the rest will arrange itself. Where is conviction? There may be a good deal of concession: there may be a strong indisposition to object to, or to deny, or to bring into discredit, theological problems and religious usages, but what is needed is something more: clear, well-reasoned, strongly-grounded conviction; and where this rules the mind every faculty is called into service, and the battle of life is conducted with heroic decision and chivalrous self-forgetfulness.

It was well understood in Israel that the fainthearted man does more harm than he supposes he does. It is the same all the world over and all time through. The timid man says,—I will sit behind. Does his retirement behind mean simply one man has gone from the front? It means infinitely more: it is a



loss of influence, a loss of sympathy, a loss of leadership. A Christian professor is not at liberty to say he will abide in the shade: he will allow the claims of others: any place, how obscure soever, will do for him. Have no patience with men who tell such lies! They have no right to be behind: their mission should be to find the best place, and to wake up every energy—to stir up the gift that is in them; and every man should feel that the battle depends upon him. The discouraging influence of faintheartedness it is impossible to describe in words. Better have a congregation of six souls of light, and fire, and love, than have a great crowd without conviction, easy-going, flaccid in sentiment and thought,—without central realities and foundations that can be relied upon. “What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go”—he is not a loss: his going is the gain of all who are left behind: he made other people cold, he discouraged the young, he threw a gloom and a frown upon all that was proceeding in the Church: he disliked passion and music and beauty and brightness; no genial word ever came out of his lips; his hands never grasped the hand of soldier with heroic firmness;—he must go, and we will send no blessing after him, for he would have no capacity to receive it. The great work of weeding the Church army must be carried out. It must be carried out in the ministry. There are men, unquestionably, in every ministry who have no right to be there—respectable, pedantic, literal, self-considering, afraid of giving offence, so prudent as to be imprudent, so wise as to become foolish. The ministry must be rid of them: they are not created in heaven, and they have no right to be in this position upon earth. So with all ranks, classes, and stations in the Church. The one man we must get rid of is the fainthearted man—the timid, cowering, self-considering professor, who is thankful when all is over without any accident having occurred,—a fear-ridden soul, a fear-darkened mind; he must be exhorted—unhappily for his destination—to return to his own house, probably because no other house would receive him. Let him go: the pulpit will be the better for his absence, the Church will be the warmer for his retirement, the young will then lift up their voices and be glad. Who has not seen the saddest of all pictures—a child beginning to dance and sing the moment the father has left the house? That is a

scene to make the soul sad. The child should never dance and sing so much as when his father comes back: and the father should dance and sing with the child, and *be* the child, and thus gladness should sound in every room of the house.

How marvellously faintheartedness shows itself! In one case it is fear of heresy. We hear of certain young people throwing off old habits and ways, and thereupon we become fainthearted, forgetting that there is a time in life when cleverness is the little imp that tempts men to their own destruction,—forgetting that there is a very critical period in life when the boy is too tall for a jacket and too young for a coat! We should bring into our view all the intermediate periods of life, and all transitional processes, assured that outside the Church there is nothing but a mighty famine, swine-feeding, and the bitterness of soul will send the young wanderer back again. In another case it is fear of criticism. What will the people next door say? What will the adjoining Church think? What will other men declare their judgment? The false and cowardly speech runs thus:—I have no wish myself about the matter: personally I should say nothing to obstruct the suggestion; but I am afraid it will be misunderstood, and that others will form an improper or inaccurate opinion about it. A man talking so representing other people! A man assuming a penetration like that ought to have had a courage equal to his genius. In another case it is fear of sensation. Our ministry has been wrecked in many instances by cold-hearted and mean-spirited men who ought never to have had the influence associated with official promotion. We must not advertise, because some people might misunderstand it; we must not have too much music, because there are persons unable to follow the mystery of praise; we must not have anything unusual. To have such fainthearted men in the Church is the bitterest trial that Christ has now to undergo. As for his enemies, he will rule them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel; but the fainthearted and the timid—those who have no conviction or daring or chivalry—they wear out the life of the true minister, and they curse the home where they live. There is another faintness which is rather to the credit of the man who experiences it—a faintness arising from great service, long-continued effort, and noble sacrificial consecration. When a

man pours out his life for the cause he may well be faint now and then. A beautiful sentiment in Scripture describes his condition:—"faint, yet pursuing"—putting out the arm in the right direction, looking along the right road, and saying in mute eloquence,—Give me breathing time, and I will join you again; let me rest awhile; do not take my sword away: in a day or two at most I will be at the front of the fight. That is a faintness which may be the beginning of great strength. So God is gracious to us: having no sympathy with timidity and fear and cowardliness, he has infinite compassion upon those who, having worn themselves out in service, need space and time for breathing. This exhortation comes back in a great trumpet-blast:—"What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return into his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." It is difficult to stand against discouragement: it is awfully, awfully hard to keep warm in the presence of an iceberg. Not only is the man himself a coward: he is making cowards of others. So with regard to the pulpit and to every department of Christian service, this word must sound out more and more clearly: if any man wants money, let him go and return unto his house;—if any man wants ease; if any man would be exempt from criticism and hardship; if any man is seeking to abound with the decaying and withering tributes of life; if any man is ambitious for mere applause, let him go and return unto his own house. Christ can do without him: he is hindered by him.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou spreadest our table in the sight of our enemies; our cup runneth over; goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life. When we went into a far country and there felt the pains of hunger, we were moved to return again, saying,—In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. Lord, evermore give us this bread! This is the true bread that cometh down from heaven, of which, if a man eat, he shall hunger no more. Lord, evermore give us this bread! We have thought to satisfy ourselves with the stones of the field, and, behold, we have become more and more an hungered. Give us the true bread which cometh down from heaven. May we eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son, and thus have life abiding in us, even eternal life. We have followed the way of evil, and have been stung by disappointments beyond all number; but now we return to our Father's house, where the feast is spread, where hospitality is offered to the poorest and the meanest; and we would sit down here at thy bidding, King of the feast, Master of assemblies, and eat and drink abundantly of the wisdom and grace and love of the Triune God. We have longed for this mystery: we have become weary with things we can handle and understand and measure and set back in our contempt: we have longed for the tabernacle in the wilderness, for the shekinah-cloud, for the trumpet of convocation, for the descending Deity. Having come into thine house, may we enter into the mystery of its grandeur and the deeper mystery of its peace; here may we enjoy conscious pardon through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ: may we arise from this attitude of prostration into a pasture of triumph, release, joy, through the Holy Ghost, and go out to do life's duty with new strength, new hope, immortal courage. We are in the Lord's banqueting-house; we are not in the wilderness, we are not in stony places, we are not exiles; but, through the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God, we are children at home. Let our hearts be glad and let our eyes lift themselves up to the heavens, and see how much there is yet to begin, and what spaces have to be covered, and what possible services may have to be rendered. Thus may we bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the concerns, the burdens, the pains of the passing hour. Speak comfortably to those whose hearts are sore with a bitterness they cannot explain, and come thou, as thou only canst come, to hearts that are bowed down in self-distrust, in utter penitence and contrition, and are crying for the rest that can only come through pardon. Send messages, sweet singing gospels, to our loved ones at home, whether well or ill, but with special tenderness to those who are shut up in the chamber where they must soon die. The Lord comfort

those who are weak, and when heart and flesh do fail be thou more than ever to the faith that has hung upon thee in simple love. Double the joy of those who are drinking deep of gladness to-day, but chasten their delight lest they become presumptuous and forget God. Lead, kindly Light—go before us, Spirit of Peace, make us quiet with thine own security, make us strong with thine own power. Amen.

### Deut. xx. 19.

‘When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man’s life) to employ them in the siege.’

### CUTTING DOWN FRUIT-TREES

IT will be observed that this instruction is given to the Jews in the event of their going to war against any city. No question of mere horticulture arises in connection with this injunction. It is wantonness that is forbidden; it is not art that is decried. Trees that did not bear fruit were of course available for war, but trees that could be used for purposes of sustaining human life were to be regarded as in a sense sacred and inviolable.

A prohibition of this kind is charged with lofty moral significance. When men go to war they are in hot blood; everything seems to go down before the determination to repulse the enemy and establish a great victory. But here men in their keenest excitement are to discriminate between one thing and another, and are not to permit themselves to turn the exigencies of war into an excuse for wantonness or for the destruction of property that bears an intimate relation to human sustenance. It would be easy in times of calmness to admire and preserve beautiful fruit-trees, but imagine an army of soldiers rushing up to an orchard, and standing still before it as if they had suddenly come upon an altar—a god! surely that were a severe trial of human patience. If one of the trees could have been cut down the victory might have been won, or certainly the enemy might have been baffled; but even under such circumstances law was to be religiously respected. Dropping all that is merely incidental in the instruction, the moral appeal to ourselves is perfect in completeness and dignity. Civilisation has turned

human life into a daily war. We live in the midst of contentions, rivalries, oppositions, and fierce conflicts of every kind, and God puts down his law in the very midst of our life and calls upon us to regulate everything by its sacredness. God has not left human life in a state of chaos; his boundaries are round about it; his written and unwritten laws constitute its restraints, its rewards and its penalties; and even war in its most violent form is not to blind our eyes to the claims of God. Men say that all is fair in love and war, but this proverbial morality has no sanction in holy scripture. We are too apt to plead the exigency of circumstances in extenuation of acts that would not have otherwise been committed. It is evident that there are points in life at which circumstances must triumph or law must be maintained. Thus an appeal is made to reason and conscience in nearly every day. When the human or the divine must go down, the Christian ought to have no hesitation as to his choice.

Victories may be bought at too high a price. He who gives fruit-bearing trees in exchange for his triumphs may be said to have paid his soul for the prizes of this world. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" What is a warrior profited if he gain the province, and cut down every fruit-tree, and burn up every harvest-field, and dry all the wells and fountains of the land? Thus again and again comes upon us the certainty of the law that a man may purchase even his victories at too high a price. This applies to all kinds of victories,—victories, for example, which relate to property, influence, social position, and all the vanities of life. This is the danger which Christ was constantly pointing out. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" "Fear him who hath power to destroy both body and soul in hell." "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." A wonderful foresight is discovered in the injunction of the text. The speaker is endeavouring to show that the present victory may be overborne by future suffering. We shall require the fruit-trees after the victory has been established: but if we have cut down the fruit-trees to achieve the victory, where then is our reward and what is its value? We may get our own way in life, but we may have burnt down all life's fruitful orchards in gaining the worthless prize. A whole

philosophy of life is involved in this text. The fruit-tree is symbolical and not literal. God sometimes gives men the desire of their hearts, and sends leanness into their souls. What if a man shall come back from the field of learning, having won his honours, if, in doing so, he has lost his health? What if a tradesman, at the end of a long period of service, should retire with a whole bankful of money, but have lost his power of enjoying the beauties of nature or the comforts of social life? "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." Were it possible for a man to adorn his house with all the riches of sculpture and painting, what would he be profited if, in the process of bringing all these treasures together, he should have lost his sight? Which is the more valuable possession, a picture which cannot be seen, or eyes which may for ever satisfy themselves upon the beauties and glories of nature? Many men override this law, and insist upon having the pleasure whatever may be the price that is paid for it. An account is steadfastly kept against them, and one day they must discharge it, or be thrust into prison until they have paid the uttermost farthing. The young life, boastful of its energy, insists upon having its pleasures, cost what they may, and the old man is left to ruminate that in his youth he won his victories by cutting down his fruit-trees.

Two views may be taken of the circumstances and objects by which we are surrounded; the one is the highest view of their possible uses, and the other the low view which contents itself with immediate advantages. The wood of the fruit-tree might be as useful as any other wood for keeping back an enemy or serving as a defence; but the fruit-tree was never meant for that purpose, and to apply it in that direction is to oppose the intention of God. We are to look at the highest uses of all things—a fruit-tree for fruit; a flower for beauty; a bird for music; a rock for building. It is not enough that things be put to some use, we must endeavour to discover the particular use which God intended them to serve, and the adoption of that use alone will bring us into harmony with the divine will. Music was never intended to celebrate evil or give notoriety to things that are unholy, or purposes that are morally mischievous. Music can be used for these purposes, but the use of it in this direction is

a profanation. Eloquence was never intended to advocate unrighteous claims or dishonourable causes; eloquence can bring together all its words and sentences and thunders even for this base purpose, and in the choicest language may defend the foulest criminal: but this was not the original purpose of eloquence; man's tongue was not made that the interests of falsehood might be subserved, or that vice might outwit virtue in some display of wordy skill. Eloquence was meant to expound truth, equity, law; it was intended to be a tongue for the dumb, and to speak boldly for those who could not speak for themselves in all righteous causes and claims. So, as a fruit-tree might have been used for military purposes, but was yet forbidden to be so used, many human faculties, if not all, might be turned to inferior or even forbidden uses, but the mere fact that they could be so perverted is no justification of the perversion. In all things respect the highest purpose, the chief intent, the manifest destiny, and, working along that high line of appointment and ordination, the issue must be one of contentment and harmony. A man may be able to clean a boot, but if he be also able to paint a picture the time which is spent upon the inferior service may be time wasted. He may be able to carve a face upon a cherry-stone, but if he can also teach a child, all his carving, however exquisite, is but a proof of his perverseness. The question we ought to put to ourselves constantly is, What is the highest purpose of my being? What is the real intent of my creation? Can I do some larger and nobler thing than that which now absorbs my energies? Unless we study such questions as these, and answer them righteously, we shall certainly be cutting down fruit-trees to help us to gain temporary triumphs. A man has a brook to cross and is unable to cross it without assistance; he can cut down a fruit-tree which will form a bridge, or he can pull up a gate-post which would serve exactly the same purpose; is he at liberty to desecrate a fruit-tree when he might have crossed the stream by other means, involving no act of wantonness, and inflicting upon society no sense of loss? No man is at liberty to beg for bread so long as he can work for it. He must turn himself to the highest advantage,—that is to say, realise the very purpose of God in his creation and fulfil all its obligations. A man has the power to hide his talent, but not the right. This



is a distinction which is not always made with sufficient clearness. Power and right are not coequal terms. We have the power to cut down fruit-trees, but not the right; we have the power to mislead the blind, but not the right; we have the power to prostitute our talents, but not the right. The right is often the more difficult course as to its process, but the difficulty of the process is forgotten in the heaven of its issue. To have the power of cutting down fruit-trees is to have the power of inflicting great mischief upon society. A man may show great power in cutting down a fruit-tree, but he may show still greater power in refusing to do so. The first power is merely physical, the second power is of the nature of God's omnipotence. Forbearance is often the last point of power. We may have power to starve an enemy, or injure an opponent, or lead away business from a rival, or turn aside the current which would fertilise the garden of an antagonist; all these things we might do at great cost, and show great expertness and ability in bringing about our purposes: we forget that we should show a more distinguished power in abstaining from every one of these wicked things. To love an enemy is to show greater strength than could possibly be shown by burning up himself and his house, and leaving nothing behind but the smoking ashes. This is a great spiritual mystery, and seems indeed to have in it all the elements of a palpable contradiction, and is not to be understood or realised in all its gracious possibilities but by long-continued practice in obedience to the divine will. Such issues as these often come upon the mind with the surprise of a revelation.

There are times when even fruit-trees are to be cut down. Perhaps this is hardly clear on the first putting of it. The meaning is that a fruit-tree may cease to be a fruit-tree. When Jesus came to the fig-tree and found on it nothing but leaves, he doomed it to perpetual barrenness, and it withered away. Even the husbandman pleaded that if the fruit-tree did not bear fruit after one more trial it should be cut down as a cumberer of the ground. Fruit-trees are not to be kept in the ground simply because in years long past they did bear fruit. Trees are only available according to the fruit which they bear to-day. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Christians themselves are only to be tolerated as such in proportion to the fruit which

they bear. Profession often aggravates disappointment. Ornamental churches, ministries, and institutions generally, how bold and loud soever their professions, must perish under the condemnation of the society they have mocked by their false appearances. A tremendous possibility must not be overlooked here: it is possible to bring forth evil fruit. The question, therefore, is not, Are we bearing fruit? but, Are we bearing good fruit? The Christian can have no difficulty as to the kind of fruit which he is expected to bring forth. He is to be as a branch in the Living Vine. "From me is thy fruit found." "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." "Little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." There is to be a judgment of trees. "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees." Here again we are brought into close proximity with our own text, for in Deut. xx. 20, we read: "Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down." There must be no mistake about the fruit. Leaves are not enough. Shapeliness is not enough. Abundance of wood is not enough: "That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

## PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, our hands are withered ; bid us now stretch them forth. Thou art the Healer, O Christ of God ! Thou dost live to heal ; thou hast no pleasure in disease, or death, or the grave : thy joy is in health and life and heaven. May we rise into the spirit of thy joy, and respond to all the ministries thou hast set in motion for the preservation of the soul's health and the opening out of great views concerning the soul's destiny. We bless thee for thine house, its comfort, its security, its peace ; it is a place of calm : the storm is outside : the high wind blows over the roof but does not come within. Thou hast hidden thy people as in the cleft of a rock until the calamity be overpast, and thou hast spoken comfortably unto them and assured them of deliverance and liberty. We bless thee for thy Book ; it is in our native tongue : we understand most of it ; when we most need it, it is most to us—so comforting in sorrow, so inspiring in dejection, and so enriching when the mind realises its true capacity. May we read thy Book with attentive eyes, with hearts eager to learn the meaning of the message ; and may we retire from our perusal of holy pages stronger, purer, wiser, more resolute in the cause of good, and more resigned to all the mysteries of thy rule. Thou hast a word for every one : the old man trembling on his staff and looking into his grave ; the little child to whom life is a cloud full of stars, or a night full of voices, or a day bright with hope ;—send a message to each of us : let each feel that this is the Father's house, and as for bread, there is enough and to spare. Dry our tears ; lift our burdens awhile that we may recover breath and strength ; attemper the wind to the shorn lamb ; speak to those who have little, and who live in backward places and positions, in the shadow and in the cold, and so reveal thyself to them that the spirit may triumph over the flesh, and that even in unexpected places there may be a sense of thy presence. The Lord grant unto us light, peace, pardon, comfort,—all we need, to do the remainder of this day's work with both hands, and to enter on to-morrow's labour with Christian hope.

We pray at the Cross : we name the Name that is above every name ; we cannot understand the mystery which it represents, but we feel its redeeming love. Amen.

### Deut. xxii. 1-4.

1. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them : thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother.

2. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then

thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again.

3. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself.

4. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.

### FRATERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

THE word "brother" is not to be read in a limited sense, as if referring to a relation by blood. That is evident from the expression in the second verse:—"if thou know him not." The reference is general—to a brother-man. In Exodus, as we have seen, the term used is not brother, but "enemy":—"If thine enemy's ox, or ass, or sheep——." It is needful to understand this clearly, lest we suppose that the directions given in the Bible are merely of a domestic and limited kind. "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray." That is not the literal rendering of the term; the literal rendering would be,—*"Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep driven away"*—another man behind them, and driving them on as if he were taking them to his own field. The term, therefore, is much stronger than the term which is thus rendered in English. Not only is the animal going astray, as if by misadventure, but it is being driven away—carried off, feloniously claimed by some other man. We are not to see actions of this kind and be quiet: there is a time to speak; and of all times calling for indignant eloquence and protest there are none like those which are marked by acts of oppression and wrong-doing: "Thou shalt not hide thyself"—thou shalt stand up, go to the front, play the man, accost the wrong-doer in a tone he cannot misunderstand, and insist upon right being done to brother, friend, or enemy. This is the tone of the Bible; this is the moral inspiration of the Holy Book: it speaks up for right, it never countenances wrong-doing, it never crowns a felon: it hangs its Iscariot, it drowns its blasphemers.

We are now upon familiar ground, these sentiments having come under our observation in earlier readings. As the sentiments are the same, their applications must not be substantially varied. What are those applications? The argument must proceed from the lower to the higher. We must reason thus: If

a certain line of action is to be adopted under such and such temporary circumstances and within such and such limited scope, what action will be appropriate to higher occasions and within larger boundaries? This is the divine method of revelation; this is the only method which God himself could adopt in coming near to us. He tabernacled in the idea of fatherhood; he said in effect, The people understand the word FATHER: amid all their wrong they still cling to the fatherly idea with some measure of fondness and loyalty: I, therefore, will be as a father to them, and will instruct my servants to say, "like as a father;" and I will instruct my Son to say, "how much more shall your Father!" and when the disciples gather around him that they may ask concerning the mystery of prayer and request him to hand them the key of heaven, I will teach them to say, "Our Father." This is a principle of Biblical interpretation—namely, movement from the lower to the higher, from the contracted to the boundless, from human tears to the infinite compassion of God.

Adopting this principle, how does the passage open itself to our inquiry? Thus: If we must not see our brother's ox being driven away, can we stand back and behold his *mind* being forced into wrong or evil directions? It were an immoral morality to contend that we must be anxious about the man's ox but care nothing about the man's *understanding*. We do not live in Deuteronomy: we revert to it as men revert to ancient history, inquiring into the roots and origins of things: we live within the circle of the Cross: we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; our morality or our philanthropy, therefore, does not end in solicitude regarding ox, or sheep, or ass: we are called to the broader concern, the tenderer interest, which relates to the human mind and the human soul. Are not *minds* driven away? Some minds are stronger than others: and is not dominance sometimes used to compel inferior judgments to accept sophistical or even immoral conclusions? Is there no man to whom the truth has been given as a sacred trust and in whom it burns so that he cannot run away when he sees other minds being driven into darkness, or attempts made to debase and prostitute the intelligence of the soul? There need not be any dogmatism in the man's manner or tone; but, in proportion as he has a sense of

right, will he speak emphatically, clearly, in round and penetrating tones, so that his exercises of a philanthropic description may not be taken as efforts that cost nothing—interpositions which express officiousness rather than the earnestness of the Cross of Christ. It would be singular indeed, amounting to an irony intolerable, were we taught to be solicitous about oxen and sheep and cattle of every name, but to care nothing about the man himself. How contradictory! How painfully ironical could we read such words as these:—If thou seest thy brother's ox driven away, stand up, insist upon the ox being taken back, speak a word for honesty; but if thou shalt see thy brother *himself* being driven into slavery, pass by on the other side, take no heed of an action of that sort, confine solicitude to the ox, remit concerns in relation to the individual man! Evidently the argument must run in the other direction: If careful about the ox, how much more about the mind! If careful about the sheep, how much more careful about the owner! Reasoning in this direction, we soon find ourselves approaching the mystery of the Cross: all this neighbourliness, philanthropy, tender, anxious solicitude about cattle and property leads by a straight and open road to the mystery of the divine concern for the soul of man, as revealed in the Cross of him who died the just for the unjust.

Take it from another point of view. If careful about the sheep, is there to be no care concerning the man's *good name*? Are we permitted to stand by and see the man's fame and reputation driven away without protest upon our part? We could not see one sheep taken from his flock without instantly being excited and hastening to the owner to tell him that some petty felony had been committed; we might even be more courageous, and, assured that others were looking on and were near at hand to help us, we might venture to protest to the felon himself and insist upon the property being returned. We are courageous when we are in considerable numbers. The individual and solitary observer might not have courage to protest, but the most timid of hearts acquires boldness in the assured presence and society of others. Can we, then, see the good name driven away without jealousy for our brother's fame, without concern for that quality of reputation without which life is not worth

living? We are told that to steal the purse is to steal trash—it is something—nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his—a mere rearrangement of property; “but he that filches from me my good name, robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed.” Do we leave the poets to express this high sentiment in golden terms, whilst we engage ourselves with the small solicitude which is satisfied with the fate of oxen and sheep? We are the keepers of our brother: his good name is ours. When the reputation of a Christian man goes down or is being driven away, the sum-total of Christian influence is diminished;—in this sense we are not to live unto ourselves or for ourselves: every soul is part of the common stock of humanity, and when one member is exalted the whole body is raised in a worthy ascension, and when one member is debased or wronged or robbed a felony has been committed upon the consolidated property of the Church. Thus we are led into philanthropic relations, social trusteeships, and are bound for one another; and if we see a man's reputation driven away by some cruel hand—even though the reputation be that of an enemy—we are to say, “Be just and fear not”—let us know both sides of the case; there must be no immoral partiality; surely in the worst of cases there must be some redeeming points. When the Church cares for itself in this way the hireling will be afraid to approach the fold: even the wolf will know that the flock is well sheltered.

Take it from another point. “In like manner shalt thou do with . . . his raiment.” And are we to be careful about the man's raiment, and care nothing about his *aspirations*? Is it nothing to us that the man never lifts his head towards the wider spaces and wonders what the lights are that glitter in the distant arch? Is it nothing to us that the man never sighs after some larger sphere, or ponders concerning some nobler possibility of life? Finding a man driving *himself* away, we are bound to arouse him in the Creator's name and to accuse him of the worst species of suicide. Aspirations are the beginning of great character: they express discontentment: being turned into our mother tongue they might be thus read: This world is not enough: I beat my hands against its narrow boundaries: my soul longs for something broader, brighter, grander: I know

these glittering points are not nails driven into a door to prevent its being opened—these glittering points are invitations, calls, allurements; I would respond, Is there no God in all the void? Hear a man talking so, and instantly leap upon his chariot, join him, and ask him if he understands what he says, and when he tells you that he has no understanding but is sighing after solutions of mysteries, read to him the great words of Christ—the solemn Gospel of the Son of God—and as you speak, in Christ's name and in Christ's tone, his heart will burn within him, and at eventide he will say, Abide with me. Man knows the truth when he hears it: there is an answering voice in the constitution of man. There are some words which cannot be palmed off upon man as true; when he himself is really in the agony of earnestness there are other words which come into his darkness like great lights. The light proves itself. Light instantly chases away the creatures of darkness; one little flame sends a vibration of light into every corner of the building. How light troubles darkness! how the darkness writhes under the gleam of light!—it is in sore distress. So the soul knows the light as the flowers know the sun.

Can we see our brother's ass being driven away and care nothing what becomes of his *child*? Save the children, and begin your work as soon as possible. The traveller who wants to get home does not wait until the sun is high up in the sky: the moment he sees a little whitening line in the east he grasps his staff and stands up ready to go onward to his home and the sanctuary of his love. Were we more anxious about the children we should do a greater work of a Christian kind. The old man seems to be beyond our reach, but the little child seems to be made for Christ. It would seem—do not let us shrink from the term—*natural* for every little child to put out his arms to cling to the Child of Bethlehem. Save the children, and you will purify society; expend your solicitude upon young, opening, tender life, and you shall see the result of your concern after many days. Services should be constituted for children; the old people have had the sanctuary too long: their ears are sated with eloquence: their minds are stored with names which never turn into inspirations; churches might be built for children, and preachers trained to speak to them alone. We have reversed all things, and thus have



gone astray. Baptism is for the little speechless child—a great mystery of life: a throb that has in it immortality; and that other sacrament of blood, that mystery of pain, that apocalypse of love might be given to little children; when we touch it with our reason, we profane it: when we claim it because we understand it, we become idolaters: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” See a little child without knowledge, and do not “hide” yourself, but say, That little child is mine. We hold our knowledge for the benefit of the ignorant; we are trustees of our strength that we may save the weak from oppression. It is sad to see the little children left to themselves; and therefore ineffably beautiful to mark the concern which interests itself in the education and redemption of the young. A poet says he was nearer heaven in his childhood than he ever was in after-days, and he sweetly prayed that he might return through his yesterdays and through his childhood back to God. That is chronologically impossible—locally and physically not to be done; and yet that is the very miracle which is to be performed in the soul—in the spirit; we must be “born again.”

It is a coward's trick to close the eyes whilst wrong is being done in order that we may not see it. It is easy to escape distress, perplexity, and to flee away from the burdens of other men; but the whole word is, “Thou shalt not hide thyself” but “Thou shalt surely help him.” Who can undervalue a Bible which speaks in such a tone? The proverb, “Every man must take care of himself,” has no place in the Book of God. We must take care of one another: “Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” If thou sayest,—Behold, I knew it not,—will not he who makes inquisition for blood bring the matter to a positive and inevitable test? Christians are not called upon to close their eyes, to run away from danger, and to lay down some narrow doctrine of *mine* and *thine*. Christianity means nothing if it does not mean the unity of the human race, the common rights of humanity: and he who fails to interpose in all cases of injustice and wrong-doing, or suffering which he can relieve, may be a great theologian, but he is not a Christian.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we cry unto thee, each for himself, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." The leprosy is in the heart; the flesh is good and sound and right, but our hearts are full of sin and evil and bitterness. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." But thou dost ask us to be willing in this case: Lord, we are willing; we would be clean; we would know the mystery of holiness, the rest of purity, the music of unity with God. We do not know what cleanness is; we cannot wash our own hearts. Thou alone canst cleanse the spirit and sanctify the whole will, making every passion a pure flame, and the outgoing of the soul a sacred yearning after larger knowledge. We cannot do the miracles of God. Work in us mightily, and show thy great power in the cleansing of hearts that are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. This is the purpose of thy Cross, O Christ, this is the meaning of the blood that was shed,—to take away all sin, to cleanse the sinner, to make the evil-doer a right-doer, so that not only shall the works be changed, but the worker shall be transformed. We bless thee for this revelation of thy purpose; it enables us to seize the Book in which it is written, and to lay hold upon it with our judgment and affection, and to expect from it further light, more ardent warmth, and larger hospitality. Thou wouldst have all hearts clean; from the great heaven thou hast written this word, addressed to all the sons of men: "Be ye holy, as your Father in heaven is holy." Thou dost call us to no minor character; thou hast not set before us that which is uncertain, incomplete, fickle, and changeable; thou art thyself the standard of holiness, the character to whose grandeur we must aspire. To God all things are possible. In that consolation we rest, and from that point we begin our poor endeavour, knowing that our weakness shall be perfected by the divine power, and what we cannot do, God will abundantly accomplish. We have been a long time at school; we are poor scholars; we misspell the simplest words, and misapply the deepest, and in the midst of our reading we burn with unholy passion. When we are at church, we bring with us forbidden guests. When we read thy Book, we think of other music and fascination. Life is difficult, the discipline is hard; every day smites with its own fist, and we spend our time in vainly trying to get up again. But it is thy life, not ours; thy way of doing things, and therefore it is right: we accept it; even when the burden is heaviest, we do not pray that it may be destroyed, but that our strength may be equal to it. Thou hast carried thy servants through many a mile of the life-journey; some of them are willing to turn right back again, and begin all the road once more, thinking they would avoid the

mistakes, and never repeat the errors which have filled the life-way with difficulty and judgment. Some are in a strait betwixt two: wanting to stay, willing to go; wanting to go, willing to stay; having no will in the matter, but waiting thy revelation. Others are impatient to go, for they have seen the end of things; they have heard all the roaring wind, and have tasted its emptiness, and now they long to be in the better land, where every day is harvest, and where there is no black night. We pray for one another: for the little child and the old man, for the sick heart, for the wounded spirit, for those whose hopes are dead, and whose best trusts are blighted. We remember those whose sin cannot be spoken, whose suffering lies beyond the reach of words, who die in secret, and waste away whilst they are deceiving their friends with smiles. Thou knowest us altogether: in our robustness and force and great strength, in our weakness and delicateness, in our pining and fear, in our richness, in our wealth and poverty,—in all our relations thou knowest us wholly; there is not a word upon our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thy knowledge is mercy: to know is to pity, to know is to look with inward kindness on the objects of suffering and despair. The Lord send messages to us, every one; make the reading of his Word like the dawning of a birthday; and may there be festival in the house, eating and drinking abundantly at God's great table, and may all the guests rise from the feast, saying,—Blessed be the Master, and to the King be the loyalty of every heart. Amen.

#### Deut. xxii. 6, 7.

“If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: but thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.”

#### BIRDS' NESTS.

A SINGULAR word to be in a Book which we might have expected to be wholly occupied with spiritual revelation. Men are anxious to know something about the unseen worlds, and the mystery which lies at the heart of things and palpitates throughout the whole circle of observable nature, and yet they are called upon to pay attention to the treatment of birds' nests. Is this any departure from the benevolent and redeeming spirit of the Book? On the contrary, this is a vivid illustration of the minuteness of divine government, and as such it affords the beginning of an argument which must for ever accumulate in volume and force, on the ground that if God is so careful of a

bird's nest he must be proportionately careful of all things of higher quality. Jesus Christ so used nature. "If then God so clothe the grass," said he, "how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?" So we may add, If God is so careful of birds' nests, what must he be of human hearts, and human homes, and the destinies of the human family? It is not enough to keep the law in great aspects, such as appeal to the public eye, and by keeping which reputation is sometimes unjustly gained. We are called upon to pay attention to minute and hardly discernible features of character, for these often indicate the real quality of the man. God's beneficence is wonderfully displayed in the care of the birds' nests. God is kind in little things as well as in great. The quality of his love is one, whether it be shown in the redemption of the race, in numbering the hairs of our head, in ordering our steps, or giving his beloved sleep. Did we but know it we should find that all law is beneficent—the law of restriction as well as the law of liberty. The law which would keep a man from doing injury to himself, though it may appear to impair the prerogative of human will, is profoundly beneficent. Was not man to have dominion over the fowls of the air? Truly so; but dominion is to be exercised in mercy. Power that is uncontrolled by kindness soon becomes despotism. The psalmist heard that power belonged unto God; at that point he might have trembled with awe or bowed himself down in servile fear, for little and frail is the strength of man; but the psalmist seems to have heard at the same time the other and comforting truth—namely, "Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." This is completeness of sovereignty: this is not only a hand that can rule but a heart that can love. We are apt to think that right and wrong are terms which only apply to great concerns, and so we lose the element of morality in things that are comparatively insignificant in volume and temporary in duration. The Bible insists that right and wrong are terms which belong to everything in life. There is a right way of appropriating the contents of a bird's nest, and there is a way that is equally wrong. We may do the right thing in the wrong way. All men know what it is to speak the right word in the wrong tone, and so deprive the word of all its natural music and proper value as a moral instrument. There is a right way of

chiding, and there is a chastisement which becomes mere malice, or the wanton expression of superior physical force. The morality of the Bible goes down to every root and fibre of life. In offering a salutation, in opening a door, in uttering a wish, in writing a letter, in using titles of deference, in every possible exercise of human thought and power the moral element is present. Phebe was to be received by the Christians at Rome "as becometh saints." A New Testament injunction is "Be courteous." Charity itself is courteous, graceful, savoured with the highest degree of refinement, and expressive of the completest reach of dignity. So the Bible will not allow our life to fray itself out in loose ends, content if the middle portion of the web be comparatively well-connected and serviceable; every thread-end is to be attended to, every fibre is to be considered of value, and conscience is not satisfied until every question which righteousness can ask has been answered in a satisfactory manner. The treatment of birds' nests is a sure indication of the man's whole character. The act does not begin and end in itself. He who can wantonly destroy a bird's nest can wantonly do a hundred other things of the same kind. It is here that we see the value of all such moral restriction and injunction. To be cruel at all is to be cruel all through and through the substance and quality of the character. Men cannot be cruel to birds' nests and gentle to children's cradles. The man who can take care of a bird's nest because it is right to do so—not because of any pleasure which he has in a bird's nest—is a man who cannot be indifferent to the homes of children and the circumstances of his fellow-creatures generally. It is a mistake to suppose that we can be wanton up to a given point, and then begin to be considerate and benevolent. We are all apt scholars in a bad school, and learn more in one lesson there than we can learn through much discipline in the school of God. The little tyrannies of childhood often explain the great despotism of mature life. Is not kindness an influence that penetrates the whole life, having manifold expression, alike upward, downward, and laterally, touching all human things, all inferiors and dependants, and every harmless and defenceless life? On the other hand, we are to be most careful not to encourage any merely pedantic feeling. Hence the caution I have before given respecting the purpose for

which a man considerably handles even a bird's nest. Every day we see how possible it is for a man to be very careful of his horse, and yet to hold the comfort of his servant very lightly. We have all seen, too, how possible it is for a man to be more careful of his dogs than of his children. But the care which is thus lavished upon horse or dog is not the care dictated by moral considerations, or inspired by benevolence; it is what I have termed a pedantic feeling, it is a mere expression of vanity, it is not an obedience to conscience or moral law. There are men who would not on any account break up a bird's nest in the garden who yet would allow a human creature to die of hunger. The bird's nest may be regarded as an ornament of the garden, or an object of interest, or a centre around which various influences may gather; so whatever care may be bestowed upon it, it is not to be regarded as concerning the conscience or the higher nature. We must beware of decorative morality; hand-painted feeling: calculated consideration for inferior things; for selfishness is very subtle in its operation, and sometimes it assumes with perfect hypocrisy the airs of benevolence and religion. What if in all our carefulness for dumb animals we think little of breaking a human heart by sternness or neglect? According to an ancient authority it was better to be Herod's pig than to be Herod's child; an anomaly which in literature is impossible, but in actual experience is an indisputable and tragical fact.

Kindness to the lower should become still tenderer kindness to the higher. This is Christ's own argument when he bids us behold the fowls of the air that in their life we may see our Father's kindness, he adds, "Are ye not much better than they?" When he points out how carefully a man would look after the life of his cattle, he adds, "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" It ought to be considered a presumptive argument in favour of any man's spirit that he is kind to the inferior creatures that are around him; if this presumption be not realised in his case, then is his kindness bitterest wrong.

It is true that all such injunctions are not literally repeated in the Christian economy. We have not in the Christian Church to guard ourselves by sections and sub-sections of technical precepts. How then does the case stand with us who have come

into a complete inheritance of so-called liberty? We have passed from the letter to the spirit; God has put within us a clean heart, so that we are no longer true, or kind, or noble, merely because of a literal direction which is guarded by solemn anction, but because the Holy Ghost has sanctified us, made our hearts his dwelling-place. It is utterly in vain for us to attempt to satisfy even our own sense of right by attending merely to what is known as duty or propriety. If we have not within us the Holy Spirit as our Teacher and Ruler, the efforts of our hand will but disappoint and mock our expectation. We cannot build a great character with the hand. At first the hand was called into active requisition, and was made to do a great deal in the way of moral industry, but he who called the hand into such service intended through it to find a way into the heart. Again and again we must repeat, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If we pass by a bird's nest and forbear to destroy it simply because a law has forbidden its destruction, we are in our souls as if we had torn the little home to pieces and slain its helpless occupant. We do the things which we would do, even though they be not accomplished by the action of the hand. We pass through the wheat-field and do not touch a single ear of corn, yet if in our heart we covet the produce, or begrudge the farmer the result of his labour, we are in the sight of God spiritually guilty of having burned the wheat-field and thus destroyed the bread of man. The morality of Christianity is intensely spiritual. To hate is to murder. To covet is to steal. To desire is to appropriate. We are prone to measure things by vulgar aspects and broad appeals to human attention; consequently we have come to think that thieving can only be accomplished by the hand, whereas Christ teaches us that without laying our hands upon a single article of property belonging to another man we may in reality be guilty of the most wicked appropriation. Our prayer should continually be, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." The hand may commit mistakes, it is the heart that commits sin. No matter how pedantically we may fulfil the literal law, if the spirit of righteousness is not in us we are not credited with obedience: the light that is within us is darkness, and when that is the case, who can estimate the gloom of so terrible a night?

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou knowest what is good for us; we will not choose: to choose is to spoil the life when thou hast undertaken to choose for us. Do with us what thou wilt; thou canst not do wrong: God is Light; God is Love. We rest in God; we wait patiently for him. Let him come when he may: at the cock-crowing, or in the hot mid-day, or in the depth of the darkness. Come when thou wilt, as thou wilt; delay not thy coming—is the one prayer upon which our faith and hope would venture; and thou hast permitted us to go thus far in our pleading with thee: thou hast not forbidden it to be written in thy Book,—Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. We know not what quickly means: it is a word that expresses our present failing, but we know not all that it contains. A thousand years are in thy sight as yesterday when it is past: one day is as a thousand years. Thou dost not reckon as we do. So we stand speaking our little language, uttering words which express only part of our thought, knowing that thy love will interpret our meaning and send an answer to itself rather than to our pleading. Thou dost permit us to pray. It relieves the heart to talk upward; the life is the better for the vision directed on high;—there we see majesty, vastness, grandeur, points of light as tender as they are dazzling, and behold gates open upward into heaven, and we hope to enter the gleaming portals. We bless thee for the thought that is upward, for the aspiration that is like fire, for every wish of the heart that purifies the lips that utter it. These are thy creations; these are the testimonies of God to man; these are the proofs that thou hast not forsaken thy creatures. Pardon us wherein we have done wrong; grant unto us a sense of forgiveness; give us to feel as men feel who, staggering under great burdens, lose the way, and are permitted to spring forth into liberty. That will be early heaven; that will be a pledge of immortality; that will be the crown of Christ. O Christ! we bless thee. Our hearts know none other; they love thee: thou hast redeemed them. Our whole life is a tribute to thy power and thy grace. We come to thee, we rest upon thee; touching thy wounds, we say, These shall save us; opening thine hand to see the print of the nails, we say, This hand is mightier than all other; it will protect and deliver us; and to Christ shall be the praise of every age. Amen.

### Deut. xxii. 8.

“When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”



### BATTELEMENTS.

NOT only is this an extraordinary instruction, it is the more extraordinary that it appears in a Book which is supposed to be devoted to spiritual revelations. But in calling it extraordinary, do we not mistake the meaning which ought to be attached to the term "spiritual revelations"? Are not more things spiritual than we have hitherto imagined? It is due to the spirit of the Bible, and indeed to the whole genius of the providence of life, to enlarge the term spiritual rather than to enlarge the word material. What if in the long run it should prove that things are in reality not material at all but intensely and eternally spiritual? It will be observed that according to this instruction man is not at liberty altogether to please himself even in the construction of a dwelling-place. What is there indeed in which a man is permitted altogether to consult himself or gratify his own desires? Self ought to have no place in human thinking. At first this may appear to be an impossibility, and indeed it is a natural impossibility, and is one of the miracles which can be wrought in human thought and life only by the spirit of the Son of God. This instruction recognises the social side of human life, and that side may be taken as in some sense representative of a divine claim; it is not the claim of one individual only, but of society; it may be taken as representing the sum-total of individuals; the larger individual—the concrete humanity. Socialism has its beneficent as well as its dangerous side. Socialism indeed, when rightly interpreted, is never to be feared; it is only when perverted and prostituted to base uses, in which self becomes the supreme idol, that socialism is to be denounced and avoided. The social influences continually operating in life limit self-will, develop the most gracious side of human nature, and purify and establish all that is noblest and truest in friendship.

There are certain conditions under which an instruction such as is given in the text may excite obvious objections. Suppose, for example, that a man should plead that his neighbour calls upon him only occasionally, and should upon that circumstance raise the inquiry whether he should put up a permanent building to meet an exceptional circumstance. The inquiry would seem to

be pertinent and reasonable. On the other hand, when closely looked into, it will be found that the whole scheme of human life is laid out with a view to circumstances which are called exceptional. The average temperature of the year may be mild, for most of the twelve months the wind may be low and the rain gentle; why then build a house with strong walls and heavy roofs? Could we be sure that there would be only one tempestuous day in the whole year—if we did not know when that day might occur, the element of uncertainty being of great consequence in this argument—we should build the house strongly in order to prepare for the advent of the stormy visitation. Thus in reality we do build our houses for exceptional circumstances. The ship-builder builds his vessels not for smooth waters and quiet days only, but for the roughest billows and the fiercest winds. He does not know when the tempest may come upon his vessel, and therefore he has prepared for it under all possible emergencies. The vessel would be absurdly too strong were it always to sail in unrippled water; but even if the navigator knew that for nine days out of ten the water would be without a ripple, and knew not on what particular day a great wind would arise to try the timbers of his ship, he would not stir an inch from port until he was sure the ship was so built as to be able in all probability to weather the most trying storm. Our neighbour may call to-morrow—see then that the battlement be ready! Though his visits be uncertain, yet that very uncertainty constitutes a demand for a permanent arrangement on our part; as the uncertainty is permanent so also must be our means of meeting it. We are continually exhorted to be prepared for crises, to expect the unexpected, and be sure of the uncertain; he who is so defended for his neighbour's sake will be found to be equal to the most sudden emergencies of life.

A man who is anxious to save himself the expense of erecting a battlement for his roof may easily suggest reasons for evading the law which is laid down in the text. He might plead that it would be time enough to build the battlement when anything like danger is in prospect. Or he might suggest that it would be time enough to consider the desirableness of building the battlement after someone had proved the inadequacy of the roof to prevent accident or injury. But all these excuses are

selfish and pointless. Life is to be regulated by the doctrine that prevention is better than cure. We are not at liberty to make experiments with the lives of people, for example, seeing whether they will in reality fall off the roof which we have built. Life is too short, too valuable, to justify such experiments. He who prevents a life being lost, actually saves a life. The preventive ministries of life are not indeed so heroic and impressive in their aspects as ministries of a more affirmative kind, yet are they set down in the Book of God as most acceptable services, often requiring his own eye to discern them, and requiring his own judgment to fix their proper estimate and value. To prevent a boy becoming a drunkard is better than to save him from extreme dissipation, though it will not carry with it so imposing an appearance before the eyes of society. All workers engaged in the holy service of prevention should be sustained and encouraged in their noble work. It lacks the ostentation which elicits applause, and may indeed bring upon itself the sneer of the unreflecting, but God himself continually operates in what may be called a preventive direction, and prevention in his case is equal to an act of creation.

But ought not men to be able to take care of themselves when they are walking on the roof without our guarding them as though they were little children? This question, too, is not without a reasonable aspect. It might even be urged into the dignity of an argument, on the pretence that if we do too much for people we may beget in them a spirit of carelessness or a spirit of dependence, leading ultimately to absolute disregard and thoughtlessness in all the relations of life. We are, however, if students of the Bible earnestly desirous to carry out its meaning, bound to study the interests even of the weakest men. This is the very principle of Christianity. If eating flesh or drinking wine make my brother to offend, I will eat no more while the world standeth. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." Thus we are continually exhorted to consideration for other people. The whole house is controlled by the weakness that is within it. The sick-chamber shuts up the banqueting hall. The dying child puts an end to the intended feast. It will be found in examining all the conditions of social life that it is around the centre of

weakness that solicitude, and affection, and beneficence continually revolve. The house itself may be strong, but if the battlement as a sign of grace be not above it, it is wanting in that beauty which is pleasant to the divine eye. You yourself may be able to walk upon your roof without danger ; but another man may not have the same steadiness of head or firmness of foot ; and it is for that other man that you are to regulate your domestic arrangements. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." By thinking of one another we lay claim upon the affection and trust of neighbour and friend. We are not to reason as if this action were all upon our own side. Whilst we build our battlement for the sake of another man we must remember that that other man in building his house builds a battlement for our sake. All services of this kind are reciprocal ; no man, therefore, is at liberty to stand back and decline social responsibilities : in every sense, whether accepted or rejected, no man liveth unto himself.

The Christian application of this doctrine is clear. That Christian application we have seen in many other instances in the course of these readings. If we are so to build a house as not to endanger the men who visit us, are we at liberty to build a life which may be to others the very snare of destruction ? Is there not to be a battlement around our conduct ? Are our habits to be formed without reference to the social influence which they may exert ? It would be a poor defence to say that we had put up our houses with excellent battlements, but had forgotten to put a battlement upon the house of our life and conduct. The house of stone is admirably built ; but the house of life is practically a ruin ! This would seem to be an impossibility, and in our poor thought it is such ; but facts are continually showing us the bitter and disastrous ironies which men can perpetrate. Remember that children are looking at us, and that strangers are taking account of our ways, and that we may be lured from righteousness by a licentiousness which we call liberty. Is the Christian, then, to abstain from amusements and delights which he could enjoy without personal injury lest a weaker man should be tempted to do that which would injure him ? Precisely so. That is the very essence of Christian self-denial. Perhaps a man may say in self-excuse, "I am so little known or of so little account that my example can do no harm to any one."

This reasoning is not to be credited with humility, but is to be charged with direct iniquity. It is to no man's credit that as a Christian his example is of so little moment. When men make out that they have lived a long life in the world, and at the end of it must be considered as of small account, they forget that they are making out a bitter self-impeachment. If we had been more faithful to our Master in the circle in which we moved we should have been more known. Consistency always acquires a very high and wide reputation. The consistent man is remarked, and is applauded or avoided according to the moral quality of the observer. The very fact of our not being widely known as Christian men, men of living conscience, and self-sacrificing spirit, may constitute a very heavy charge against our personal fidelity.

A question kindred to inquiries which we have often raised recurs at this point : has God given directions for the building of a house and forgotten to give directions for the building of a life ? Is it like him to do the little and forget the great ? Is he not more careful about the tenant than about the house ? He has given the most elaborate and urgent exhortations upon the matter of life-building. "With all thy getting get understanding." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." "Wisdom is the principal thing ; therefore . . . with all thy getting get understanding." To know how carefully God has given instructions for the formation and development of a strong life, we may profitably peruse the book of Proverbs ; added to this study will come a careful investigation of all the sayings and counsels of Jesus Christ. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." The specification for a well-founded, commodious, and beautiful life-house is to be found only in the Book of God. Not one detail is omitted by the divine architect. To body, soul, and spirit counsel is immediately directed. Whoever goes to the Book of God with an earnest desire to discover the way of salvation and the secret of vital growth will assuredly receive the mystery of God as a gift never withheld from the heart of the devout and diligent man. It is indeed utterly impossible to plead with truth and reason that we should be better men if we knew exactly how to live. Whatever

force such a plea may have had many centuries ago, it has been utterly divested of all value since the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Son of God himself never allowed that the plan of a true life was a modern invention even of his own day. When the lawyer asked him what was to be done in order that eternal life might be inherited, Jesus Christ referred him to a life thousands of years old. God has at no time left human nature without illumination and guidance. Even in the earliest ages the way upward and heavenly was disclosed to the eyes of attentive men. Balaam exclaimed—and his exclamation cannot be improved either in eloquence or in doctrine—“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?” Let us be careful not to leave the house unfinished. It is not enough to have many good rooms, and some beautiful views; we must regard the house as a whole, and consider that no house is stronger than its weakest part. It is impossible to deny that many men who make no profession of Christianity have life-houses not without strength and beauty. But they cannot be complete houses. The law of God is immediately opposed to the idea that completeness can be secured without divinity. However great the house of the wicked man, however commodious the space, however splendid the decoration, however costly the furniture, there is in it a vital defect, a weakness which the enemy will discover, and that house is doomed to fall because it is not founded upon a rock. How many life-houses there are which apparently want but some two or three comparatively little things to make them wholly perfect! In one case perhaps only the battlement is wanting, in another case it may be but some sign of spiritual beauty, in another case there may be simply want of grace, courtesy, noble civility, and generous care for the interests of others. Whatever it may be, examination should be instituted, and every man should consider himself bound not only to be faithful in much, but faithful also in that which is least; and being so he will not only see that there is strength in his character but also beauty, and upon the top of the pillars which represent integrity and permanence will be the lilywork of grace, patience, humbleness, and love.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast laid a great charge upon us, and in the very greatness of the charge we see thine own wisdom and grace. Behold, this sacrifice is of the Lord's appointing : we see his hand in the arrangement and none other. The Lord who gave is the Lord who commands. We are not our own : we have nothing that we have not received ; we are bought men ; bought not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ,—a price beyond all words, all thought, yet touching the feeling with marvellous power and stirring the noblest emotions of the soul. May we answer the great demand ; may we be no longer our own, even in name, or in thought, but hold ourselves at God's bidding, ready to do all his will : to accept the law from heaven and to make thy statutes our songs in the house of our pilgrimage. We bless thee for the greatness of the claim. Thou art a great God and a great King above all gods, and thou dost ask what they never ask, and by the very fact of thy doing so thou dost show thy greatness. We would respond to thy claim : not our will, but thine, be done. Whatever we have that we most prize, we lay it down, we place it upon the altar ; we say, It is not ours first, but God's, and ours to use, enjoy, and turn to highest purpose. Thus shall we live a sweet life, full of grace and tenderness and great joy, saying, All things work together for good to them that love God. We will have no fear ; no spirit of dejection shall rule us ; but the joy of the Lord shall be our strength, and all our cry shall be, Thy kingdom come ; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. The Lord work in us this miracle of grace by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost ; subdue every rebellious thought, and bring our whole will into loving obedience and resignation. So shall our heaven begin even upon earth, and whilst yet in the house of death we shall feel the joy and the nobleness of immortality. Amen.

## Deut. xxix. 29.

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God : but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

## SECRET THINGS.

WE have here two words of permanent significance, the confusion of which would lead to all kinds of spiritual disaster. These words are “secret” and “revealed.” It is

something to know that this distinction was so early made in human thinking. The distinction, in fact, can be found in the communications which passed between God and man in the garden of Eden itself. The simple law is that some "things" belong unto the Lord our God; we have nothing to do with them; we are not concerned in their investigation or adjustment; other things belong to us and to our children, and our definite duty and relation to these is to see that they are realised in all their meaning and purpose.

Things that are secret and revealed occupy, from one point of view, distinctly different spheres, yet from another point of view it is obvious that the secret and the revealed are at some points vitally related. One would say that nature is a full revelation; that the heavens and the earth are books wide open; and that there can be no law of trespass in the outer creation. But this is not the case. We find that even nature has her mysterious or secret things, and that many a door is marked "private," and that phenomena only, and not essences, are open to the investigation of human science: there is a law of secrecy even in the apparently open and unwatched fields of nature. In other words, there is a point of unknowableness in the construction of a grass-blade as certainly as in the creation of a human mind. Inquiry is circumscribed. There is a limit to the "ask, seek, knock" of all investigation. Emphatic importance attaches to this fact. We imagine that prayer and spiritual benefits, exclusively so designated, are alone comprehended under the statement—"ask, and it shall be given you;" whereas experience shows that that simple law is at the very root and core of every kind of progress. "Ask, and it shall be given you"—is as truly a canon in science as it is a law in religion. It is written alike in the Bible of nature and the Bible of the Gospel. It is inscribed as distinctly on the heaven and the earth as on the solemn temple and the Mosaic altar. And so indeed with many other of the laws of the Holy Book. When the ages shall give birth to the seer who shall have in all its fulness and vigour the faculty of interpretation, he will teach men that science and gospel stand on the same basis, and that the one serveth the other as the younger the firstborn.

Here is a man who is learned in the writing of the stars. The



heavens are the broad pages, and the worlds are the words, and systems are the sentences which he attempts to make out. Many a brilliant paragraph he succeeds in interpreting, at least to some extent. But how did he attain his wisdom? Simply by the old Gospel plan—"ask, seek, knock;" by patience often severely tried; by labour that brought sore weariness; by perseverance often toilsome,—this is the way by which men acquire wisdom of all kinds. What is called cant in religion is called philosophy in science. Every time the astronomer turns an inquiring eye to the stars he actually stands in the attitude of mute prayer. Every turn of the telescope really represents the action of asking, seeking, knocking. Every conclusion arrived at as the result of investigation seriously conducted may in some sort be described as an answered prayer. The difficulty which the Christian teacher has to contend with is that men willingly acknowledge that they are studying, botanising, anatomising, and the like; but they will not carry up their action to the term which comprehensively expresses the whole method and purpose of the inquiry: that term is Prayer, the highest asking, the most reverent solicitude, the most persistent, and the most rational application of human powers. We could not read a line upon the face of nature if an unseen hand did not hold the light for us. We could not read the book of the stars if that unseen hand did not turn over the pages.

The practical point to be kept in view is that although God encourages man to ask, seek, and knock; though he has made man an inquisitive and a progressive being; though he has endowed man with faculties, instincts, capacities that yearn to transcend the limits which humiliate him, yet human ambition is to be regulated by divine law, and man is to keep within prescribed boundaries and avoid the iniquity of trespass. This is so in nature, and it is so in what we have come to understand by the term Providence. No man can find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end. We cannot see how God interposes in every combination and adjusts the place of every detail in life. We see something of God in the vastness of the heavens, but are baffled by the minuteness which makes the dewdrop as perfect a sphere as the greatest planet that burns in unknown heights. The Bible teaches that in the every-day

affairs of life God is constantly interposing. He hath compassed us behind and before, and laid his hand upon us. There is not a word on our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, that is not known altogether to God. This is the Bible theory of human life; our inquiry is into the reality of that theory,—a question which cannot be determined by words, but which can only be concluded by a careful study of individual and general human experience. Wonderful are the hidings of the divine purpose! We lay our plan, we boldly predict a bright future, we see everything exactly as we would wish it to be, and our imagination is that all we have to do is to advance and enjoy the gracious result; yet we know that in the midst of our dreams an invisible hand has overturned our glittering temple and ploughed up its deep foundation. In walking down the highway we have unwittingly changed sides; we knocked at the wrong door when in quest of a friend; in sorting our correspondence for the post we have mismatched some of the letters and envelopes; or we had set our heart on a certain journey and had made much preparation for it, but on the appointed morning we were arrested by severe affliction, personal or relative. We could not understand these things at the time. Some of them appeared to be of no consequence. But time disclosed a wonderful purpose, even in things which were so small as to be made no account of. We were amazed that events so trivial could have concealed purposes so great, and that afflictions so unexpected and so cruel should have lain at the very threshold of the kingdom of God. But the divine Worker disdains nothing. He holds everything in high value. He will have the fragments gathered up that nothing may be lost. An atom may be necessary to the completion of a temple. As out of so common a thing as the dust of the earth God fashioned man, so out of the ordinary trifles of life he builds the greatest realities of the future. That we cannot understand these things is no argument against the certainty of their existence and action. We have to understand God as much as God intended us to understand, and leave the rest. What do you do when in reading the great books of ancient religious authors you meet with passages written in an unknown tongue? Paragraph after paragraph you read with all possible fluency, instantly appre-

hending the author's purpose ; but suddenly the writer throws before you a paragraph written in Greek or in Latin, or in some language you have not learned ; what then ? If you are absorbed by the book you will eagerly look out for the next paragraph in English, and continue your pursuit of the leading thought. Do likewise with God's book of providence. Much of it is written, as it were, in our own tongue ; read that, master its deep meaning, and leave the passages written in an unknown language until you are farther advanced in the literature of life—until you are older and better scholars in God's first school. The day of interpretation will assuredly come. A beam of light will pierce the mystery. Meanwhile, there should be sweet rest in the reflection that "secret things belong unto the Lord our God."

The Christian admitting all this, and even contending for it as a necessity of Christian philosophy and life, turns with still higher wonder and reverence towards a scene which compels him to exclaim, "Great is the mystery of godliness!" All the mysteries of nature and providence are but as the riddles of childhood compared with the problem of the Atonement. The Cross is the meeting-place of the highest intelligences. "Which things the angels desire to look into." Pilate's superscription in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin we can decipher ; but the writing of that other hand—the hand that wrote on Belshazzar's proud walls—that hand, so awfully distinct, yet so rapid, so delicate, as to be "something between a thought and a thing"—the writing of that other hand we cannot read in all the depth and scope of its meaning. The oldest wisdom looks on and wonders, wrinkled sages can but sigh in amazement ; and angels make no progress in that infinite study. Yet we are not to turn away from the Cross as from a mystery that has no aspect of a practical kind. There are revealed things even in the Cross of Christ. We have not so much to do with the top of the ladder which is lost in the brightness of heaven as with the foot of it which resteth on the earth ; nor have we so much to do with the bright angels who throng that ladder as with the messages of mercy and hymns of hope which they bring to our attention. Fool is he who in running from a town in flames will not cross the river until he speculates concerning the architect of the bridge and makes inquiry into the origin and date of its

building. The illustration may be applied to the sinner who wishes to escape from his sin. His first business is to reduce to practice what little he does understand, to manifest a disposition to accept all the arrangements of divine wisdom, and in child-like trust to give himself up to God. The Cross has a side that is "secret," and a side that is "revealed"—a side that shines towards God and a side that shines towards a sinning world. The Cross may be so treated as to be an overwhelming and discouraging mystery; or it may be so treated as to show the infinite love, and mercy, and righteousness of God in the great endeavour to rescue men from wickedness and restore them to the image and favour of God.

We have come to associate secrecy with selfishness, yet all nature proves that in divine administration secrecy and benevolence may co-exist. As rapidly as we are pointed to the mystery we should direct our eyes to the fatherhood. Do men say that God keeps to himself the mystery of the sun? Our answer should be that he turns upon us the full revelation of the light. Does God keep to himself the secret of germination? On the other hand, he gives us the revelation of golden harvests; the spring kept the secret in her heart, but autumn has filled our barns with plenty. Thus, enough is kept back to prove the power, and enough is given to establish the mercy. It is not only right, it is necessary that the father should know more than the child. Is the father less a father because of his superior knowledge? Is not his very superiority of knowledge one of his highest qualifications for discharging his duty as a father? Mystery is the seal of the infinite, yet benevolence is perpetually present in the providence which guides human life. You have seen a blind man led along the highway by a little child, to whose young bright eyes he commits himself in faith and hope. Man is that poor blind wanderer through the way of God's mysteries, and that little guide represents the benevolence, the mercy, the tenderness, with which God leads us from day to day and will lead us until the time of the larger revelation. The commonest mercy of the daytime flames up into a fire column that lights men through the gloom and trouble of the night. We must not look at the mystery and forget the benevolence. The very wealth of God makes us covetous. Does poverty provoke envy? We look

not so much at what God has given as at what he might have given. We read the love through the mystery, rather than the mystery through the love. Men like to penetrate into the hidden. They flatter it, they exalt it, they say it is given for good, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise ; and having wrought themselves up into this delusive appreciation of its value, they put forth the thievish hand, and the fancied blessing turns to a scorpion's sting. We are not to anticipate our course of study : the volumes will be handed to us one by one. Let us understand what we now can, and in doing so let us increase in knowledge ; understand that in all the wastes of folly there could be no greater fool than he who will not believe his father's telegram because he cannot understand the mystery of the telegraph.

The sense in which things revealed belong unto us is distinctly specified in the text—"that we may do all the words of this law." We know revelation by a power which is within ourselves. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth us understanding. Whether that power has been correctly designated by the expression "verifying faculty" or not, there it is, constantly operating within us, and constantly confirming or disputing our conclusions. That power does not affect to deal with the incident, the colour, and the local or transient detail to be found in a book : it deals with great moral disclosures, and supreme moral appeals, and profound moral obligations. Looking in this direction, the inward light is an unfailing guide, the verifying faculty never fails to cry out, This is the very truth of God : this is the very beginning of heaven. Observe the expression—"all the words of this law." We are not called upon to consider the words of a speculation, or a theory, or a new suggestion regarding the constitution and destiny of things. God puts himself before us distinctly as Lawgiver. All the moral institutes issue from God's wisdom. All that man lays down as law is, so far as it is right, but a modification or interpretation of God's own word of government. The heavens and the earth are full of proofs as to the omnipotence of the Creator, but in such a word as "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" we may find a profounder testimony to Christ's Godhead than in all the wonders of creation. Here is a moral mystery

only to be interpreted by moral obedience. This doctrine is only attainable through doing the will ; blessed be God, through doing the will we do come into the full appreciation of this religious mystery, and are enabled from that point of progress to advance to immeasurably greater distances in the upward way. To have lost our identity in the interests of others, and for their real good, is to have begun to realise the mystery of divine love.

The law is to be translated into action : "That we may do all the words." A very beautiful picture thus appeals to the attention. A word is to become a deed : a thought is to be embodied in expressive action ; and between the word and the deed, the thought and the action, there is to be obvious and undeniable consistency. Religion has, indeed, its contemplative side, but it has also its practical side of action. The architect draws his plans not that they may be exhibited as pictures but that they may be built up into visible and useful edifices. If the builder has taken the architect's plans, framed them in gold, and hung them up in the best room of his house, he has not honoured the plans but dishonoured them : the architect will presently come and ask for the mansion, and he will not be satisfied to be told that instead of the mansion having been built the plans have been carefully framed and exhibited only to admiring eyes. But have we not framed the law of God and made a picture of it and worshipped the letter with a species of idolatry ? What have we done with the Bible ? We have published it in letters of gold ; we have bound it in richest morocco ; genius, art, taste, have conspired to beautify and adorn and decorate the sacred book ; but where is the mansion of a noble, holy, and useful life ? We received the law that we might "do" it ; if we have failed in the doing our admiration is hypocrisy and our loudest applause is but our loudest lie.

We are not only called to obedience, we are called to hope. We shall make some conquest yet even in spheres which at present are absolutely mysterious. At present we know in part, and prophesy in part, because we see through a glass darkly. What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter. We have a hope which is as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, a hope which entereth into that within the veil, and we are confident that one day we shall know even as also we are

known. They will know most of the mystery who have done most of the law. If we are waiting for the solution of the mystery before we begin obedience to the law, the mystery will never be revealed to us other than in clouds and storms of judgment. We walk by faith, not by sight. Jesus said unto one of his disciples, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." This is the Christian's law of action. He acknowledges the mystery; he has no reply whatever to many an enigma; but he is sure that in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, he is preparing himself for those great revelations which are promised to faith, obedience, and love.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

One of the most sad and saddening aspects of modern life is the lack of a humble acknowledgment of the limitation of human powers. There has been engendered a pride and even arrogance of thought which knows not how to veil its face in the presence of the infinite God, and of Truth which is as infinite as he. There is an audacity of speculation which will acknowledge no mystery, and which rejects all that transcends the limits of reason.

And especially is this the case in those departments of truth which relate to the moral and spiritual government of God. Concerning the material world there is no such presumptuous daring. Men feel that as yet of this they know but in part—and in small part. No man of science will step forth and profess a universal acquaintance with the universe. He would be regarded as a laughing-stock. He might as soon pretend that he can hold the waters in the hollow of his hand, or that he can mete out heaven with a span, or comprehend the dust of the earth in a measure, or weigh the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance. Slowly and patiently do men of science work, winning now the knowledge of one fact, and then another, but feeling as Newton felt when he had achieved even his noblest discoveries, that they have but picked up a shell or a pebble on the great shore of truth, while the vast ocean lies yet undiscovered before them. The map of science is filled in here and there, but over the greatest portion of it is written the words "unknown land." Year by year a little more is filled in, and yet a little more, but when shall the whole be defined, and when shall the map itself be large enough to include the whole material creation which stretches illimitably around us on every hand? There is no discovery that has yet been made, which has not immediately suggested new mysteries, and the wisest men are those who feel that the disproportion seems ever growing between the limits of the human mind, and the boundlessness of the creation which it seeks to explore.—ENOCH MELLOR, D.D.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou abidest for ever though thy servants are cut off in the midst of their days. We are as a shadow, and there is none continuing ; but thou remainest the same, and thy years fail not. One generation goeth, and another generation cometh ; but the Lord abideth evermore. Thou art the living Sovereign, thou art the living Redeemer, and thy mercy, like thyself, endureth for ever. We have heard of thy mercy all the ages through, since thou didst put skins of beasts upon the shoulders of those who fell in the garden. Thy promise has always been singing in mid-air, cheering the heart and touching the imagination of the world ; and, behold, we have seen thy promise fulfilled : it is no longer a promise, it is a reality, for Jesus Christ hath come into the world to save sinners. May we believe in him that we may rejoice in him, and rejoicing in him may serve him with both hands earnestly, knowing no joy but in his approbation, and expecting no heaven that is not involved in his blessing. Few and evil are our days upon the earth : our days are as a post or as a weaver's shuttle flying to and fro ; we are driven before the wind ; we are consumed by the moth ;—all things press against us destructively. Yet have we hope that cannot be extinguished—confidence in immortality : if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ; now we see beyond the night-line : now the cloud is but a door which will presently open, and through the opening gloom we shall see the ineffable glory of heaven. We have learned all this in Jesus Christ thy Son ; he is our Teacher and our proof ; we witness to him : we have sat beside him and heard the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth, and our souls are glad ; we have entered into a great inheritance : we are rich in faith : we can be poor no more ; we shall see our Redeemer face to face, and bless him even for the trials of the road. Keep us steadfast in the love of the truth : may we abide in the Vine and bring forth much fruit ; may our love be in Christ and for Christ and towards Christ—a bloom for ever seeking the sun. For all thy care we bless thee ; for the guiding of thine eye we magnify thee. We owe all we are and have to thee : by the grace of God we are what we are. Hear our hallelujah ; receive the hosanna of our grateful hearts ; and help us to live all our prayers. Amen.

### Deut. xxxi. 14.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die.”



## NEARING THE END.

THERE is no day fixed : it is an "approach" that is spoken of. The word may, therefore, be addressed to every man well-advanced in life. There is a period at which the road becomes a slope downwards, and at the foot of the hill is the last earthly resting-place. This is the way of God. He tells them that the end is "approaching." Now and again he seems to cut them off suddenly as with an unexpected stroke ; yet perhaps the suddenness is in appearance rather than in reality. To be born is to have notice to quit ; to live is to die. If men speak of "suddenness," it is because they have not interpreted the circumstances which have constituted their surroundings :—"We all do fade as a leaf." Every sin takes out of us some portion of life ; we cannot have an evil thought without the quantity of life within us being diminished. We cannot think a noble thought, or find a free way in our hearts for a sublime impulse, without increasing the sum-total of our life—without beginning our immortality. Thus is a man stronger after prayer than before ; thus does every sweet and holy hymn send a thrill of gladness through the soul that sings. Let every man take notice that he must die. From a literary point of view that is a pitiful commonplace ; but from the point of view of actual experience and all the issues of death it is a sublime and an appalling announcement. But Moses must die. We have never associated the idea of death with Moses. He has always been so strong : the camp never halted because of his ill-health ; he was always at the head ; his voice was clear and mellow ; his eye was bright and darting, and yet so genial—as if it could not conceal the smile that was in his heart. His has been the strong arm and the uplifted hand and the commanding tone, and to associate death with such strength was to be guilty of irony and to perpetrate an almost palpable contradiction. Yet the strongest trees yield to silent time ; the mightiest strength bows down itself in weakness and trouble : Samson dies, Hercules becomes but a figure in ancient history ; there is no man who abideth for ever. It is becoming, therefore, under an announcement of this kind, that we should revert to the beginning with which we have become so familiar. The woman of the Hebrews hides her little three months' child in a basket of bulrushes, and

trusts him to the river. How weak the child! "The babe wept." Did he ever weep again? Were those his first and final tears? He never looked like a weeping man; but men who do not look so often weep more than those whose lives are given up to chronic sentimentalism:—"Jesus wept." Compare the child upon the river with the hundred-and-twenty-year-old man, going up the hill never to come down again. He walks up steadily. If he was a weak man, how seldom he showed his weakness! he had a gift of concealing infirmity, so much so that only now and again, in some flashing outbreak of temper, do we find that he was a man of like passions with ourselves. The end is not like the beginning: those who studied the beginning could not have forecast the end. Suppose any ardent imagination had attempted whilst looking at the weeping babe to cast the horoscope of the man, to say what he would be—as history has proved him—how he would die on the top of Nebo—no absurdity could be more glaring. Out of such weakness none could have predicted the issue of such virile might. Is not God always teaching us by these great changes that he is secretly working out a still grander mutation? It doth not yet appear what we shall be: weeping babes have become mighty legislators; poor little outcast lives have towered up into the majesty of leadership and sovereignty; and God by these palpable analogies is for ever suggesting the possibility of our own development and final coronation. Oh that men were wise, that they would read the Bible which God is writing every day, and put together, until they accumulate into massiveness and overwhelming moral authority, the incidents which characterise our varied life. What greater distance is there than between the weeping Moses on the Nile and the culminating Moses as he gathers himself together to obey in sweet patience and uncomplaining resignation the last demand? Regard the whole process: note its variety, swiftness, tumult; and then observe the deep tranquillity, the sabbatic calm, the ineffable dignity, and say whether after such a perusal of historical facts it does not become easier to believe that we ourselves—weak, lonely, misunderstood, harshly treated, ill-behaved, unruly,—shall one day, by the ministry of the Holy Ghost and through the blood of atonement, become, as it were, princes, priests, kings, in the upper spaces—the holy sanctuary of the heavens. Let

analogy teach ; let history become theological ; let the palpable incidents of life connect themselves into an argument and vindicate the page of Holy Scripture.

Now that Moses is walking up the mountain, we cannot but think of the life-long hardship he has endured. Read the history of his association with Israel, and say if there is one "Thank you" in all the tumultuous story. Does one man speak out of the host and say, In the name of Israel I give thee thanks ? We do not know some men until we see them wandering away from us. The back of Moses is now turned : we shall see his face no more ; he will be a great man in Israel now that he is gone : the people may make an idol of him—of him whom they have so much abused ; they may quote his words, repaint his lineaments, and tell their descendants of his heroic days. When had he any times of peace ? When does Moses ever say, Now I am in a green country full of verdure, and flowers, and birds, and this is ample compensation for all the horrors of the way ? Marvellous is the providence which calls some men to continual labour and other men to almost continual contemplation, or such monasticism of life as protects them from the roughness of the storm ! We owe much to our labourers : we reap harvests which were sown by heroic swords. It is easy to gather the harvest, for we go out in the autumn time when the sky is richest in all brightness and beauty, when the wind is cool and vitalising, and when the fields are white or golden, according to the crops they bear ; but these harvests were sown in tears : the seed now fructified was dropped into furrows moistened with blood. Let not the harvester rejoice as if he were the sower : we reap what nobler men have cast into the ground. Some men cannot do without encouragement, but Moses was left to pursue his way in its absence. Who ever cheered him ? He was always called upon to cheer others, to stimulate them, to cry,—Higher ! forward !—as if he were bidding them to mountains rich with harvests and to prospects bright as heaven.

What a strain there was also upon the religious side of his nature ! He had no recreation : the bow was never unbent ; he was always being called up to hear the Lord communicate some new law, some new charge or address. To his veneration a continual appeal was addressed. What wonder if his face

wore the aspect of solemnity? What wonder if his eye was alight with the very splendours he had beheld? For the face of Moses not to shine would be a contradiction and a defiance of fact. We are ourselves like what we most like or what we most admire. Moses dwelt in the presence of God, entered into the very spirit of the divine purpose, accustomed himself to the throb and music of the divine utterance, and when he came down from the mountain he wist not that his face did shine. We do not know all that we gain by divine communion; we seize only part of the treasure: we do not comprehend or appreciate the unsearchable riches. It is customary to speak of the sternness of Moses, his rigour and his definiteness of command and tone; but we cannot deeply peruse his story without observing the womanly instincts which gave the tenderness of dignity to the man. He was father and mother of that great house of Israel; he did all kinds of work; if there was sickness, he was the man to speak about it in healing tones; if there was bitterness in the pool, he was the man to find the purifying and sweetening plant;—in a sense he gathered the lambs in his bosom and carried them with shepherdly solicitude; he was the mother, the nurse, the sister, the woman, in that great and rebellious house of Israel. Such always is the complete man: his tenderness is always equal to his dignity, or by so much he is a defective character. The greatest men in history have, in spirit, temper, and patience, been the greatest women. What was the motive of such a life? Who can explain the inward and all-moving force? We must wait for the keyword until we come to the most eloquent epistle in the New Testament. How is Moses accounted for by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews? “By faith Moses——.” Now we begin to get light upon that mysterious word “faith.” It is ascribed to Moses as a motive—an animating and sustaining force; it must, therefore, mean insight into the purpose and tendency of things—penetration into the very philosophy of right, religion, and duty; it must mean self-surrender, self-abandonment, complete trust of God. Such is the meaning as read in the light of history, and such is the meaning vindicated by the richest learning of philosophy. Faith could find a way through the wilderness; faith could build a sanctuary in the desert; faith could carry a great household of rebellious

children through dangerous places ; faith could see Canaan with closed eyes, and awaken imagination to sing to adequate music the delights of that promised country. We perish for want of faith. Knowledge we have, and tongues many, and sense of the value of things : nor are we without veneration or prayerfulness of attitude and tone ; but we have not the all-firing faith, the all-ennobling trust, the sight that sees the invisible, the hands that clutch the very omnipotence of God ;—our life is a calculation, an excited prudence, a boastful cowardice. Do we say, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest” ? He replies : No, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests : but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” “Who follows in his train ?” Few men go along that line ; if they ever join it, it is because they have come upon it along some incidental path. Christianity is the religion of faith : it is not a new variety of philosophy ; it is not a specimen of intellectual legerdemain : its watchword is faith, its keyword is love, its purpose is the pardon of the world.

Then is Moses not to see Canaan ? Moses would not care now to see any land flowing with milk and honey. He shall see the upper Canaan,—the happy land where the flowers never wither, where the summer is guaranteed to last eternally. Thus God educates men. He promises them something for the end, and under the animation of that promise they pursue their duty, and they so pursue it that at the last they ask for something for the heart ; the hand could not hold what they want : it is not equal to the answer of their bolder prayer. The Lord promises a land flowing with milk and honey, the only promise that could then be understood. Men arose to search for the land, and by daily education, gracious discipline, gentle admonition, continual and regulated instruction, they came to say what God at first meant them to say,—We seek a country out of sight : we seek a city on high—a city whose Builder and Maker is God. We have seen that a time comes when by right spiritual education and true spiritual sympathy with Christ the world shrivels into mean proportions, and is hurried into contempt by the very religion which we supposed would enable us to enjoy it. After a certain period of well-received lessons we say, We will not have the earth : we do not feel that it is worth carrying ; it is but a handful

of dust, it is but a flutter in the air,—let it return to the nothingness out of which it came ; we yearn for God, we sigh for the infinite, we cannot rest without the eternal Father.

Moses goes upon the mountain to die. It is well : such a man ought to die upon a mountain. The scene is full of symbolism ; it is quick with moral and spiritual suggestiveness. Men may die upon mountains if they will ; or men may perish in dark valleys if they like. To die upon the mountain is to die into heaven. The place of our death, as to its significance and honour, will be determined by the life we lead. We die just as we live, and, so to say, where we live. Moses lived a mountain life : he was a highlander ; he lived on the hills, and on the hills he died. May it not be so with us ? By well-done duty, by well-endured affliction, by well-tested patience, by complete self-surrender, by continual imitation and following of Christ, we may die on some lofty hill, cool with dew or bright with sunshine, the point nearest to the skies. To die at such an elevation is to begin to live. Men can die in the valleys if they please ; by meanness of life, by self-consideration, by baptised prudence, by bastard piety, by feigned prayer, they can hasten swiftly down into deep places and die in the shadows and gloom of despair. We can so live that none will care where or how we die : the only gospel they ever hear of us will be that we are dead. But who will live this life ? Who can think of it ? Who that knows the value of influence, who that regards the love of children and the love of posterity, could live a life so ignoble, so devoid of practical sentiment, so wasteful in all that is most sacred in energy ?

Moses died with a song upon his lips. What that song was we shall in our next reading see. The image, however, may now, for the moment, be detained before the mind as full of the best suggestion. Moses died singing : a song was part of the last utterance of the heroic man. What a song it was we may be eager to know. How strong ; how tender ; how valiant ; how nearly a law ; how next to a judgment ; how close to a cross ! The song of Moses marks a period in the progress of the soul. The song tells what the life has been, and the song touches with infinite delicateness the future of the spirit. We may die with a song upon our lips, or we may die in cruel

silence—in the dumbness of despair. By a song do not understand the term literally : he dies singing who dies contentedly, hopefully, at peace with the world, at rest in Christ, confident that the Cross he has served will light him through the valley ; it may be no sound of a vocal kind, no triumph, no rapture, as commonly understood ; but tranquillity may be music, resignation may have about it the triumph and gladness of a song.

Die we must : there is no discharge in that war. How we shall die may be determined by ourselves, as to its moral characteristics and benedictions ; where we shall die, as to elevation of thought and mind, is left to ourselves very largely to decide ; but know this, that if any man believe in Christ Jesus with his whole soul, he cannot die : he that liveth and believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” “Believest thou this ?” Let the question be the most solemn appeal ever addressed to the attention of the soul.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast been eyes unto us : thou hast seen the way when it was hidden from our vision ; the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee. We delight to worship thee as the God ruling among the armies of heaven and among the children of men, for we are all thy creatures : we represent thy breath : thy life is in us, and thy touch is even upon our ruin. We are still thy children, fashioned by thee, redeemed with blood by thy Son, and to us are revealed the unsearchable riches of Christ. We desire, therefore, to claim every privilege, and to rejoice in every honour, and to say, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ; this is the gift of God, this is the light of heaven, this is the miracle of the Holy Ghost. So there is no boastfulness : we are humbled in the dust ; when thou dost show us how thou hast loved us we are the more cast down in our own esteem : but thou dost recover us and re-establish us,—yea, thou dost set our feet upon a rock, and thou dost put a song into our mouth : we will sing of thy goodness and mercy ; we will bless thee for thy judgments too, often strange and heavy, yet every one needed to chasten and subdue the soul on which it falls. We bless thee for thine house : we love every stone of it ; its light is sanctified ; its very air is charged with a ministry of light. Thy Book is wide open before us, and we can understand somewhat of it, and can respond to its great appeals ; and above all that it unfolds and reveals we see the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—the Priest of the universe, our Advocate with the Father, the Daysman between God and our souls—laying his hand upon both and making reconciliation. We love the Cross because of its representation of God's love, God's pity, God's omnipotence ;—may we cling to it, and glory in it, and magnify it, and die under the inspiration of its holy mystery. Amen.

### Deut. xxxi.-xxxii.

19. Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel : put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

22. Moses therefore wrote this-song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.

### THE LAST SONG.

THE old man whom we have known so long dies singing. All men should die so ; all men may so die : God is not sparing in his gift of song or privilege of music : music was in



his purpose long before speech : all things are to end in a great song. What speeches may be delivered on high we cannot tell : few if any have been reported even by dreamers and seers ; but they have all told us of the singing that characterises life in the upper spaces : they quote the very words of the noble song ; they give some idea of the innumerableness of the numbers who sing the triumphant hymn. God means, therefore, that every life should end in a song—not necessarily in the mechanical definition of that term, but as to its spiritual scope and meaning : there is triumph in serenity—yea, serenity may be the last expression of triumph. There are songs without words : there is singing without articulate and audible voice : we may sing with the spirit and with the understanding. Blessed are they who, before going up to Nebo to die, sing in the valley, and, so to say, pass out of sight with their singing robes around them ;—to this end we are invited in Christ, and in Christ this is the only possible end—namely, triumph, song ; the rapture of expectancy, and the inspiration of hope.

The song was to be a “witness” for God “against” the children of Israel,—say, rather, as between himself and the children of Israel. Witness does not always imply accusation : it quite as frequently implies confirmation, endorsement, approval ; it embodies in itself a sure testimony, strong because of its indisputableness. God is said to be “Judge,” and we too frequently attach somewhat of harshness to that word ; in many of its relations it is noble in its tenderness : it is a refuge to which the soul may continually flee. God is the “Judge” of the widow and the fatherless. Does the Scripture mean that God will hold them to standards that are severe and bind upon them penalties which are intolerable ? On the contrary : instead of Judge, say “Vindicator.” God is the Judge of the widow and fatherless : he will hear their cause and determine it ; he will temper judgment with mercy : in wrath he will remember mercy ; to the Judge of all the earth all good causes may appeal, and all weakness, and all inculpable infirmity, and all broken-heartedness. God is the Judge of the little, the mean, the helpless,—the widow, the orphan. The word “witness” is to be interpreted after some such fashion. The song is not to be put up to accuse the children of Israel only : it is not an im-

peachment merely; it is a witness, a record, a testimony,—a distinct writing that can be appealed to in all critical or ambiguous circumstances.

Moses wrote the song “the same day.” We speak of our efforts of genius, and the time required for the elaboration of this or that attempt to serve the sanctuary; but if you can write a song at all you can write it at once. Herein the great French poet’s dictum is true: said one to Victor Hugo, “Is it not difficult to write epic poetry?” “No,” said the great genius of his day, “No: easy or impossible.” “Difficult” implies that the poetry can be written with due time, and after due effort; but the French judge would have no such construction put upon the term. Poetry is breathing, looking,—the last expression of inspired genius. Moses wrote the song “the same day:” he could not stop the rush of the musical storm: the moment he got the first note he had all the rest in him. How many men would be burning lives, in all the best sense of ardour, if they could but get the first spark!—they have fuel enough in them: they have great latent power; but they have not the starting spark, the first ignition, which would set on a blaze whole volumes of noble matter.

Moses has been trained to this effort: he has sung before; but he always sings after great disclosures of the divine face—after the most vivid consciousness of the divine presence and touch. His songs are all in the same key: they roll along the same lofty level; they never beat into weakness, they are never impaired by meanness; from end to end they are God’s own songs, and Moses seems to have been but a hand in the grasp of Omnipotence when he traces the immortal words. Such is to be our ministry; such is to be our life: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

What are the characteristics of a great song? The first most noticeable characteristic of this song is that it is intensely theological. The keyword is GOD—in his majesty, in his compassion, in his righteousness, in his tears—God in a species of incarnation thousands of years before the event of Bethlehem. Without God there is no song that fills the whole arch; there are snatches of song that want unity, cohesion, and massiveness,

—stray notes, wandering chords, confused vibrations ; but in God you have the upgathering of every chord, bar, suggestion, and tone of music : he is the centralising, uniting, all-cohering force. Have nothing to do with songs that do not lead up to God. This will not exclude many songs that are supposed to be of a secular kind. Who made the earth ? Who cut off the little slice from eternity which we call time ? God is the God of the whole world, and his is the fulness of the sea. Many a song that dips down towards recreation, amusement, entertainment, may have in it the true music of heaven ;—let such be the beginning, and let the end be grand as thunder, solemn as lightning, appalling as the height of heaven.

Another characteristic of the song is its broad human history. Read the thirty-second chapter from end to end, and you will find it a record of historical events. Facts are the pedestals on which we set sculptured music. We must know our own history if we would know the highest religious arguments, and apply with unquestionable and beneficent skill great Christian appeals. The witness must be in ourselves : we must know, and taste, and feel, and handle of the word of life, and live upon it, returning to it as hunger returns to bread and thirst flies swiftly to sparkling fountains. We do not live upon the history of other people : we only read the history of Israel to show how true it is that God is one and that his government is an indissoluble whole. To the Christian student there is no ancient history in the sense of history that is antiquated, obsolete, and no longer applicable to human circumstances. What we call ancient history was done yesterday from a divine point of view ; from that point of view, indeed, there is but one day, quick with the tumultuous pulses of a thousand years. As we have often seen, we impoverish ourselves and lower the temperature of all noblest history by causing great spaces to intervene between our personal consciousness and the actual transaction of the events. Everything has occurred to-day. Early on the summer morning God said, " Let there be light," and the east whitened, and the dawn blushed, and over all the hills and vales and streams there came a tender glory. This very morning God shaped us in his own image and likeness. He was with us in the darkness,

bearing our aching and weary heads, remaking us, reconstructing us, putting a distance between ourselves and our last sin and our most recent failure, and setting us up in the strength of recruited power to attempt the labour of another day. Speak not of ancient history in any sense that severs present consciousness from the eternal providence of God. When you are doubtful as to religious mysteries, read your own personal record; when metaphysics are too high or too deep, peruse facts,—put the pieces of your lives together: see how they become a shape—a house not made with hands, a temple fashioned in heaven. The days are not to be detached from one another: they are to be linked on and held in all the symbolism and reality of their unity.

Hence, another characteristic of the song is its record of providence. God found Jacob—

“In a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him” (xxxii. vv. 10-12),

—and then comes all the detail of providential care and love and tears, and all the sublime appeal arising out of the undisputed goodness of God. We do not need providence to be proved by wordy argument, for we ourselves are living illustrations of God’s nearness, and greatness, and love. We must never give up this arm of our panoply: this weapon is a weapon strong and keen; we must in the use of it testify what we have seen and known, what has been in our own experience; and we must magnify God by facts that have occurred within the limits of our own observation and experience. Every Christian man is a miracle; every Christian life is a Bible; every devout experience is a proof of the possibility of inspiration.

The song is also accusatory:—

“Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (v. 15).

When a song accuses, how terrific is the indictment! Who expects a song to double back upon the singer and accuse him of ingratitude, presumption, or forgetfulness? Our hymns are witnesses for us and against us; our very music has some plain things to

tell us ; even in song we do not escape justice. The songs of the Bible are not mere sentiments melodised and turned into a species of æsthetic luxury : Bible songs are Bible theology, Bible statutes, Bible precepts, divine interventions, and providences. They misinterpret the Bible who suppose that it is a piling up of one sentiment upon another, until the sentiments bulge upon the clouds and are lost in the obscure distance ; in the songs of the Bible there is law : the very songs of our pilgrimage are statutes that are turned into music.

Moses able to say all this after such experience as he knew ! This is a noble testimony ; this, indeed, is a complete and happy vindication of the ways of God to man. It is Moses who writes this ; no poet was created for the purpose : no hidden genius or flower born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air was developed for the purpose of writing these noble stanzas, these rolling, thunderous bursts of song. The old legislator, the holy leader, the man who had to bear so much, who knew all the providence of God in human history even from the beginning to the end—he was elected to be poet. That is God's way. Serve on faithfully ; bend the back, use your arms, toil in the dust ; but whatever you do carry it out with both hands, with reality and simplicity of purpose ; and, by-and-by, when the poet is wanted, you, toiler, may be told to stand up and sing. This is the loving way of God : those who pass his scrutiny go in through the gate of pearl to sing on the inner side : after hearing God's "Well done, good and faithful servant," everything but a song becomes impossible ; from that poetry there can be no apostasy into prosaic moods and contracted spaces.

In this song we have the commandments all repeated,—that is to say, you find nothing in the Ten Commandments, as to the formation of human character and the shaping of human destiny, that is not to be found in this great song. Commandments must be the severe side of true music ; duty is only the outer aspect of song. Without the commandments of God there could be no songs of men with reality in them and with the fire pentecostal and the touch that gives immortality. God will have his commandments

honoured: first he will state them in plain, stern terms:—"Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not;" there shall be no mistake about the literal meaning of the commands of God; but after long years every commandment will come back again upon us in song, in appeal, in persuasion, in tears, in the Cross of Christ, and in all the love spoken by the Gospel. Thus the Bible is one: the spirit of the Bible is a spirit of righteousness, truth, compassion, redemption. Everything in human history is in the Pentateuch; every romance that can be read aloud and every true work of fiction repeats the commandments of Sinai. Men do more than perhaps they mean to do. We cannot escape the circle of God in any lawful industry, in any conscientious effort. A man shall set himself to depict in parable or fiction the life of his day; he may describe himself as an artist, he may even go so far as to describe himself as a *mere* artist—a devotee of art, a student of proportion, perspective, and colour;—he little knows that in proportion as he succeeds in rightly interpreting life he is a preacher. Great is the company of preachers! They would not be called by that name: they are suspicious of that limited term, because it has been limited by the very men who should have glorified it. You find all the fiction in the world that is true to human life in the parable of the Prodigal Son: the pen of fiction has never touched a point that is not involved within the sweep of that nobler delineation. The parables of Christ contain everything—every spark of genius, every throb of poetry, every moral of sound teaching. So we return to find all the commandments of God in the last song of Moses; as God first gives the commandments, and then gives the history, and then gives the song, so all life is under his control, and he is revealing his purposes and providences in many a book never meant to call attention to his sovereignty. Many are called they know not why, or how, or to what end: the first may be last, the last may be first. As for those who are nominally Christians and preachers—baptised men, anointed with a sacred unction—what if they fall short of their calling and other men should come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and they—the supposed lineage of God—should be shut out! The Christian reader of all history should make it his business to include, wherever he can, every effort and attempt made to lighten human burdens, to soothe

human misery, and disentangle human perplexity; we cannot have such service described as worldly, secular, atheistic. He who dries a child's innocent tears is by so much serving God; he who but closes his eyes silently before partaking of his food recognises a Hand unseen—a Giver quite near; he who writes a poem for the purpose of brightening family life and cheering solitary wanderers—he who leaves behind him some sign which may be seen after many days, that a forlorn and shipwrecked brother seeing may take heart again, is a minister—not ordained by human touch or recognition of an ecclesiastical kind, but a helper in the human strife, a friend of the friendless. Do not reject commandments because they come in the form of song, and do not regard song as being destitute of the inspiration and virility of righteousness. The Bible combines strength and beauty, law and gospel—Moses and the Lamb. Our life is meant to fall into music. Music is an abused term. The musicians have been as unkind to music as the theologians have been unkind to theology. Definitions need enlargement; terms need ampler reference and application. Many a man is musical who cannot sing; the spirit of music is in the man: he knows the true tone when he hears it—not from the critical point of view—but it touches his soul, comes into his being like an inspiration, and soothes him like a benediction, or stirs him like a war-trumpet. Music is the inheritance of little children—the angel that sits upstairs watching the weak and the dying when hired eyes tire and fall into needed slumber. So with the Gospel of Jesus Christ: it has its stern theology, its profound metaphysics, its awful morality—the very snow of heaven, the spotless whiteness of the ineffable purity; but it has its song, its musical strain, and it calls us all to walk in step—to go processionally: our feet are to fall harmoniously: the whole motion of the Church is to be a motion united, massive, coherent, resonant,—providences turned into psalms, afflictions elevated into music, and righteousness itself—the stern commandment—is to be made to take up the harp and re-express itself in tender strains. Do be musical, do be harmonious in life; as for the mere vocal exercise, that may be poor or uncultivated, but there is another kind of music—a spiritual, intellectual, moral music, and to that we are all called—a blessed, a sacred destiny.

## PRAYER.

WE would see Jesus. He is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Our eyes ever desire to look upon him, and now we have come to the place of his appointment. Where two or three are gathered together, there Jesus is in the midst; he is always the centre. We know him to be the way, the truth, and the life, and none may dispute his place. We will have this Man to reign over us, for it is his right to reign. We call him King of kings; we hail him Lord of lords; we bow down before him, and worship the Son of God, God the Son, Immanuel—God with us. We have praises to sing, and we would sing them with a loud, clear voice. We are not ashamed of the providence of God. Thou art our Father: thou dost guide us with thine eye; thine arms are round about us; thy smile is our soul's day, thy frown the night in which our soul trembles. Thou hast spread our table bountifully, so that our hunger has been more than satisfied; thou hast kept our house, so that there is peace at home; thou hast given us music in every room and light on every point of the dwelling;—verily, thou art the God of the families of the earth, and our households trust in thee. As for our afflictions, it was good for us that we were afflicted: we were chastened, sobered, refined; there came into our voice a tenderer tone, and there settled in our hearts a nobler trust: thou hast sanctified thy chastening, and turned our smarting to our spiritual account. We bless the rod, we kiss the hand that lifted it, and at the grave-side we desire to say, It is well. For all thy mercies we bless thee—for every flower that blooms, for every bird that sings, for every stream that moistens the green grass, for all the promise of the year,—for a good seed-time and hay harvest, and prospect of plentifulness of bread; the Lord has been in the field, and the orchard, and the garden, and has filled the river with riches. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto the name of the God of Providence! We will not ask thee for the earth: it is too small a gift for a King; we want thyself, we desire thy Spirit, we yearn for clearer sight of thy love and for further hold of thy purpose, that when we are tossed upon the deep, the tumult may be but local, for in our souls immortal there is rest—a deep and eternal tranquillity. We desire to read thy word with new vision, to enter into the spirit of its history and its prophecy, its minstrelsy and gospel, that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly, abounding in gracious fulness, so as to make the enemy afraid because of the holiness of our souls. We desire to see thee in all the way of life, to say every day, This is the Lord: lo, God was here, and I knew it not; and even among these rocks he has set up his ladder. We pray for one another: for the young, and the bright, and the tuneful, that they may rise



up into nobleness and usefulness of life; for the sad and the weary; for the man who has just seen life's emptiness, and turned away with discontent from the place where he meant to find his pleasure. Thou dost send that revelation upon us all; we say, Surely on the mountain-top we shall find our home, and, lo, we cannot stay there, because of the darkness, and the cold, and the dreariness of stony places. We said, Surely now we shall find what we needed of wealth, and beauty, and comfort, and enjoyment; now will begin the dance of pleasure, now will break out the music of lasting gladness;—and, behold, we fell among serpents and into dangerous places, and every tree shook as with alarm, and the wind was full of fear. We now see that light is in heaven only, and rest in truth, and peace in faith, and joy in purity; thou hast scourged out of us our old vanities and misleading sophisms and false expectations, and now we see where the garden of the Lord is, and that it opens but at one place, and with one key—Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God. We pray for the friends we love, and without whom we could not live—the hearts we look for, the travellers we expect with joy, the souls that light every room of the house with tender glory; for our friends who are far away, across the great sea, in the colonies—wanderers in places they have not yet known. We pray for those in trouble on the sea—that great and terrible waste. We pray for all who are visiting us from distant places: may they feel at home; may there be some touch in thy house that they shall recognise with ardent love and thankfulness. We pray for our sick ones: some nigh unto death; some are sick of body—weary, utterly exhausted: the grasshopper is a burden; others are ailing in mind: they are disappointed, they are mortified, they have not found what they expected: they dug in earth that they might find heaven, and, lo, heaven was not there. We pray for those whose graves are quite new, for the grass has not yet had time to grow upon them, there is not a flower upon the mould that hides the dead; be thou the resurrection and the life in the hearts of such, and make them glad even in the churchyard: turn that last resting-place into a garden of flowers, and make it a place where they will keep appointments with those who from death would learn how to live. The Lord be with us now; and we need no other presence. Amen.

### Deut. xxxii.

### THE SONG OF MOSES.

**W**HAT interest can we have in the study of events which occurred thousands of years ago? If that is the question which we put to ourselves, no wonder the answer is sometimes disappointing. We do not study the events which happened thousands of years ago. That would be too narrow a way of putting the case; we might then be mere antiquarians, deeply interested in something that transpired innumerable centuries since. We are not studying the events. We are studying the

God that overruled them. Persons are apt to imagine that there is nothing in the Old Testament but old history; they forget that God is in the Old Testament, as in a bush that burns but is not consumed. How often we hear the question, Seeing that all these events occurred so long ago, what have we to do with them at this distance of time? The events certainly did occur long ago, but the God who originated them, or sanctified them, or overruled them, is the God who lighted the lamp of this morning. We study God in studying the Old Testament; and in looking into the events which constitute the narrative line and substance of the Old Testament, we look into them as men look into caskets where they expect to find choice treasure. The events are dead, but God lives. The profoundest and most exciting of all questions is,—Does the God of the Old Testament reappear in the New? Is he the God of to-day? He has proclaimed himself the God of the living—in what large sense are we to interpret that term “living”?—does it include all beating pulses, all throbbing hearts, all eyes uplifted that they may find satisfaction in the heavens? We must get rid of all narrow definitions. We must purge the mind of the folly that in reading the Old Testament we are digging in a grave; we are keeping company with Jehovah, we are walking with God, we are being charged by the subtle yet broad consistency which unites all human history, and shows the eternal in the very midst of the mutable. Moreover, true songs are never old; music is the youngest of all angels, with a glorious and incalculable ancestry, yet here to-day to take up all oldest words, and make them thrill and quiver and vibrate with new energy and new passion.

The preface of the song is in the first four verses. The song opens with a noble appeal:—

“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth” (v. 1).

Who is the speaker that he must have the heavens for auditors? Who is this claimant of human attention that he must hush the earth and have a silent universe to listen to his harmony? This verse is not a human creation: something a good deal smaller in the way of theatre would suit any human speaker. The voice of man is limited; his vocal strength is but a dying strength. Who is this man who says, “O heavens, incline your ear; O

earth, listen to me" ? The subject determines the theatre ; the doctrine regulates the space. Let those who handle mean subjects content themselves with corners, and obscurities, and favoured spots, and elected listeners ; the Gospel will have all the world to roam in :—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." This Bible, whether in Hebrew or in Greek, speaks for large spaces ; it will not have any spot excluded from its appeals ; it will cause its pearly music drops to fall into all the realms tenanted by man ; and not a single human hearer shall go without some message of tenderest love and hope. Moses asks that the earth may hear and that the heavens may listen ;—why ? Because his subject is the Creator of them all : he will sing of God ; his topic shall be Deity ; he will lift up his song high as heaven's throne. There is nothing narrow or exclusive in the tone of the Bible ; it would have every man hear, it would find a place for every man, and if the man will not come to the place, it would go after him, and never rest until the man is found. So we must not speak timidly. If we are uttering words of our own making and propounding theories of our own invention, then the fewer the hearers the better, and the easier will go our fortune in the mean attempt to satisfy human learning ; but he who speaks God's truth must stand in God's zone, and ask all the stars to wait to catch some tone of his inspired tongue. Thus we find nobleness everywhere in the Bible—great massiveness, incalculable solidity, ineffable dignity ; as to mere flash, or foam, or sparkle, they have no place in God's great Book : it is a Book built as it were on rocks and lighted with suns. The Bible pays little or no attention to mere nature ; the inspired books never go into rhapsody about flowers, and birds, and colour ; in that sense of the word the Bible is not æsthetic. The great Pagan writers hardly pay any attention to nature ; in all their poems they never dream of the beauties of merely natural scenery ; they philosophise, they moralise, they idealise, but it has been left to modern seers to note how closely God identifies himself with every leaf in the whole forest, and every star in all the hosts of night. But the Bible always worships the God of nature : it is a theological Book, it is charged with theological inspiration and theological purpose ; all things it holds in contempt in comparison with the

revealed God. If he can be found, everything less than he falls away into cloud, perspective, and is not reckoned in the presence of the glory of his smile. God himself will call the heavens and the earth to witness :—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth : . . . I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." "O stars of night, I have had no trouble with you, great blazing glories : you have come and gone hither and thither, obeying my voice with precision ; but my children have left me, they have set their teeth in me, and their words have been stout against me ; yet how can I give them up ? I have laid up in store thunderbolts for their destruction, and I have dissolved those thunderbolts in dew ; how can I give them up ?" Still the great Bible songs and the great Bible appeals roll through the firmament, sound through all space, and justify their avarice of room by the splendour of their subject.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (v. 2).

What an easy condescension from the sublime to the minute and the comparatively insignificant ! "My doctrine"—that is, my learning, the truth which I hold, the spiritual philosophy which I grasp and value—"shall drop as the rain"—that is, shall be handed on and down, shall be regarded as the right and inheritance of the ages. No man is to be the perpetual custodian of God's truth ; doctrine is not to be locked up within any four corners, and to be closeted as a private possession. Whoever has a truth must speak it ; he will get two truths back for the one which he delivers. Every man must sow his ideas, and reap great harvests of thought. We spoil doctrine by keeping it within confined air ; doctrine must go forth, and challenge attention, and ask for audience, and persuade men to adopt it ;—why ? Because doctrine is not a mere sentiment, or idea, or high and audacious thought : it is inspiration ; it cannot co-exist with indolence, or selfishness, or disregard of human sin and need ; wherever the doctrine is benevolence follows it : both hands are put out to help, and the eyes are made quite quick to detect the necessities and errors of all men. Doctrine, therefore, is not a set of words, an elaboration of phrases : it is an inspiration ; a movement, an energy in the soul. All inspired thought

says, Speak : correct the mistake, run after the wanderer, help the helpless, make the poor rich. A doctrine of that kind was never meant to be shut up within private quarters, or to be claimed as an individual possession ; it is the wealth of the race, it is the treasure of God. He who takes natural objects as his symbols and guides will often act very beautifully as well as very exactly or correctly :—" My doctrine shall drop as the rain." The earth without rain cannot grow one tiny grass-blade ; when the clouds keep away the flowers hang down their heads, and shrivel and burn, and represent the very spirit of necessity and pain. We must have the black clouds ; how welcome they are after a time of drought and scorching, when the earth is opening its mouth and asking for a draught of water ! So God's doctrine is to be poured out upon thirsty souls, burnt and scorched lives, ruined and unproductive natures. The rain-plash is a sweet music, a minor music, a tender appeal, a liquid persuasion. The rain will accommodate itself to all forms and shapes, and it will impartially visit the poor man's little handful of garden and the great man's countless acres. Such is the Gospel of Christ : it is impartial, gentle, necessary ; it finds the heart when the heart is scorched, and asks to heal its burning, and to make the barren land of the inner life beautiful with summer flowers. " My speech shall distil as the dew,"—it shall come in the twilight, not in the great burning noontide. The sun no sooner goes than the dew says, I must make the best of my time, and give the scorched landscape its nightly bath, and in the morning all the face of the land sparkles and glitters as if a king had poured out upon it all jewellery and precious stones. When does the dew come ? How does the dew come ? " The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so"—and thus it is with the dew. When do the vapours become dew ? Who can gather the dew without spoiling it ? Who can take one dew-drop into his hands and place it back on the rose-leaf ? Some beautiful analogies of nature must exert a fascination over us by suggestion rather than submit to be handled by rude and heavy touch. We cannot tell how the word gets into the heart—how softly, how silently : it is there, and we knew it not ; we expected it, and at the very time we were looking out for it, it was already

there ; it is the secret of the Lord, and it moves by a noble mystery of action, so that no line can be laid upon it, and no man may arbitrarily handle the wealth of gold. "As the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." There shall be adaptation between the one and the other : if the herb is "tender" the rain must be "small." Do not thunder upon us with thy great power ; do not plead against us with all the winds of thine eloquence, for who could stand against the storm ? On the other hand, the tenderer the grass the better it can bear even the scudding shower and the heavy downpour. Your big things are broken ; your little ones bend themselves until the calamity is overpast, and then they lift up their heads and bless God. Great trees are torn, or are wrenched from their roots, or are thrust down in contempt, but all the grass of the meadow is but the greener for the winds which have galloped over it, or the great rivers that have poured themselves upon the emerald bed. Thus may it be with man : in his pride and vanity, and strength, and fatness the winds scorn him, and all nature says he must be pulled down, and thrown into the dust and trampled upon until he learn to pray. Jesus will bless the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace-loving ; but as for those who in heathen vanity set themselves up against him, he will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. The word does not always produce an instantaneous effect : the word has sometimes to filter well down into the thought and into the heart and the life ; and the word does not report itself in the mere quantity of the doctrine, but in the greenness of the young grass, in the beauty and fruitfulness of the tender herb : no statistical return shall be made of the number of discourses heard, or the number of chapters read, but the life shall be the more verdant in spring-like beauty, and the more splendid in all the colouring of summer.

Why are the heavens called and the earth silenced ? Why is the doctrine to drop as the rain, and the speech to distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass ? What is the occasion ? The answer is given in the third verse :—

"Because I will publish the name of the Lord : ascribe ye greatness unto our God."

Now the noble tone is resumed. The second verse brought us down into a new level—into the places of channels: we left the mountains and walked by the silver streams made by the dropping rain and the distilling dew; now we are lifted up to the level of the first verse:—"I will publish the name of the Lord." I will not be ashamed of it, I will make it known; I will associate God's name with human life and human providence; I will make all things theological. Begin by ascribing "greatness unto our God." Greatness even of bulk may be used for religious purposes. What is the mountain? No ten feet of it are worth looking at; but when hundreds of feet are added to hundreds more, and when the hundreds become thousands, and the great hill bulges against the cloud, that is a dull eye which cannot see the beginning of majesty. "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God." Gather up what he has done, put his acts together, add providence to providence, day to day, mystery to mystery, until reason says, I am tired, and imagination takes up the mighty task of calculation. God is great; his greatness is unsearchable and past finding out. There is something in the divine greatness which appeals to the best faculties of the human mind. At first we are amazed by it, perhaps afraid of it; gradually, by much chastening and all the mystery of daily education, we approach it, and at last we seem to ascend it as men climb mountains; and we rest upon God's greatness: we find a hiding-place in the very majesty we dreaded; the greatness of God becomes the base on which stands in beauty God's love. We must beware of low ideas of God. Herein reason needs to be cautioned and warned very sternly. A God that can be measured by reason is no God; a God that can be understood is no God; we must have a God we can worship, and to worship we must be moved by impulses of fear rising and sobering into veneration, and must have some sense of kinship with the God which we adore. We cannot worship a "strange god;" we may bow down before it and make an idol of it, but we cannot worship it in the sense of heart-trust, heart-love, intelligent confidence. What is a "strange god"? It is a god to which we are not akin: there is no blood-relationship between us; the god is hand-made, hand-painted. The true God is a spirit—as man is a spirit—and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, away from language and

possible representation of thought, in ineffable quietness, in the speechlessness of sympathy.

“He is the Rock, his work is perfect : for all his ways are judgment : a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (v. 4).

That is doctrine. In that verse there is substance to be grasped, appreciated, and appropriated. “He is the Rock.” God only is called “the Rock” in all Holy Scripture. The Hebrew word which is translated “rock” is here and there wrought into other names and may be found in the middle of a name or at the end, but is qualified by its human accretions or attachments ; but here we have “the Rock”—otherwise translated feebly “everlasting strength”—a multitude of syllables instead of this one, solid, quiet word. “He is the Rock” without which the earth would be impossible—the symbol of strength. “His work is perfect.” An imperfect God is not a God. The work may not be measurable within two given points : within those two visible points it may seem to be imperfect work, as in the momentary flourishing of the wicked and the temporary distress of the righteous ; but when God’s work is spoken of, it must be measured by God’s own space. Then comes the grand assurance without which religion would be a fiction :—“God is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” The moral basis is strong ; the moral claim is complete. The purity of God is the guarantee of providence and is the pledge of redemption. “Just and right is he”—then no good cause need fear ; no misunderstood life may evade the divine judgment, as if misunderstanding would be added to misunderstanding. We must have a God of whom we can say, He is “right.” We must not be ashamed of the geometrical term “he is right ;” we must magnify it into moral senses, and still say, “He is right.” If any suspicion could be fixed upon his rightness, his majesty would be a dissolving cloud, a glittering nothing. It is because God is right, true, just, that the universe stands ; and, at the last, Providence will be vindicated, and human history disclose itself as one of the tabernacles of the Most High.

In the fifth verse the whole tone changes :—

“They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children : they are a perverse and crooked generation.”



Is this true to human history? The contrast itself is so violent as to excite the spirit of incredulity. As a poetical conception it would seem to be out of proportion and out of colour;—what is it as a solemn fact? Can we, as human creatures, accomplish a miracle so stupendous? Are we, as intelligent men, capable of corrupting ourselves,—sowing in our own hearts the seeds of decay, cultivating a cancer, taking delight in our withering powers, and viewing with a kind of mad satisfaction our decrepit faculties? The answer must be in ourselves. There is no reply in poetry; poetry is offended by the juxtaposition of majesty so sublime and corruption so putrid. The answer must be in ourselves: let the heart reply; let human life lay down its testimony. Who does not know that the testimony of human life would be a ghastly confirmation of that which appears to be a violent and incredible irony? Moses says, before singing the song, “I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves.” The word “utterly” is to be read “surely,” with moral if not literary emphasis. The people had corrupted themselves, but there would seem to be a difference between “corrupting,” and “utterly corrupting”—between wounding and suicide, between a momentary offence and premeditated treason. The word “utterly” expresses their fate when great influences are removed. Some of us are only kept apparently right by a very subtle and sympathetic hand: if such and such a ministry were removed, we know not to what depths we would fall; were a certain praying voice, at home or elsewhere, to cease its intercession, our life would fall down in absolute humiliation and wastefulness. The word is “corrupt,” “corrupting,” “utterly corrupt”—signifying rottenness, putridity,—absolute decay that has not in it one element of hope. “Their spot is not the spot of his children”—they are not his children; the spots that are upon them are disguises: they are not signs of adoption, not proofs of election to which the soul has consented; these people are aliens, strangers: their garments are not known at God’s wedding-feast; they have accomplished the miracle of sinking their identity. “They are a perverse and crooked generation” where they are not positively sinful, they are difficult, unmanageable; where they are not utterly rotten, they are “crooked:” it is impossible to straighten them; everything they say is upside-down as to its

meaning : there is no straightforwardness, sweet candour, beautiful frankness about them ; they are knotty, they are difficult of understanding, never saying exactly and straight on what they mean,—doubling back upon their friends, twisting language into a false meaning, making promises and not sealing them with their hearts. Again we have to ask, not so much—Is this true ? as, Is this possible ? Can a man corrupt himself ? Can a soul depart so far from its innocence as to become learned in all evil and iniquity, and wickedness of every name and degree of intensity ? Can trees of the Lord's right-hand planting twist themselves, as it were, into knots that never can be disentangled ? Does it lie within finite strength to accomplish miracles so astounding ? The song is based upon history, this music comes out of fact ; this noble strain of praise and complaint interprets in the language of music the horrors of an actual human tragedy.

Now a question arises :—

“Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise ? is not he thy father that hath bought thee ? hath he not made thee, and established thee ?” (v. 6).

So human actions are not dissociated from divine economies and heavenly thoughts. Human actions are replies to divine providence ; human conduct is a commentary upon the providential method of God. We cannot take our actions and set them up solitarily, and say, We began the action, continued it, and completed it without any reference to heavenly ministries and providential interpositions and judgments. We cannot cut off our actions from the great currents of the universe. The lifting of a hand may be a prayer, or it may be a token of rebellion ; the uplifted eye may be a speechless supplication ; a cup of water given to a disciple in the name of Christ is given to the Master himself. Every act of condescension and benevolence ought to be considered an echo of a divine appeal. Thus the reference is once more to conscience and to reason :—“Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise ?”—people of a withered heart, people who have put out the lamp of understanding, people who have forgotten the first principles of human responsibility. What is it that has been omitted from the policy and worship of the unwise and foolish people ? It is the fatherhood of God :—“Is not he thy father that hath bought thee ?” Having

got rid of the Father, all the rest is an easy run into the devil's arms; having accomplished the moral excision—having cut off ourselves from consenting to God's sovereignty—we become the guest of the enemy, and are easily led into ever-deepening depths of humiliation and disgrace. Is this possible? We will not ask—Is it true? But does not possibility itself shudder at the suggestion, and say, Do not prostitute fancy; break your little moral commandments, trample your ethics in the dust: they are but vain theories of vain minds; but let imagination alone, do not defile the sanctuary of high fancy, the thing which you suggest is impossible? The plea has reason in it, the protest is not without force from a philosophical point of view. It ought not to be possible to forget father, God, law, love, providence; it ought to be impossible for a man to be ungrateful. Are men ungrateful? Can any father testify even to the possibility of an ungrateful child? Unthankfulness ought to be impossible. We find it in this song; we are, therefore, driven back upon our own consciousness once more for confirmation or rebuttal. Have *we* been ungrateful? Have *we* forgotten the Father who made us and the God who established us? Have *we* taken our lives into our own hands, and treated ourselves as if we were almighty and all-wise objects of self-idolatry? Better leave these inquiries; do not ask for replies in terms: the inquiry must be left as its own pregnant and appalling answer.

Now the Psalmist will reason with the people. He will change for a moment the tone of the great Psalm; he will call a council and examine minutely the sacred past:—

“Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee” (v. 7).

God's providence is no novelty. In searching out its root and origin, so to say, we have to pass by every ancient book: we have to pass by the very written letter of the Bible itself. We always revert to the former generations—the ages that are gone. When God made us he began to be kind to us: not a day were we left alone; he has watched our downsitting and our uprising from the very beginning of human history. Search far back as we may, there is still a yesterday to that past; examine as profoundly as we can, there is still a sacred depth to which we have

not penetrated. What is the consistent testimony? How does history mass itself up into argument and accumulate itself into the shapeliness of a sanctuary? The whole tendency of history is to prove the existence of an unseen hand, the watchfulness of an unseen eye, the government—critical and beneficent—of an unseen Sovereign. We are not left to the testimony of some mean ten years, or some mean ten centuries: still the years double upon themselves in æons, ages, millenniums. Thus the fact of God's care, love, presence, and providence, is based upon the simple induction of facts large as time and solid as the foundations of the earth. It is something to be able to make so wide and penetrating an appeal. We might have been afraid of the yesterdays of history; we might have said, Draw a line, and do not go beyond that: begin at a certain defined period in human history, and from that period draw all your induction and argument. But the Bible knows nothing of mythological periods—periods anterior to formulated and certified history; the Bible insists upon the retrospect being absolutely complete, so that every grass-blade may say, God nourished me—and every man may exclaim, Without God I can do nothing. This is the appeal to time; this is the determination to abide by the arbitrament of history.

“When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel” (v. 8).

The nations, then, are God's creation. We have drawn lines upon our paper-world, and called them by significant and convenient names; but in doing so we were endeavouring to follow the broad line of fact and reality. He who made the map did not make the world which it represents. We are so prone to think that if we can make a map we can fashion the earth. Our map is but a plan of what is already done. We have gone forth to scan the shape of the continents, and to number the islands, and to estimate the varieties which distinguish the geography which is accessible to us; but the facts were all there to be examined and tested and reasoned about. God has been building all the time. The Almighty has not been bringing together an infinite amount of human material, and leaving it without shape or purpose: he has been building nations, setting

up empires and communities of every name; and he has so watched them that surge as they may into what foaming tumult may be possible to rebellion, they are still brought back like leashed hounds within range and hold of the divine grip. God's globe is God's garden: he is growing in it all manner of trees, and flowers, and things beautiful and useful;—let the shapeliness thereof be an argument; let the daily continuance thereof suggest some religious thought; let the whole build itself up into an altar, and invite us to humble prayer and holy psalm.

“For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance” (v. 9).

As if we were of consequence to him, as if he could not do without us, as if even our disfigured countenance, made ghastly by skilled iniquity, had still a fascination for the Maker's eye. It is long before God can give up the sons of men: mothers yield before he surrenders; he cares for man, and values the sons of men, and has made man a little lower than himself—as it were in jealousy, a little lower, but still quite near;—this is a mystery: instead of overwhelming our understanding it should touch our faith, and set an unconsuming fire to our imagination, and make us glad with premillennial joy. Nowhere is man made so much of as in the Bible. It is true that many a Bible doctrine humbles man, drives him into the dust, makes him ashamed of himself, causes burning to scorch his countenance; but even such humiliation is but a pledge of the divine solicitude and a proof of the culprit's greatness.

“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye” (v. 10).

A wonderful word is this “found.” It occurs often in Holy Scripture. Let it mean here—God *disclosed* himself to man in a desert land—manifested himself to man in the wilderness. Thus God found Jacob at Bethel. Thus the word is used by Jesus Christ with significant repetition in the three great parables in the fifteenth chapter of Luke:—“Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost . . . Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost . . . Let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found,”—a word we dismiss lightly. We have forgotten the

deep significance of many a familiar word. We know not in what words God may be specially discovered. When God "finds" a man, the meaning often is that he *discloses* himself to the man, so that a dreaming Jacob sees what he did not expect to see, and when he speaks it is to say, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." It was not Jacob who found God, but God who found Jacob: "We love him, because he first loved us." Having discovered himself to Jacob, what course did he pursue? "He led him about, he instructed him." He did not pursue a straight course with the wanderer, for that would have been too brief, and would certainly have been misunderstood; but Jacob was "led about," now a little forward, now a little backward; now a little aside, now through a city; now across a mountain, now in rocky places where human hands could find no sustenance. That is life; that is our own life, if we rightly understood it. We cannot go forward galloping, running, fleeing, in a straight line, and making what we call progress: it would be but lineal advancement: all we should leave behind us would be a mere thread of a way. Education consists in being brought back, in being called upon to advance—retire—halt; to rise at unexpected times, to meet surprising perils, and to be cast back upon our own resources to learn that resources we have none. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Education is not a leap, a bound, an easy course; it means a great deal of returning, redoubling, gathering up the fragments,—going over our life again day by day, perusing old diaries, acquainting ourselves with ancient journals, and out of the past bringing an inspiration for the future. Thus was Jacob treated; and in that sense Jacob is a symbolical term, standing for the sum-total of the human race: for God's education of Jacob is God's education of the world.

A beautiful figure represents a portion of the divine way with man:—

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings" (v. 11).

Imagination must fancy the picture. The eagle has taken out the little eaglets upon her wings: suddenly she has dropped

from under them, and left them to try their own pinions: they are weak, they will fall,—see how the great eagle darts down and receives the tired eaglets upon her wings, and mounts again into still higher levels; then she will try again, and the little one is cast off into the immeasurable air, and its destiny is partially realised: it flutters as if in its native clime; presently the little pinions become tired, and the eaglet will fall, but the eagle descends again and receives it on mighty pinions of iron, and rises again to the gate of heaven; and thus the eaglet is trained to fly, and there comes a period when the little ones become strong, when the eaglet drops its diminutiveness and becomes complete as the eagle itself, and has thus been trained to swim in God's air, to fly in God's firmament, and beat its strengthened pinions against the gate of the sun. This is God's way with us. We fly sometimes but poorly: we fall, and suddenly the great pinion of the Almighty, the wing of the Most High, is under us, and we rest upon it; and then we fly a little more and discover our weakness, and just at the moment of peril the pinion returns and we rest in high-up places amidst what appears to us to be infinite dangers. We do not always fly as we should like to do: our fear overcomes what little strength we have; we must not be scoffed at or mocked; we are only learning to fly; by-and-by we shall fly well and fear nothing, and in all our flying we shall return at eventide to hover over the nest of heaven and find peace in the shelter of the skies. Give us time: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary: and they shall walk, and not faint." It is easy to stand below and laugh at the young eaglets in their early flying; but God's wing is under them: God will not forsake them; not one of his birds shall perish; not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father; and if he treats us as his larger creatures, his nobler creations, he will guide us with his eye; under the shadow of his wing we shall find protection, and at last it will be infinitely pleasant to us to be able to mount above the earth—to tower away and mingle with the blaze of day.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, it is a fearful thing to fall into thine hands. Thine arrows are of great number, and when they strike they pierce fatally. Who can set themselves against God and live? Whose arm is strong enough to repel thy stroke? We are consumed before thee; thou hidest thy face, and we are lost in darkness. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Our God is a consuming fire. Them that honour thee thou wilt honour, and they that despise thee shall be lightly esteemed. Now we turn and behold thy mercy, and are amazed at the tearful compassion of God. Our hearts exclaim thankfully, God is love; God is light; he has no pleasure in death: he would that the wicked might turn and live. Thou criest after the lost one that he would return; thou hast the best robe ready for him; yea, thou art waiting to be gracious, to receive us, one and all, wanderers, into thine house, and thou wilt call upon thine angels to be glad. We thank thee for all thy tender mercy, thy loving care, thy pity, thy tears. We live in God's love; we are upheld by God's omnipotence; the light of his countenance is our day, and his love in Christ is our hope for eternity. We come to the Cross—the wondrous Cross—the mystery of God, the mystery of eternity; into these things the angels desire to look. Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. We look, and live in the looking; it is thy way: thou hast called us to look unto Christ and be saved; Lord, help us to look, to fasten our eyes upon the dying Sacrifice. We commend one another to thy loving care: hold us, guide us, make us stronger day by day; and then, when the day's work is well done, call us into rest, and joy, and glory. Amen

### Deut. xxxii.

“But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (v. 15).

### THE SONG OF MOSES.—(Continued.)

**I**S this true? Do not trifle with the inquiry. First of all, is it possible? As we have already inquired, is it not too astounding to be credible? Does it not shock the imagination? Do strong men cease to pray? Do men who are covered with the fatness of prosperity cease to sing God's praise? Is there some-



thing in the world, in time and in sense, that crowds out the divine, the supernatural, and the future? We are able to answer these questions: they are not metaphysical, subtle, out of reach; they come strictly and literally within the lines of our own consciousness and experience; so we can affirm or deny these great historical portraitures of mankind. The history of poverty is more likely to be a history of religion than is the history of wealth. We, perhaps, never see human meanness so conspicuously as when we see foiled, defeated, disappointed men crawling back to the altars which they had abandoned in the time of sunshine and abundance. We easily dismiss our ministers; they soon become a nuisance to our prosperous life; we will call for them in the day of sickness, and ask them to whine out their prayers in our hearing when we cannot pray for ourselves, or when we think Heaven is so offended with us that any prayer of ours would be answered only with contempt. The world does not sit comfortably with true spirituality of mind; they speak different languages, they belong to opposing spheres, they cannot occupy an equal position. To speak of making the best of both worlds is to speak about that which has no relation the one part to the other. One world is to be kept under our foot: it is never to sustain any relation to our head; it is never to come within the operation of our highest and strongest thought; the other world is lined outside with bright blue, flecked here and there with silver and woolly clouds, and at night punctured and enriched with the embroidery of stars,—a high world, out of reach, yet still pouring upon us its light and warmth and eternal comfort. We must keep the varying worlds in their places. We, too, have a kind of astronomic sovereignty to maintain. We cannot disturb the relations of the worlds: each star must throb in its own place, each planet burn within its own sphere, and everything must be kept in regular system and exact relation, or we shall be troubled in our thinking and foiled and mortified in our prayers. "Jeshurun" is a diminutive; it is a term of endearment; it is, so to say, that loving cunning twist in the proper name which indicates the playfulness of affection; it is a fancy name; it was meant to please the man-child to whom it was applied. Even the endeared one "waxed fat, and kicked"—that is to say, grew too prosperous to be truly godly, grew too

rich in matter for the hand, to have any real and lasting property in the heart. Who, then, is the rich man?—The man who has laid up treasures where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal; the man of great thought, energetic mind, copious understanding, spiritual insight, love of the invisible and the divine; the soul mighty to triumph in the great art of prayer-war—the violence that storms heaven's gate and forces omnipotence to terms. God is willing to be thus conquered; he waits to be gracious; he wants to have us press down his almightiness, as the strong man loves the little child to draw him nearer to its own stature. We speak of forcing omnipotence to terms, meaning thereby to pay a tribute to the omnipotence that is willing to be forced. Even the endeared soul may become too prosperous to find in spiritual endearment its richest heritage and noblest blessing. How easily we are led away from the altar! "How hardly"—that is, with what infinite difficulty—"shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Nor is the term "riches" to be taken in its merely monetary or arithmetical sense: whoever is contented with earth cannot pray—in other words, whoever can find satisfaction within the bounds of time and space cannot need a revelation, and cannot understand one. The Bible is a blank book to blank eyes. Thus there is a place for poverty in the discipline of life; thus there is a sphere in which the black minister called affliction can preach his sombre discourse, and touch with feelings akin to religion hearts that are otherwise likely to be led astray.

"They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger" (v. 16).

Is this little on the part of God? If we say so, we do not understand what we say. This is true of all love, of all spirituality, of all honesty and decency. The purer the object, the more easily is it excited to jealousy—not the jealousy which expresses itself in censoriousness, in petulance, in mean revenge; but the jealousy which expresses a wounded heart, a disappointed love, a mortified trust. That which is but partially honest is not moved to jealousy by felonious action: by its very nature it connives at it; it has a mind skilful in the formation of excuses

for outrages so detestable: it attributes them to custom, to the manner of the times, to the atmosphere of the place; it does not judge them in the eternal light and at the infinite bar. The whiter the snow, the more easily it shows every black spot there is upon it; the more vital the love, the more easily does it respond either to the homage which is due or to the humiliation which is undeserved. God thus expresses precisely what we should wish him to express; even here he is not transcending our reason: he is magnifying himself so as to lay a broader claim upon our veneration and trust. It is right that it should be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; and it is right because God is love. Outraged love is the severest, the most terrific, of enemies; offended honesty has no pity upon the thief. It is right that it should be so. We must in some quarter of the universe find a throne that cannot be bought, a sceptre that cannot be bribed, an authority that cannot be deterred. All these ideas are gathered up in a final expression and in a sublime representation in the Bible term—GOD.

A very marvellous expression occurs in the seventeenth verse, full of the subtlest sarcasm. There is one set of words in this verse that has upon it the keenness of a sword. Speaking of what apostate Israel did, the song says:—

“They sacrificed unto devils, not to God.”

That we can perfectly understand: the matter is put in the broadest and most impressive form, so much so as to be little better than a commonplace; but the sentence grows and sharpens as it advances—thus:—

“to gods whom they knew not.”

There is a hidden excuse for them there—meaning, perhaps, if they had known their gods they never would have worshipped them: if they had known their gods, they would have known their emptiness, their vanity, their weakness, their self-helplessness; they would have poured contempt where they were invited to offer prayer; but the expression that is so sharp and keen, biting like satire and mocking like irony, is this:—

“to new gods that came newly up.”

There is no finer wit in all literature, having regard to the keenness of the satire and to the infinite suggestiveness of the

weak-mindedness of Israel. "To new gods"—to new toys, new objects of fascination, new theological theories, new speculations—"that came newly up"—as if they were twice new, double-dyed novelties, new things "newly up"—just to hand—toy gods brought by the last ship; fall down and worship these fancy deities! They have everything you want—except wisdom, righteousness, love, and omnipotence; they have everything as gods you can desire—except elements that are divine and energies that are supernatural; come, worship them! they are so new, they are brand-new, the paint is hardly dry; they have come "newly up," they are just to hand; first come, first served; gods in plenty—new—newly come. We need not therefore invent any present-day satire to inflict upon theological novelty; a better phrase than is found in the seventeenth verse can never be invented. Think of a "new" god! The expression is a contradiction in terms. To be God is not to be new; to be new is not to be God. As we have said, there can be no "mere" preaching; if it is preaching, it is not *mere* preaching, and if it is *mere* preaching, it is not preaching. If the god is *new*, it is not God; if the god is real, he is not *new*. So with theological theories, doctrines, speculations, and confidences. Let us allow for new letters, new settings, new framings; but the things uttered, and set, and framed must be venerable as eternity. He who can adopt a new god can give a new god up. A new god that has come newly up can be easily abandoned. Have no faith in lovers of novelty; your confidences will become old to them, and they will seek a new confidence; they will become accustomed to your love, and cast it off as a burden. Men cannot love novelty in theology, and yet love antiquity and thoroughly-solid establishments in friendship, in household love, or in commercial confidences. We are doing injustice to the spirit of truth in supposing that a man can be here and there and elsewhere in religion, and yet keep firm in love, honest in social confidence, and the standard-bearer in business and in the family. The man is what he is religiously: if he can accept a new god, he can accept a new love; if he can be pleased with a new religious toy, he can be pleased with new conversation, new faces, and new relationships; the novelty which is most conspicuous at the religious end runs through and through, like

a stain, the whole substance and quality of the character. We have to-day an abundance of "new gods that came newly up," whom our "fathers feared not." They must be left to play off their little novelty, wear out their paint; they must be permitted to expose their complexion until the sun has devoured it; gods that can be new grow old very soon, and are cast out by the love that never really trusted them.

"Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee" (v. 18).

How is it that men soon forget the solid, the real, the substantial? What is it that delights men in spluttering rockets, in coloured fountains, in lamps swinging upon trees that are offended by their presence? See the great seething crowd waiting for the coloured fountains to spring up, and for all the little electric lamps confined in tinted globes to shine among the swaying branches! What exclamations of idiotic delight! How stunned is modern intelligence at the marvellous display of colour! Who heeds the quiet moon that looks on with unutterable amazement, and that in her motherly heart is saying,—O that they were wise, that they were less given to toy-worship and to playfulness of that kind! Here I have been shining ages upon ages—who heeds me? Which of all the sweltering, overfed throng turns a bleared eye to my course to watch me in my gently sovereignty? And the stars, too, look down upon the coloured fountains without being moved to envy by their momentary blush and by their unheard splash! We forget the Rock so soon; we prefer the toy; we want something light, something that can be spoken trippingly on the tongue—an easy fluent nothing. We do not care to bow down the head to study, to criticism, to the examination and estimation of evidence, and commit ourselves to the acceptance of sound conclusions. Can we go anywhere to see a coloured fountain? Men who do not travel half-a-mile to the greatest pulpit in the world, or the greatest altar ever built to the God of heaven, would put themselves and their families to any amount of inconvenience and expense to gaze with the admiration of idiocy upon a coloured fountain! Blessed are they who love the permanent stars, the lamps of heaven, and who set their feet broadly and squarely

on God's everlasting Rock. Let us turn to the real, to the substantial, to the very revelation of God's truth, and abide there; the coloured fountain can only come now and again, but the eternal heavens are always full of light or rich with beauty.

How could the Lord meet this case? He says:—

“I will hide my face from them” (v. 20).

Withdrawment is the only defence of outraged holiness. Men do not know what they are enjoying until their enjoyments are withdrawn. Hence the ordinary quotation—“Blessings brighten in their flight.” Who knows what he owes to the Church of the living God until he is put down in a strange land where the opportunity does not occur, where the altar is not to be seen? Who knows even how comparatively good a Christian community is until he is thrown amongst aliens and strangers, who never heard the Christian name, and never uncovered in reverence to the Christian God? Few men there are who have been driven into such circumstances who would not have been thankful for an opportunity to return to the most imperfect Christian community in their native land.

But withdrawment is not understood by the fattened prosperity of Jeshurun; so God will proceed further. He lays down his policy in the twenty-first verse:—

“They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities; and I—”

—for a rod has two ends—

“—and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”

Men must be met upon their own ground. We cannot address high arguments to men who have blinded their intelligence and dismissed their conscience: we reduce ourselves to a lower level than that upon which we began; and God must bring himself down to that level if he is to inflict upon sinners appropriate chastisement. Jeshurun shall feel the jealousy he himself has provoked. What will God do then? He will put honour upon nations that have hitherto been without name or status: their men shall become kings, their nameless ones shall become famous; they shall arise to dispute the primacy of Jeshurun. Then Israel

will begin to think. He will say, Who are these that come up from the north? what men are these, of whom I have never heard before?—and then he will return in memory to old covenants, and promises, and vows, and will ask Heaven's explanation. There is always an explanation in heaven. Afflictions do not spring out of the dust. Your tower of strength was not thrown down because a feather blew against it. There are no accidents in the great issue and outcome of human life. When competitors arise, and you feel that the standing of your favouritism is imperilled, you will begin to wonder, and he who wisely wonders often timidly prays. The man will talk to himself in plain terms: he will say,—How is this? I have been king; I have had none to dispute my sceptre or my authority; and now the dog barks at me on the streets, and men whom I would not have numbered with the dogs of my father's flock mock me, and ask for my name, and look upon me as they would look upon some intrusive curiosity. How is this? The elders used to rise at my approach, and strong men owned me first amongst equals: now wherever I put my foot I have a sense of insecurity, and wherever I look I see no beaming face. How is this? The answer is religious: I have forgotten my appointments with God; I have hurried through a Book amid the fruitful pages of which I ought to have lingered with delight and desire and love; I have abandoned the God of my fathers: I have taken interest in new gods that came newly up; this is the reason: I am speaking truly to myself; all this I would not care at first to speak in the hearing of other people, but I will tell the truth to myself, and the truth is that my love of God has cooled, my loyalty to truth has become impaired, my communion with the heavens has become less intimate; I am not the man I was; and now God is permitting chatterers to arise around me who mock me and insult me; I have retained everything but the rod of my strength, the eloquence of my prayer, the almightiness of my faith. When men speak to themselves thus—ruthlessly, sternly, with religious frankness—they will end the monologue by saying, "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned." Never did erring child say that to the Father in heaven without the Father calling for festival and music and infinite joy.

God blamed Israel because they were

“children in whom is no faith” (v. 20).

Do not misunderstand that word “faith.” It is a Christian word ; here it does not occur in its spiritual or Christian sense. “Faith” is a word which belongs to Christ, not to Moses. The word “faith” here means covenant-keeping, reality, honesty to vows. They have signed a paper, but they will break the bond : they are children in whom is no faith, no reliance, no trust. This is not the “sixth sense,” this is not reason on wings ; this is simple truthfulness and covenant-keeping honour. Faith is not born yet in the Bible, as to name and definite influence—though many a man in the old book was moved by faith who could not account for his own motive and impulse. We are called to faith in its highest sense ; and in being called to faith in its highest sense, we are not called upon to renounce reason. Should I say to a child, Dear little one, your two hands are not strong enough to take up that weight, even of gold, but I could find you a third one, and with that you could lift it easily, and with that it would be no weight ; you could carry it always without weariness and without fatigue—do I dishonour the other hands ? Do I put the child to some humiliation ? Do I ignore what little power it has ? Certainly not : I increase it, I magnify it, I honour it ; so does the great and loving One, who wishes us to pray without ceasing, magnify reason by saying,—It wants faith ; faith magnifies the senses by saying,—They are five in number, and I can make them six ; do not dispense with any one of them, keep them all in their integrity, but you want the sixth sense that lays hold upon the invisible and the eternal. We cannot, therefore, keep covenants and honour vows in the sense in which the word “faith” is used here, with any completeness, until we are inspired by the higher faith—that all-encompassing trust in God, that marvellous sixth sense which sees God. Lord, increase our faith ! May our prosperity never interfere with our prayer ! Give us what thou wilt—poverty, riches, health, disease, strength, or weakness, but take not thy Holy Spirit from us.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, guide us with thine eye in all the way of life. We need some sense of thy nearness, for the wind is cold, and the way is hard, and the end is not clearly seen. We are hardly born until we die; there is no time for anything upon the earth. Surely this is not all! The days become shorter rather than longer; we thought they would lengthen out and give us light to do some work in, but, behold, they close quickly, and the years are all gone, and there is no time to repair the past or make much of the present. There is no present: it flies whilst we describe it. We are driven on as by a mighty wind; we are withdrawn as by a hand unseen; we are spoken to by voices that have no figure; and, behold, we cannot tell what it is we see, or hear, or do. But thou hast sent word to us of thy nearness and presence and purpose; we are told that thou art a God nigh at hand and not afar off—nearer to us than we can ever be to ourselves,—a mystery of nearness, as if we were part of thee, as if thou wert part of us, as if we were one. This is a great mystery, full of solemnity and full of pathos. That we have done wrong we very well know. It is easy to do wrong: it is easy to eat honey, because it is sweet. Behold, we have indeed done wrong, and so far spoiled thy purpose and stained the handiwork of God. But we are sure that we are not so great as thou art. If we have done wrong, the remedy is in thee and not in ourselves. Thou canst not be at peace so long as wickedness remains. Thou hast endeavoured to reclaim us by punishment, and thy penalties have left us harder than ever; thou hast burned us with hunger, thou hast cut us with the sword, thou hast filled the soul with terrors; and we have shed tears of fearfulness and uttered cowardly prayers and promised to be better for fear that we should be crushed; but Pharaoh-like we have turned again in the morning and defied thee to thy face; then thou hast whispered to us and persuaded us with all gentleness, and led us out to a place called Calvary to see thine agony, to behold thy love, to look upon the sacrifice for sins. This is the Lord's doing: herein is mercy combined with righteousness holding counsel with law, herein is grace abounding over sin. The devil is not Lord, the enemy is not on the throne; he sets up his purposes, and they are foiled and thrown down and buried in the grave of contempt. The Lord reigneth; the Cross is the symbol of triumph; thy Son shall have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. As I live, saith the Lord, the whole earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord. This thou wilt work out in thine own way and in thine own time, but it shall be done, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Surely thou wilt remember us in our low estate; our weakness shall be our plea, our sin shall be the mighty reason of our prayer; because we cannot save ourselves thy power to save shall be magnified. As for our afflictions, difficulties, disappointments, all the black things that make up life, all the

miserics that chasten the heart, they are under thy control every one of them : no spark has in it more heat than thou hast entrusted to it, and no chain is longer than the links thyself hast forged. We still believe in God and have no confidence in ourselves, and have perfect distrust of the enemy when we muse upon thine almightiness and see somewhat of thy love. Reconcile us to our lot wherein we cannot amend it. Life is an infinite difficulty to some : the morning brings no light of hope, the evening no shade of rest, and the noontide is a fierce enemy ; they cannot fight the battle ; the bread they earn is too little, and it is embittered by many a reflection which cannot be controlled or explained ; the house is lonely and dark, the children are sickly and unequal to the task of life, the whole day is full of shadows, and the night is a darkness unrelieved ;—come to such ; explain a little of the mystery to them ; if they could but sing one note in the night-time, they would take heart again. Have pity upon those who are too successful ; thou art causing them to see what prosperity means, and, behold, we regard them with compassion as they open the glittering parcel to find it full of nothingness. The world grows bitter herbs ; all time and sense are like a garden-land bringing forth nothing but bitter aloes ; behold, the garden is on high, where the sweet fruit grows, where the pure flowers bloom, where the birds sing God's gospels. May we set our affections upon things above, and by a mightier gravitation than that of earth be drawn towards the throne that is established for ever. Break the bad man's purpose ; turn his counsel to confusion ; set him upside down on the wayside that men may laugh at him who mocked their God. Prosper every good cause : give it energy and hope and secretly-multiplying resources, and may it win the whole battle, and set up God's standard—pledge of victory, pledge of peace. Amen.

## Deut. xxxii.

## THE SONG OF MOSES.—(Continued.)

WE find a record of what may be called the penal resources of God in the paragraph beginning with verse 20 and ending with verse 25. That paragraph is a kind of armoury ; it is a special chamber set apart in the great creation into which we may reverently look if we would know some resources which are available in reference to the punishment of sin. The paragraph should be read alone,—that is to say, it should be taken out of its literary setting and perused as a solitary writing. In the New Testament we find an armoury available to Christian soldiers ; in that armoury we find sword and shield and breast-plate, and all the other parts of an invincible panoply. In these verses we find an armoury which is not to be used by men, but which is to be solely employed by Almighty God himself. Quite a new aspect of the divine character is here

revealed. How after perusing such words can we read the sweet message given in sweet syllables—"God is love"? He is a God full of terribleness according to the description given in verses 20-25 of this chapter. What is God's penal reply to sin according to this record? It is a reply in the first instance of withdrawal:—"I will hide my face from them"—(v. 20)—let them see what they can do with life; grant unto them their own hearts' desire, and "I will see what their end shall be"—they claim to be wise, let them light the lamp of their wisdom and see how long it will burn without my presence and blessing. This withdrawal of the divine face is the most terrific punishment that can befall the life of the human soul. It is not a stroke, or a sharp pain, or an open wound out of which the blood flows in a hot flood: all such pains can be borne with some degree of fortitude; possibly some man may have found a balm for such wounds: send for him, pay him well, ask him to make haste, to leave all other patients and clients, to flee to your side because you can reward him handsomely; but here is a punishment man cannot touch: it may be described in a sense as abstract, as purely spiritual. What are we waiting for? We are waiting for light. Who can bring it? It is not carried in the waggons of men; it cannot be fetched by the horses of kings; it lies beyond the line of our arm. For what are we pining?—for a smile. Who can buy it? None can buy it: it is not sold in the market-place for gold. We want a touch, a glance, a feeling of divine nearness; we cannot tell in words what it is we need, but such a necessity never before strained the soul and pained it with agony. So long as we can describe our suffering, our very description becomes a species of mitigation. When words fail, when our attempted utterance returns upon ourselves, the hearer being unable to make out one word we say, then the mind staggers and eloquent lips babble an idiot's tale.

God will thus punish his people homœopathically,—an ancient plan, full of philosophy, but failing sometimes even in the hands of God. He will address like to like; he will encounter the sinner in his own mood. Says God,—“They have moved me to jealousy . . . I will move them to jealousy”—and jealousy falling into collision with jealousy, there shall be destruction of the unholy feeling and return to peace and concord. It is not so

in reality. As a piece of abstract philosophy it sounds well ; but jealousy does not cure jealousy in this sense. For a time a happy effect seems to accrue, but in the end the wickedness is deeper than before. Says God, They have set up in my place a not-god;—that is the charge he brings against them, namely, that Israel worshipped a not-god. I will vex them with a people that are not a people : I will raise up compeers out of the dust, and rivals shall spring out of the dung-hill, and men who had no name shall stand up as children of renown. That homœopathic principle also failed. For a time it operated well : Israel began to look around, and to wonder at the mockery and humiliation ; but we may become accustomed to miracles, we may become so familiar with providences as to fail to observe them. Now God will be more energetic :—

“For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell [*sheol*, pit], and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains ” (v. 22).

That will have no effect on sin. The terms do not co-ordinate. “Sin and hell” may be associated as crime and punishment, but never as crime and salvation. Punishment does not save, hell does not cure ; there is nothing in perdition, whatever that term may involve and imply, to bring the soul to penitence and forgiveness. A man comes out of a gaol a greater criminal than when he entered it, so far as the gaol is concerned. There is no light in darkness ; there is no pardon in law. Our God is a consuming fire ; not a soul in all the universe takes up its psalm to sing that God’s wrath saved him or the fire of his judgment redeemed him. When gospel songs are sung they will be associated with grace rather than fire, burning, anger, hell, consuming ; in these there is no gospel, in these there is no hope. The harvest is a heap, and a day of desperate sorrow is sent upon the earth, and men think they pray ; but lift off the pressure and they curse with a double energy.

“They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction : I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them with the poison of serpents of the dust ” (v. 24).

That is God’s translation of the term sin. When he puts the term sin in equivalent terms of punishment, we begin to see what sin really is in the divine eyes. No man can interpret the

word sin. God himself fails to make it clear to human perception. The sinner cannot judge sin: he says it was a mistake, he did not mean it; if more time had been given to him the error never would have been committed; he meant to turn it to good uses; he was tempted suddenly, his soul was not in it; now that he sees its issue, he is sorry he began the process. So long as we can talk of sin we cannot feel it. If we make of it a matter of words, we shall make of it evaporation. He made the most of sin who simply said whilst his eyes were piercing the dust,—“God be merciful to me a sinner.” He did not know what he said as to all the fulness of its meaning; but our noblest eloquence is forced out of us.

God will now send another punishment—namely, the “terror within” (v. 25). That is worst of all. We can deal with any force that is visible, measurable, and otherwise estimable as to quality and energy; but who can fight a shadow? Who can put down an army of fears? Who has weapons fine enough to fight impalpable ghosts and shed blood where there is none? We cannot account for the fear: the man lies there on his couch visibly and talks with some degree of coherence; his eye has in it no unsettledness, and his voice is as firm and resonant as ever; but he has a fear in his heart: presently he will speak of it; a great terror sits upon the throne of his reason; it is in vain to laugh at the man, or mock him, or challenge him to high and sober reasoning; on all subjects but one perhaps he is sane, clear of mind, but at a certain point he breaks down and is no more a man. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Halt of the journey we gallop on steeds that cannot tire; and in one moment we are thrown upon the ground and cannot move a limb. The division between life and death is very frail; the partition between genius and insanity can almost be seen through: it is so thin that at any moment the mightiest man in society may be unable to find his own door, to recognise his own children, to return the common salutations of life. So God's armoury is very large, made up of jealousies and provocations, fires kindled in anger, fires that burn downwards as well as upwards, fires that leap upon the foundations of the mountains as hunger might leap upon food; and as for mischiefs, God piles them up in heaps; and as for his arrows, he spends them upon

the wicked as a thunderstorm drenches the earth. Punishment has been exhausted. Where God has failed, let not man attempt to succeed.

Why did God withhold his hand and not carry punishment to extremity? The answer is here:—

“Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this” (v. 27).

What is the meaning?—clearly, that God will not allow the enemy to suppose that evil providences are not under the control of God,—in other words, the enemy would arise and say, Do not quote the name of Jehovah in connection with the overthrow of this people: this is our doing; we have brought them to nought, we have humbled their pride, we have stained their vanity: they are under our control. This is a very delicate aspect of divine providence. God would punish his own sinning children more but for fear the enemy should put a false construction upon the penalty. The enemy is always ready to sacrifice unto his own net and drag, and to say how able he is, and altogether potent and good. Vice says,—I have put all these things where they are: I have thrown down the altar, I have burned the holy books, I have silenced the saintly men, all praying hosts I have driven into corners and scattered into stony places. God restrains himself lest the enemy should unduly boast. When we have seen judgments come upon people who have excited our dislike, we have been too prone to say, This comes of their having acted so towards us: we are really the occasion of all this humiliation and distress; these people ought to have behaved themselves better, then this disaster had not lightened upon them. God will have the case between himself and the sinner: he will not have external criticism, nor will he have men imagine that they are the fountain and origin of affliction. Men may be secondary causes: they may be instruments of the occasion; but affliction following crime of the heart is the direct angel and minister of God.

What charge does God bring against the people?

“For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them” (v. 28).

The most difficult of all people to deal with. When people go

beyond the line of remonstrance, counsel, entreaty, they become their own idolaters, and worshipping at their own altar they get no answers to their prayers. "Void of counsel"—too proud to receive advice, too self-contented to heed social criticism, too self-complacent to accept a hint from older and wiser men. You cannot deal with such people with any happy effect: there is nothing to work upon; you have excellent seed, but they have no soil into which to receive it; nothing attaches itself to their mind: the mind has become a vacuity, it has lost its apprehensive power,—that is to say, its power of taking hold and profiting by that which is offered to it graciously and liberally; self-conceit has deposed the spirit of prayer, and self-contentment has rendered heaven unnecessary. "Neither is there any understanding in them"—they thought to be reasonable; and the very worship of reason always ends in its extinction. Reason must be fed by faith; reason must eat out of the hand of God; our understanding is not a self-perpetuating power, it also must wait among the servants of God.

Now comes a strain—a minor tone; almightiness whispers, the God of thunders lowers his voice, and says:—

"O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (v. 29).

O that there were something in them to take hold of—any living reason, any sensitive conscience, any religious aspiration, any one element that even kind and omniscient Heaven could find to begin with! How does God wish them to regard the present and the past?—by considering their latter end. What is the literal meaning of these words? That meaning may be taken as calling upon the people to consider their future, their destiny, the summing up and real meaning of things. Here and there in the Old Testament we get some dim hint of what in the New Testament is described as immortality. The blood of Abel cried from the ground. If we could have heard that cry in its articulateness, we should have heard in it some hint of another world—a place and time of settlement, justice, compensation, heaven, hell. "That they would consider their latter end!" look at things in their largeness, in their final meanings, in their bearing upon other spheres and aspects of life yet to be revealed. Thus we come back to spiritual thought, spiritual consideration,

and spiritual life and fire. No man can treat any single day wisely who does not treat it in the spirit of eternity,—then he makes an isolated stone of the day: he does not regard it as a piece of an infinite temple. No man can use earth aright who is not religiously minded. The uses of prayer herein are subtle and far-reaching. No man can make a right bargain until he can pray once; he may be clever, momentarily profitable—so clever as to justify a secret laugh at the greenness of the man upon whom the felony has been perpetrated, but there is no fine gold in the issue: children will come up and search the bank for the gold, and find in the bank ashes where they expected to find golden treasure. When men “consider their latter end” wisely and healthily, the recollection has a happy effect upon the immediate business of the day; then the man says, I must meet this action further on, or my children must meet it. Time goes round; a great wheel is in perpetual circulation; harvest comes after seed-time. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” He would be disappointed in the field if this were not so; he shall not be disappointed in the larger field of life.

So the Bible is full of solemn calls, noble and pathetic reflections, calling men to understanding, to the acceptance of counsel, to obedience and wisdom, and the consideration of the end of all things. Pagans exclaimed, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! If so, it were a pity to put off death until to-morrow, for a man might “his own quietus make with a bare bodkin” to-day. Better die before meals than after them, if that be all. The Bible is conceived in another spirit; the Bible utters another tone: the Bible asks us to eat and drink abundantly of spiritual provision; and in asking us to think about eternity it does not relax our industry in any affair of time. The Bible says, in effect, He who studies most the subject of eternity best discharges the duty of the passing day; he who prays best works best; he who loves God most loves his neighbour as himself. The Bible will have no hand-painting or decoration of exteriors; it will have the heart made right, the fountain of life cleansed, the tree itself made good at the very root and core; and then it says, the rest will follow in beauty of foliage, in ampleness and sweetness of fruit.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy way is not open to us that we may understand it. We know not what thou art doing day by day, but we know that when the days are all ended we shall say with thankfulness, He hath done all things well. Thou dost make disappointments help the soul's life; thus thou dost turn disappointed eyes to heaven. There is no land upon the earth we want when we have been trained to see thy purpose and to behold the things unseen; thou dost fill us with contempt for all time so short, for all space so small, for all earthly joy that plays its frivolous tune for one brief moment. We seek a country out of sight; we are strangers and pilgrims; our eyes are already beginning to look for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. Thus thou dost train us. We have laid down all our childish entertainments and pleasures and mockeries, and we have laid down much beside, saying, Lo, heaven is not in these, nor is the sky of God in these small blessings. We know that what we want is beyond—beyond the smiling and the weeping, beyond the sowing and the reaping; it is not here. There lies a river between us and what we really need; thou wilt divide the water for us, and we shall pass through the channel as upon dry ground, and not know until we are upon the other side mingling our voices with heavenly music. Now and again thou dost show us somewhat of that land—in dream, in new and daring thought, in rapturous praise, in ecstatic prayer, in some unexpected power of contemplation, when all the heavens show themselves in symbol; then we begin to think somewhat of the upper place and the great reserve. We would use this to our encouragement and inspiration; we would not accept it as a reward for indolence, or a guarantee of self-indulgence, but as an impulse to make haste, and to be true and faithful and wise, waiting in all the dignity of patience for the Lord's coming, that the waiting and the coming may be of one quality—calm with the tranquillity of thine own throne. We are here for a day or two: we shall be dead and forgotten to-morrow; yet may we live in remembered deeds, in holy charities, in sacrifices acceptable unto God;—for this immortality we would now live. God's blessing be upon us, a plentiful light filling all the heavens and the earth, yet with no sense of burdensomeness. The Lord's great love be our defence and our hope, our present inspiration and our lasting reward.

This we say in the sweet name of Jesus—name to sinners dear—Son of man, Son of God, who loved us, and died for us, and gave himself the just for the unjust. His name is our prayer; his sacrifice is thy Amen.

## Deut. xxxii.

"How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?" (v. 30).

**THE SONG OF MOSES.**—(*Continued.*)

**T**HIS is an appeal to reason, based upon obvious and indisputable facts. There is a law in warfare; there is a probability in battle, as in every other occupation and event of life. It is unreasonable and incredible that one man should chase a thousand and two men put ten thousand to flight. This must be accounted for. All the probabilities of the case are against the statement; the presumption is a violent one, and we must begin our argument by throwing it out: we must not have the imagination shocked by such a startling contrast of numbers. It is simply impossible that any one man should chase a thousand men, though they be the veriest cowards; their very numbers should give them courage; in a throng there should be some measure of audacity. How, then, is this chasing to be accounted for? The answer is:—"Except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up"—in other words, except their Rock had given them over to the enemy, had taken out of them whatever courage might naturally belong to them, and had thus shown that, when the religious passion goes down and the religious intelligence is insulted, even natural bravery turns to helpless cowardice. With the ancient history we have next to nothing to do, but with the moral which inspires it every man ought to feel himself concerned. Why are we driven before the wind? Why do apparently little oppositions cast us down, or fill us with great dismay, or drive us from our standing-ground? Physically we are numerous, and physically we are not without strength, and some little time ago we were not destitute of courage; how comes our present state, and what is the explanation of it? We have lost faith; we have gone down in spiritual quality; we have inverted our prayers, so that they no longer ascend to a welcoming heaven but descend to an unanswering or mocking earth. Failure is to be attributed often to loss of religious faith, loss of communion with God, loss of spiritual inspiration. How to account for the failures that are upon the right hand and upon the left—not failures from the beginning, which may

be attributed to some freak of nature in the constitution of the individuals who are defeated, but failures coming after victory, the course of a lifetime turned upside down, the once-victors now suppliants for their fate ;—these are the mysteries. Some men are from the beginning without hands or eyes or faculties : whatever they touch they touch at the wrong end, and whatever they look upon withers under their glance ; we are not speaking of such now : they are mysteries in providence which we cannot explain, riddles to which we have no answer ; but here are men who have fought and conquered, who have spoken with their enemies in the gate, and sent them reeling back in dismay and pitiful weakness,—now, the same men are fleeing a thousand before one and ten thousand before two ! Watching the incredible anomaly, we ask, How can these things be ? The answer comes from heaven : They are faithless men, they have taken to the worship of themselves ; they must be allowed to test their own vanity, and try the new gods with new conditions. God does give men up ; God does sell men to the enemy, and shut them up in a corner and turn the key upon them as if they were left in prison. Strange things does God do among the children of men ! He will not be mocked ; we cannot do so well without him as we do with him. If we think we can demonstrate our independence of him, he may let go his hold and leave us to run swiftly into destruction. Do not mock God. Have your solemn questionings, and now and then it may be your dark doubts ; but let there be no self-conceit, no offering to personal vanity, no self-confidence, no mockery of God ; when the mind is dazzled, rest awhile : after three days some capable Ananias may call upon you with answers from heaven.

The mystery is increased by another consideration :—

“For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges” (v. 31).

This verse admits of a new setting as to its meaning. It is taken thus by one of the most eminent Jewish commentators, namely : “Their rock is not as our Rock, and yet they have become our judges”—they are following the wrong course, and yet they are exalted above us, and they judge our life, and they condemn us, and they drive us away from their judgment-seat in contempt

and scorn ; this is a miracle in philosophy, this is an impossibility in morals ; their rock is not as our Rock, and yet somehow they have ascended the judgment-seat, and we turn pale before their tribunal and humbly receive the sentence of their scorn. These inversions of natural courses have to be accounted for. We are not at liberty to allow history to perpetrate infinite jests, and to taunt us with incredible ironies. There must be harmony in history ; there must be in it a tendency—a central line, always moving onward with nobleness and majesty of revelation and purpose ; much that is incidental and temporary may associate itself with that line but must fall into the harmony of the central movement. But here is an instance which cannot be accounted for on any ordinary principles. Here are people with the wrong god and the wrong law and the wrong policy, and somehow they are on the judgment-seat, and men who have the right theology in sentiment and the right law in the letter stand before them like doomed culprits.

Or take it in the other or more common way :—“For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.” We have the larger providence, we are under a more benevolent dispensation than themselves, our God is abler than their god ; they acknowledge this, and though this acknowledgment is made to us in theory, yet in practice they seem to have the best of it : they are at home, they are in prosperity, they stand in the midst of their vineyards, they make their bread of the kidneys of wheat, whilst we are strangers and exiles and wanderers. We have the right God, but we are suffering under an afflictive providence. Let it be so anyhow, if only men will think. There is hope of any man who feels an arresting hand upon his shoulder and hears in his ear an accusatory voice, and who asks questions upon the arrest and the accusation : he is dead, but not “twice dead ;” he is withered, but not “plucked up by the roots ;” he is as a felled tree, but still here and there are signs of sprouting : he yet may fully live. Let every man ask himself how it is that he can have a right theology, and a right Church, and the very book of God, and yet be mocked of the enemy, chased by straws that are driven by the wind, and made afraid by withered leaves that crinkle on the ground. The reason is religious. There is something wrong at the centre ; every accident seems to be right, but the central life is wrong.

“For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps” (vv. 32-33).

This is perversion; this is the embittering of God's sweetness; this is what is meant by the light that is in a man becoming darkness. Israel has spoiled the vine, Israel has turned wine of heaven into poison, Israel has made productive fields barren as the ashes of Gomorrah. This always lies within our power. We can dwarf the Church, we can prostitute the altar, we can make the sweetest things the bitterest. This corrupting, pestilential power seems to belong to the man who was made in the image and likeness of God. We can so treat the Church as to hate it; we can so worship ourselves, our vanity, our ability, our love of so-called progress, that we can only go back to the altar to spit upon it, and to the ministers of God to call them liars. This possibility is quite within the compass of our faculty; the heart can perform this astounding and iniquitous miracle. Israel performed it in the wilderness, and men are performing it with awful repetition to-day.

So the song rolls on, speaking of vengeance, speaking of the enemies of God, and promising them an awful reward. When the song was ended:—

“Moses came and spake all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he, and Hoshea the son of Nun” (v. 44).

He will die like old Jacob with a blessing upon his lips; but practically he ceases here. The legislator has become the poet, and in song he seems to die. He must bless the young and bless the future: he must assume the prophetic mantle and become an Elijah before the time; but the history would seem to end here at the forty-third verse, and to be continued by the hand of Joshua, or by the hand of some scribe unknown. Now Moses is told to go up into the Mount Abarim and Mount Nebo:—“And die in the mount whither thou goest up.” And a reason is given:—

“Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel” (v. 51).

Do not misunderstand these words. These words represent the

conception of ignorance. This is an after-thought by which the so-called premature death of Moses is to be accounted for; but the event as it stands here is out of analogy with the whole current and flow of the story, as if it could be accepted just as it here appears, it would throw infinite discredit upon all that had gone before. We want to be clever above that which is written, and so we will account for the decease of Moses before he enters the promised land. We are fond of attributing evil motives to men: it suits us to trace their death to their particular sin. Does the case stand thus—that all the people are to go into the promised land, but Moses is not, because Moses once ascended a hill and struck a rock, or was once or twice impatient? It is impossible. The whole people behaved so respectably, so virtuously, and so decorously, that they were permitted to go into the promised land, but their veteran leader was cut off—a sinner buried in the mountains, because he struck a rock or uttered an impatient word! Does God thus acknowledge “respectability”? Israel ancient and modern has been doing little but wrong all the way through. Moses has lived a life of suffering and of prayer, of communion with God, and has displayed meekness beyond the meekness of any other man that ever lived; on no shoulders up to his time have such burdens been laid; never was human temper or patience so tried: and is all the multitude of evil-doers, mockers, scorners, worshippers of false gods, to go into the promised land and leave Moses a culprit buried without consecration, interred without acknowledgment of service, left to rot in a place unknown? This cannot be: God cannot deny himself. Moses was the only man who would have been dissatisfied with the promised land. He had been so trained, chastened, enriched in mind, sanctified in heart, that to have led him into Canaan would be to lead him into an unutterable disappointment. What was Canaan? even if a fruitful field, it was but a field that was fruitful. If the eyes of Moses had seen Canaan, and his feet had trod the soil, surely his heart would have died within him for very vexation. No Moses ever gets to Canaan on earth. He is trained by its promise: he is so trained that the promise drops out of his vision whilst a larger scene glows upon it and a nobler issue challenges the imagination. We are promised great wealth; and when we are young we

count the gold, and hear the music of its chink, and say what we will do with it when it falls into our hands; the days pass on, life reveals itself, we see what a tragedy is operating at the heart of things—what intolerable agony is burning at the core like an unnamed hell; we then enlarge in mind, we become elevated in thought, we hear voices and see sights, and have our attention struck by revelations hitherto unapprehended, and as we grow in the upward and spiritual direction all our young dreams vanish, and we see what may be: the stars are what we want, the heavens conceal our estate,—the only inheritance worth living for, worth dying for, is an inheritance of holiness, capability for higher service, communion face to face with God. As for others, let them have the gold: they are mean enough to seize it, poor enough to need it; they never read the grander books, they never peruse the deeper revelation, they never hear the ineffable music; lead them forth, let them devour the pasture, and die of grossness. Offer Canaan to Moses! Our training has done nothing for us if it has not made us so rich in thought as to cause the earth to dwindle into a handful of soil not worth taking up. This is the end of Christian training; this is the meaning of all Christian chastening. But when we are called upon to account for Moses not seeing Canaan, we begin to say, What did he do?—True, he once struck a rock; true, he once gave some signs of impatience; but really now we think of it we can count his sins upon our fingers, but they must have been greater sins than we thought of at the time: he was not allowed to go into Canaan, therefore the sins must have been very great indeed. This is very much like us: it is marked by our lean charity, it is characterised by our shallow judgment. Though the speech is attributed to God, and put as it were into his very lips, it is the conception of the man who wrote it—the after-thought of the historian. We are emboldened to say this because of all the previous history. If sin could disqualify a man for entrance into Canaan, then not a man in all the host ought ever to have seen the promised land. But Moses was trained for the true Canaan—the Jerusalem that is above. He repeats the experience of Abraham: when Abraham came to a land flowing with milk and honey he said he would not have it; he did not want it; it was a paltry reward and no dis-

appointment worth speaking of; said the old traveller, I seek a country out of sight; give me all the earth, and I will throw it away, all the rivers, and pastures, and vineyards, and wheat-fields, and I will present them to a child—a toy to play with, a confection to suck; I want heaven—all heaven; I want the eternal God. So the righteous are taken away from the evil to come: the righteous are taken away from disappointment. They want to see their families all “comfortably settled,”—that is to say, all so beautifully settled as to have nothing to do. They want to see their sons come to manhood, and all the education of their children completed, and their houses set forth without a purpose and without a faculty; they will work and slave night and day that the eldest sons may have ten thousand more, and that some daughter may be saved from “stooping” to work. An evil purpose! A vicious cruelty! If you leave every child you have a million sterling, but with no taste for work, with a sense of indignity attaching to all labour, you cannot put him into a hotter hell on earth. You meant it well: it was pleasing to think that the boys would have nothing to do and that the girls would be enclosed in a garden of flowers; there is no such garden under the blue heavens, and there is no difficulty greater than to get over an evil training. And sometimes our purpose is good, it is a healthy purpose: we will see certain works completed, certain columns built right up to the last shaping point; we will see certain institutions thoroughly founded and brought into noble and beneficent working order: then having seen all this accomplished, we shall be satisfied. God does not allow us to see even these sacred issues: he says, I can do without you; you have been faithful, now you must enter heaven and look upon some things from above. We wonder why the good man was not permitted to live ten years longer to have seen all the reward of his labour upon earth; it is a mean wonder, an unworthy surprise. We wonder that the good man was not kept ten years longer in prison, ten years longer in banishment, ten years longer in weakness; but let us magnify the mercy of God that sent an angel down in the night-time, shook the foundations of the prison, and led out his servant into liberty and rest.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us; thou didst not in saving man take on thee the nature of angels, thou didst take upon thee the seed of Abraham; thou didst come in the image and likeness of man, which is in very deed the image and likeness of God. When thou didst so come unto us we knew thee not, for thou wert as one of ourselves, kindred in quality, the same in speech, neighbourly, friendly, social, so that we spoke of thy brethren and thy sisters, thy father and thy mother. We did not know the meaning of our own speech; we could not tell what we said, but we felt that our speech and thy vision were in contradiction; we felt thy greatness. When we did but touch the hem of thy garment we knew that thou wert more than man—than any man known to us—and we ourselves called thee Immanuel: God with us; near us, part of us, one with us; a great mystery of life, an eternal problem, not the less an eternal blessing. We thank thee for all religious thought; we bless thee that the altar elevates whosoever touches it; we thank thee that we cannot look downward whilst we are thinking of God and the future, truth and immortality, development, and heaven; then the mind kindles; then our nature puts forth its wings and flies up to the gate of the morning and the dwelling-place of the sun, and we love the light and sing in it as birds do. May we always be faithful to the altar, may our inquiry go deeper and deeper every day, and may our love burn until perfectly disinfected of all selfishness and earthliness and limitation, until it become a great flame, aspiring in continual hope and sacrifice to the very throne of God. We bless thee for all Christian fellowship, for communion in Christ Jesus, that we can speak through him and with him, that he is our Advocate and Intercessor: our Priest, eloquent through his own blood, mighty through the weakness of the Cross, the greater for us because so pained in Gethsemane and unable to save himself on Calvary. The Lord send the mysteries of the Cross into our hearts as songs without words, great inspirations, deep and holy comfortings. Amen.

Deut. xxxiii.

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF BLESSINGS.

**M**OSES cannot die. We have been told about his approaching death again and again; but he cannot yet be released. He has just been singing his great song, and now he is about to

utter a blessing worthy of its doctrine and music ; and whether he will yet die, who can tell ? He does not die hard, in any severe and arbitrary sense of that term ; instead of dying, he seems to live more, to double his vitality, and to cause his energy to express itself in song and benediction. To become a poet is not to die. To rise up into the stature and majesty of a priest is not to lie down and expire as an incident on the way to oblivion. We must follow this man further. If men can die as dogs die, why these songs, these blessings, these earnest solitudes about the future ? No dog sings ; no dog utters benedictions. What dog cares for the future of the world ? There cannot be a hand so cruel as to crush Moses after such a song and such a series of beatitudes. There are some lives we cannot kill : they are so great, so capable, so full of sacred mystery, so near being something higher, that to touch them, except with reverence, is itself an act of profanity. We cannot reason about this, or be cross-examined as to mere process of argument : we feel it, we know it ; we should contradict our own instincts and every quality that constitutes manhood were we to deny it. We thought Moses was about to die like an unforgiven criminal. Against this doctrine we have just protested with vehemence. It would be impossible. If there be two things in which it is impossible for God to lie, it is impossible for the God of justice to speak to Moses as a criminal. Whatever may have been written on the margin by some unskilled or malicious hand, and whatever may have been transferred from the margin into the body of the text, all nature, all justice, all truth says : Moses must not die on the ground of being a criminal. Such an assumption would prove too much or too little. Surely we cannot be allowed to part with Moses under some charge and impeachment of sin ? We recover our composure. Justice herself, with grave face, smiles a sweet contentment as we read the words—"Moses the man of God" (v. 1). We were in great sorrow when we read about his sin and his being ordered to Abarim because he had sinned at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin. Our heart said "*No !*" We may not be prepared with a critical or grammatical answer, but we have an answer older than all criticism and all grammar—the answer of a just instinct. Now we read of Moses as "the man of God." That term was

never applied to any man before. It will be applied to another prophet as we advance in the perusal of the sacred records; but to Moses alone, at this moment, is the term applied—and it fits him well; it is a grace he seems to have earned, a crown he seems to have won. “The man of God”—the man loving God, trusting God, knowing God, communing much and tenderly in solitary wastes and heights with God—the one man to whom God has spoken, as it were, face to face, and almost looked him into a kind of inferior deity, so grandly did his face burn and shine after long interviews in solitude with God. This is right; this is in harmony with all the story; the great rhythmic movement concludes itself in this solemn and majestic tone.

“—The man of God blessed the children of Israel.” Rights come with character. The man of God has a right to bless; and men recognise in him an undisputed dignity, and look to him as a lower fountain and origin of blessing. Who has not longed for certain men to touch them? Who has not desired to pluck the good man's gown and share his smile? Who would not have had one look from men whose names are immortal in all purest honour and goodness? To have spent a day with them would have been an education; to have heard their utterance of the mother-tongue would have been an epoch never to be forgotten. Great character carries with it great rights. There is a primacy of character; there is a throne which is never begrudged to goodness. The blessing does not read like the utterance of a man who is about to die from sheer weakness and exhaustion. There is no sign of intellectual decay here; the moral flavour is as delicate as ever, the penetration as keen, the tone as firm. This is not dying; it is passing on to greater spheres and nobler service. For death, in any inclusive and final sense, to come after this blessing would be an irony which imagination could not tolerate and which justice never could permit.

Let us look at the blessing as a whole. We need blessing. We have been so long in want of rain, it will do us good to go out and stand with uncovered head in the plentiful shower—so soft, so gentle, so impartial as to blessing, yet so discriminating as to its apportionment. All men could not receive the *same* blessing. A general “God bless thee!” would have amounted to nothing; or even some studied and pompous form of benedic-

tion, given with uplifted hands and priestly attitude and voice, would have been a gift unappreciated. It is a singular fact in human constitution that all men could not receive the same blessing—that is to say, what is a blessing to one man is not a blessing to another. Let us thank God that such is the case. It is in this way that variety becomes not only permissible but infinitely desirable, and even inevitable. The discourse which blesses one man has no music in it to another; neither is the discourse to be blamed, nor is the man to be blamed: there was no relation between the two things brought for one unhappy moment into connection. Give a landscape to a blind man! Would you blame the landscape? Would you blame the blind man because of want of appreciation? It is not a blessing to the blind man: he could not receive it. What does the blind man want? Believing that none could ask that question but God, he says, "Lord, that I might receive my sight!" Give him vision, and even partial darkness will be an opening heaven to his rejoicing and grateful heart. The earth is not equally appreciated in all its parts and distributions of clime and production. Some could hasten through a garden. There are men so made that they could walk faster through a garden than through a market-place. They could not receive the blessing which another quality of soul could receive. Some ears hear nothing in the bird-song and the bird-language but noise; they would slay the winged singers! Some men never lift their heads up to see how big the sky is. If they turn to the sky it is to forecast the weather, not to read the writing of God upon the blue beauty. So all men could not receive the same blessing or an inclusive blessing; there must be discrimination, allotment, individualisation; that we find in this great utterance of the dying Moses.

All men can receive *some* blessing. Let us thank God for that, otherwise some things in nature and life would go without appreciation. There are men so constituted that they want nothing but innumerable insects to gather, to classify, to name, and to study. They must have their portion in Israel; and God has plentifully endowed them with resources, blessed be his gracious name! He sends none away empty. If men would possess themselves, intellectually and scientifically, of stars,

worlds, planets, God feeds them at a plentiful table! when they have satisfied themselves for the moment, they are filled with a knowledge that they have not begun to know the building of God. We must provide for the constitution and capacity of every man. Every man must find something in the Church for himself, set down, as it were, by the hand of God directly and immediately for his appropriation. This is the sublime possibility of the sanctuary. The weary man here finds rest, or hears of it, and in hearing of it dying hopes are rekindled and failing strength begins to take heart again. The man of sorrow wants healing. Alas! all men are more or less men of sorrow: every heart has its own wound, every life its own pain, every spirit its own tears. Such men must be blessed; and they can be plentifully blessed only in the house of God: every stone of it was put up for such men; the whole sanctuary was roofed in for their security, and the whole book of revelation and all the noble psalms, written, by inspired men, are so many contributions made to the healing and the comforting of men of sorrow—now a great light for the intellect, now a tender tone for the hearing sated with the noises of the world, now a royal, soldierly exhortation to duty, service, sacrifice—a trumpet-blast which soldiers answer with a life of fire. Every man has a blessing in Israel—a special blessing, addressed, as it were, individually and exclusively to his very soul. Blessed are they who seize the benediction and live upon it!

The distinct appropriateness of some blessings is a proof of the possible appropriateness of others. Here and there we can join the line and say,—This we know to be appropriate; and therefore the benedictions which we cannot follow in the letter may be equally appropriate could we as fully comprehend them. Levi has been a mystery to us all the way through. He has had no land; he has been unlike his brethren; he has been, so to say, the praying man of the ever-changing company, busying himself about sacrifices and law, and all manner of religious ceremony and instruction. What can he have? Can Moses fit him with a blessing? Read verses 8-11:—

“And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own

children : for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law : they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands : smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

Could any blessing be more exquisitely adapted to Levi as we know him from history than this peculiar benediction ? Levi is commended to God because he had not known his father, or his mother, or acknowledged his brethren, or known his own children, because he was so absorbed in his work. This is the Christian call before the time. This is the dawn, white and tender, trembling and quivering in the far-away east of time ; the fulness of this light we shall find in Christ's own day, and in Christ's own speech—"Follow me ; and let the dead bury their dead ;" "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Levi in a sense had done this, and Levi is to have the great blessing ; the Urim and the Thummim are to be with the holy one for ever—Light and Perfection, glory and peace, radiance and security. As for what substance he has—Lord, bless it, and he shall have enough and to spare ; his loaves are but five in number, break them with thine own hands, and he will call "Halt ! for my hunger is satisfied." When we do come upon a divine explanation of a divine mystery, it is so clear, so complete, so profound and satisfying that we can with ineffable comfort pass on to the next mystery of which no explanation has been given, knowing that God could explain that enigma were it right that the riddle should be read.

Look for a moment at the unenvied blessings of some men. When Jacob came to Joseph the speech rolled from him like a river ; the old man did not know how eloquent he was until the name of Joseph came to his lips. We have perused that great speech of old Israel, and found it to be like a garden of delights, a fountain in the wilderness,—a surprise to the man who uttered it as well as to the man who received it. Moses almost quotes the blessing, yet he varies it ; for when was love ever short or the inventive faculty of adding new colour and new tone to the utterance of her homage ? "And of Joseph he said"—then flows the river :—

“And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, and for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush : let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns : with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth : and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh” (vv. 13-17).

Who can read the blessing with music expressive and tender enough? It must be looked at; we should profane it by vocally repeating it. A man should graduate for a lifetime in the utterance of words, in the balancing of emphasis, before he attempts to read this speech addressed to the name of Joseph. The man himself is not here, but his name stands for progeny, a posterity, a whole family of men, the world over and time through. Nothing is to be kept from this man :—

“Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon” (vv. 13-14).

He dreamed of the sun and the moon and the stars long, long ago, and saw them in a spirit of homage. Let the sun shine for him, and let the moon pour her gentle beams upon sea and land for him, and let all things that grow gather themselves into sheaves that he may carry them in his bosom; let his glory be like the firstling of the bullock, and his horns be like the horns of the unicorn (v. 17). Only God has such blessings to give. To no earthly treasure-house does this man come for Joseph, but to heaven; and does heaven contain anything too good for him? And none envied his blessings. Men felt it to be right. When the portions were given out, men felt that this man had that which was right. Not one cried out saying: “That is too much for any one man; make the distribution more equal; do not create favouritism in Israel.” There are times when men feel that compensation must be paid, when old wrongs come into the memory as so many prompters, saying, “You remember me; you cannot have forgotten my ghastliness; your recollection must

vividly recall the night of revenge and cruelty, and the day of sale and expatriation." And when all these black memories crowd upon the soul, and we hear some great, royal, priestly voice outside pronouncing blessing upon blessing, piling mountain upon mountain, we say, "It is right: let it be done; God save the king!" There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. Blessed are they whose trust is in the living God, for they shall in due time see the result of all their labour, and be comforted with tenderest and divinest solaces.

So every man in Israel had his blessing. Reuben was to have innumerable men; the voice of Judah was to be blessed as God might bless an instrument of music; Levi was to have the continual presence of the Thummim and the Urim; Gad was to be liberated from the mountains of Gilead, and to have great liberty; and all the children of Israel were to have a blessing adapted to the circumstances of each.

In blessing men we take nothing from God. When all the blessings were given, the poet-prophet said:—

"There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them" (vv. 26-27).

More blessing is left than is given. Giving doth not impoverish God. His sun, running his daily course, is as bright after he has kissed all the lands with light, as he was when he first came to begin the glowing task of the day. The sun is not wasted; when he dips in the western water, he dips with a promise that he will be back again soon. We may nod a moment and get ourselves ready to behold the vision, because before we can well close our eyes he will be up again, making the east white and glistening. There is no end to the divine blessing. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" and when you have slaked your thirst, the fountain will seem to abound the more for the water which you have withdrawn: there will be more at the end than at the beginning. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." As the ancient beneficiary cried out, "I have no more



vessels, let the oil be stayed," so now it is man who gives in, it is never God who is exhausted.

But there are always interstices—crevices that may have been left without a blessing; provision must be made for that possibility, so we conclude with a general blessing. Now, here is a shower that will fill everything up, leaving no cavity without its benefaction:—

"Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places" (v. 29).

This is the general benediction, the great comforting word that rolls like a river over the whole life of Israel.

Are we blessed? Have we each some blessing, great or small, all our own—a blessing of hope, of contentment, of aspiration, of reverent inquiry, of sure confidence in God? Do we read the Bible as if it had been written expressly, and this very moment, for us, for our guidance, stimulus, comfort and reward? If so, we are blessed with blessings. What is the Christian blessing? It may be mentioned in one word—a word which is often misunderstood, because too narrowly defined. The Christian blessing is Peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you"—the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, the peaceful peace, the tranquil calm, the sabbatic rest, the peace of God. Do not neglect the true meaning of that word peace; it is an inclusive term, it involves reconciliation—the harmonisation of the nature of man with the nature of God, the cessation of rebellion, the acceptance, upon divine terms, of pardon; it means the Cross, in all the typical eloquence of its blood, in all the unobscured splendour of its eternal glory. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." O that we had hearkened unto his law, then had our peace flowed like a river!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast given a voice unto the morning and a voice unto the evening. May we have understanding thereof, and know what thou art speaking to us by the rising light and by the departing sun; may all things round about us teach somewhat of thy providence and thy sovereignty, and may we receive the simple and tender lesson into an opening and responding heart. We all do fade as a leaf. We are cut down like the grass and are mown down like the flowers of the field. Thou dost give unto thy beloved sleep; thou sayest unto thy servants who have faithfully served thee, Well done! To dying eyes thou dost show the crown of righteousness gleaming through the deepening cloud. We bless thee for all thy care—so minute, so continual, so grand in patience, so ineffably careful and loving. We bless thee that thy hand is upon us, and behind us, and before us, and round about us, that we live and move and have our being in God. Let thy merciful presence come near us—a shining light, a glowing warmth in the heart, a speech of benediction, a token of heavenly deliverance and glory. We have come to praise thee for all the mercies of the passing time. The hours have been full of thy love, the ages have been alight with symbols of thy presence; our whole life lifts itself up in fearless testimony, and each Christian believer becomes a witness to the mighty power, the redeeming efficacy, of the blood of Jesus Christ. May we grow in the knowledge of our Saviour. We have not begun to know him; his riches are unsearchable; he cannot be found out unto perfection; he allures us onward, upward, heavenward; and by many a token he shows how near he is, and then he rises above our touch, and asks us to follow on. May we not be disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but rather arise and do God's bidding with all love, with the energy of both hands, with the consent of the whole man. We own our sin, but when we bring to bear upon it the omnipotence of thy Cross, behold, where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, and is not to be heard of, because of the wonderful ministry of Christ. Blessed Saviour of the world, thou hast destroyed sin; thou hast beheld Satan fall like lightning out of heaven, and all his power is under thy foot, and the world is thine, and the whole earth, and thine the fulness of the sea; and all is hastening towards reconciliation and unity, completeness of homage and unbrokenness of service: the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and none may set aside his oath or destroy the divine covenant. As surely as thou dost live, the whole earth shall be covered with the glory of heaven. This is our hope, and this our confidence, and this our joy. We think of it until our heart burns within us, and we know that surely thou wilt hasten it in thy time, and we shall then see the

meaning of light, the very glory of day. What we want, or what we need most, thou knowest. Thou understandest us altogether; our whole heart is laid bare before thee, like an open page, and thine eye can see the secret springs of our thought. Grant unto us some assurance that our emptiness shall be filled up, that our desire shall be construed into a sacred prayer and answered with largest blessing; may our aspirations be regarded as uttering the necessities of the soul, at least in hint, how feeble soever, and may they return upon us with great benedictions. Thou art shortening our days, thou art limiting our opportunities of doing good, thou art pointing us to the descending sun, and telling us that the day is swiftly speeding to its close; may we work in the light, for the night cometh when no man can work; may we walk as children of the day and not of the night—children of light, who are ashamed of darkness rather than afraid of it, and who glory in being sons of God, in purpose, in uppermost desire, how far short soever we fall in actual execution and realisation. We bless thee for this hope, for this inspiration, for this resolve; these are the miracles of God, these are the triumphs of grace; we praise thee for them as for good and perfect gifts of God. We pray for all whom we ought never to forget: for those who do not pray for themselves; for self-idolaters; for those who are their own confidence and strength, and who know not that their strength is in heaven and not upon earth; for the spiritually blind and deaf and dumb; for prodigals, wandering in the darkness and reaping nothing but its blackness; for all loved ones in trouble, perplexity, or sore straits; for all who travel by sea and land; for all who are in great crises of life, full of pain, or full of hope that becomes almost agony, because of its uncertainty; the Lord grant unto such all needful succour, tender blessing, ministry of grace; and lead them on still day by day, until the end nears and the meaning seems clearer to the mind. We give thee all we are and have—ourselves, our families, our houses, our businesses, our whole life. Lord, come thou, whose right it is, and reign over us all, that we may, in obedient love, do homage before thee night and day, and express the homage of our minds by the industry and sacrifice of our hands.

This prayer we pray, as we pray all our prayers and sing all our hymns, in the sweet name of the Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God, God the Son—the Word made flesh. Amen.

#### Deut. xxxiv.

#### NILE AND NEBO.

**I**T is a long way from the Nile to Nebo—a long way, not in mere distance geographical, but in experience, in trial, in work, in suffering—in all that goes to make up the sum total of the mystery of human life. It is well for us to have opposite points, that we may sometimes look at the one and at the other, at the beginning and at the intermediate end: and so measure off life in great sections, and consider it well, as if it were an

entirety between the two points. Thus we set up judgment-seats, and form exact moral estimates of what we are and what we have done; and thus we hasten on to the day of audit and final and irrevocable settlement. If Moses could have seen the whole at one view, could he have lived? No man can see God and live: can any man see his own life, in all the minuteness of its detail, in every throb of pain, in every streak of blood, in every strife of battle, and go through it? Would not the sight kill him? Would it not become a burden which he could not sustain, from which he would shrink in utmost terror and despair, saying, I cannot undertake it; let me die, and not live? Thus God is the supreme mystery. But there are mysteries under his being which help to illustrate its profoundness and its majesty. We ourselves are mysteries, and life is an invisible wonder, and is dealt out to us a moment at a time, for who of us could be entrusted with a whole week together? Our breath is in our nostrils; the little light that is in our eye is but a flash upon the surface, and may pass in a moment. Our life is but a vapour which cometh for a little time, and then passeth away. The vision is shown little by little—just one circumstance at a time; and we cannot take up the next loop along with the present loop: we must knit patiently, tediously, a loop at a time, taking up all the allotted thread until our portion of work is completed. Let us study our own life in the light of this suggestion. Let any man who has lived—not merely existed—any man who has had to struggle for life, to fight for bread, to scheme with all cunningness of thought that he might maintain his foothold upon the land,—compare the first point of his recollection with his present position, and then say whether he would like to do all the battling over again, and endure all the suffering once more; or say whether it would be possible to live the whole life in one day's agony. This is God's way of educating us. This is the way against which we chafe and kick, as men might kick against pricks: so we bruise ourselves, and let our life ooze out in blood, instead of accepting the method, saying, We brought nothing into this world, nor did we ask to come into it: but loyally, with fulness of homage, we submit to thy way in the world, reading all its books one by one, gathering up what little store of wisdom it may hold; and at the end, not now, we can

pronounce our opinion upon it. Every man who has lived a varied, eventful, struggling life is himself a miracle. Let him soberly think over the case—where he began, where he has for the moment ended; let him compare the Nile with the Nebo, and say whose handiwork is displayed in all the figure of life—who drew that geometry, who coloured that picture, who brought all those innumerable lines into focus and final meaning. The individual lines appear to be simple enough, little and short enough to have sometimes next to nothing in them; then they become related, mutually attached and reciprocal in influence and in colour. Behold how the miracle expands and brightens, until standing before it we say,—Surely this is God's handiwork; all this looks like what we behold in wondrous nature; there is unity here, shape, meaning; presently we shall hear voices in this temple, and own our life-sanctuary to be the house of God.

Could we see life as a whole, would it be worth living? No man can answer that question, because having lived it we answer it with our experience, not with our imagination. Still, the question is not without keenest interest. Could we see the whole, is life worth living? It is often a weary experience, a keen disappointment, a reaping with blunt sickles in fields that grow nothing but darkness; the morning brings its hope, and night never fails to come with its disappointment; in the morning good resolutions nerve the little strength, and at night the good resolutions are brought home—dead angels, white and cold. We must not answer from our imagination, from our momentary passions and affections, from individual instances, saying, Yes: to have seen that one face was worth living a life of agony; to have felt that one little gentle touch was worth all the sorrow that could be crushed into seventy years. That is an emotional or imaginative, not a philosophical answer. The question is, Could we see life as a whole, all its days and nights of joy and sorrow, life and death, anguish and gladness, mountain and vale, light and gloom—is it worth living? What does it all come to? To die on the softest bed, what is it but to have a luxury in which there is no enjoyment? To die amid all pomp and circumstance, what is it but to see the perfection of irony? Thus we talk outside the Bible. To open the Bible

for our answer is not our immediate purpose. We are speaking now of life in itself, by itself, and without any of those religious influences and ministries which constitute what is known as supernatural action. Begin your life upon the earth, study it within the lines of the earth, and finish it at the grave, so that the last dig of your spurs into the steed of your life shall make that steed leap into the tomb—the goal! the winning post! Is it worth doing? Occasional joys say, Yes; great disappointments say, No. A noisy controversy goes on within the mind and heart: now we say it is worth living, and now we declare in another tone that life is not worth living; and thus we are of no certain opinion for two days together, so quickly do tears follow laughter.

Read the fourth verse :—

“ And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed : I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.”

Is this mocking the man? Is this God's providence, to show a man what he might have had, and then assure him that he shall not have it—to dangle food before the eyes of hunger, and then throw it away, so that the hand of need cannot follow it? Is it God's way to lift a man up to some Pisgah whence he can see heaven, and then cast him down into hell? Is it not cruel refinement? Is this not unworthy of a God of care and compassion and love? Everything depends upon the tone of the reading. The verse might be so read as to involve a charge of mockery against God. The man whose heart is wrong could so read this verse as to turn it into an impeachment against God's considerateness of human feeling. There is a barbarous as well as a civilised mode of reading; there is a reading that misses the whole emphasis, that by a cold monotony levels the hills rather than raises the valleys. Some words are not to be read aloud, because the meaning is not in the letters but in the tone. By looking long at the words and allowing the heart to utter them, we may get some hint of their spiritual music; but to hear our words read by those who do not understand us is to suffer the worst of pain. The iron voice, or the hireling voice, the heartless voice, the grinding, crushing voice—

how it slays all things! How it will not allow anything to live that has in it one touch of beauty or one hint of immortality! Who can utter the words of the Lord? Reading the words, "Thus saith the Lord," we might well pause there for ever, and say, What he said he must repeat, for it does not lie within the compass of the human voice to reproduce the music of God. Moses was to see that the promise had been fulfilled. He was to be ranked with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in that it was unworthy of him to go into so little a land, so mean a home; enough for the scholars who were behind him, enough for those who were still reading and half-blind, who could scarcely discriminate between the right hand and the left—schoolhouse enough for them; but as for Moses—after Sinai, after forty days' communion upon the mountain, after the shining face, after all the experience that made him what he was—his next movement must be to the eternal Canaan, the better land, the Jerusalem which is above. Moses understood the speech; Moses did not reproach the providence of God. His very acceptance of it was the noblest human confirmation of its beneficence that could possibly be supplied. Where Moses was content we need not chafe.

"And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (v. 7).

Then why did he die? He might have been of use still. If his faculties had all exhausted themselves, it was time for him to lie down, and he was not called upon to work his jaded powers when they complained of weariness and sighed for the rest of the grave; but his eye was as bright as ever, and his natural physical force as complete as ever. From a physical point of view he needed not to die. Nor did he die. The word "die" in relation to Moses is used conveniently, momentarily, as the best word that could indicate a passing incident. Men in the condition of Moses do not die: they are raised, they are translated, or transferred, they ascend; they do not die in the common and general sense in which that term is accepted. Moses was not killed by work. It is said by some that work never kills any man. What authority they have for speaking so we cannot tell. It is certain, however, that the

greatest workers have been amongst the longest livers. Those who have done most have lived most, and sometimes even in natural terms they lived longest. Not always. Herein we must not meddle; there is no calendar by which these things can be fixed, or upon which certainties can be built or speculation affirmed. Moses was not dismissed for inefficiency; he was still the greatest prophet in Israel. It was the king who died when Moses died. Joshua was a child to him, and Joshua would have been the first to say so. Not a man in all Israel dare stand before him, saying, "I could wear thy mantle." When it came to real issue and test of strength, to penetration of insight and reach of judgment, and solidity of character, all men stood in the plain to admire this mountainous man. He was not, therefore, unable to work; he was not inefficient in the service he rendered; he was abler on the day of his death than he had ever been on any day of his life. Then why did he die? He did not die, he ascended. Searchers upon the mountains, diggers in the valleys, said to one another, as they searched and dug in vain, "He is not here: for he is risen." God knows when men ought to die. Do not intermeddle with God. Sometimes the work is completed in our early years. A short day have some lives, but a crowded one; within very limited hours they speak words which can never be forgotten, or sing songs the world will never willingly let die. Thus God keeps us in patient uncertainty, whether we shall perish upon the Nile, or pass away upon mount Nebo, or be found with death set upon the face as a period put to a process of sleep. All this God keeps in uncertainty. We cannot open these doors of mystery. In the midst of life we are in death. No world is so near to us as the world eternal. We speak of making the most of the present: what is the present and the near?—It is the eternal, it is the heavenly, it is the divine. It is our mistake to suppose that earth is nearer than heaven. Eternity crowds out time, and presses into interstices which time could never fill. All our days are in God's hands. There is an appointed time to man upon the earth. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. . . . Another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." Forecast we do, and add up the whole multitude of figures, and publish arithmetical results with prodigal hands,



but we cannot tell when the dart will strike. We have surrounded the mystery with calculated probabilities, but the mystery itself is a door that cannot be opened.

Were there no mitigations in the close of the life of Moses? Was all wrought out according to some process of iron necessity? Was it merely a walk up the mountain and a falling down dead, and a being covered with an anonymous sod? There were mitigations in the case, which are open to the eye of ordinary attention. Moses died in God's company:—

“—the Lord shewed him all the land” (v. 1).

“—the Lord said unto him” (v. 4).

They were together at the last. Is there no meaning in this? We are told that the Lord spake unto Moses; and the literal translation of that expression is that Moses died *on the mouth of God*.

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord” (v. 5).

Read:—

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, on the mouth of the Lord.”

What wonder that the Jewish commentator should have said that the Lord kissed his servant Moses? It would have been a fitting farewell within such a sphere as Moses had so long and arduously occupied. What if, after all his service, he had been kissed into rest—kissed into heaven? God can come nearer to us than the physician. What he does to the soul in the hour and article of physical expiring, who can tell? “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” Who shall say what sweet communion passes between the servant and the Lord when not a word is spoken? Not a word is heard from Moses. His was an expressive silence. There was but one Speaker and one auditor. The auditor who had talked so much, with so noble a voice, with so positive and royal an eloquence, spoke nothing, but died on the mouth of God—died in the embrace of his Lord. Who can say what the measure of that reward was? We cannot enter into these mysteries; we can be drawn upward by them, impelled in noble directions by their influence. To have

God's kiss, God's well-done, God's smile is not to die; it is but to "languish into life."

"And he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor" (v. 6).

These are figurative expressions. We do not know the meaning of them—and yet we know it well. The text could be so degraded as to present great difficulties to the untutored and unsubdued imagination; but to the fancy that has been chastened by suffering, the picture is full of tenderness. God has buried much in his time; he has been the great grave-digger, he has filled up the tombs of the ages and written the epitaphs of æons. How he buried Moses we can never know; but having buried him, God knew where he was. The grave was as a footprint to the Almighty: the tomb was as a chosen garden of God. It warms the poor heart, and cheers the dreariness of the spirit to think that God knows where every grave is—away out on the sea, down in the green waters, hidden among the marine rocks that human eye may never look upon; in ground blessed by the priest, in land unblessed by any human voice; the great grave loaded with marble and almost resonant with pompous eloquence and eulogium: and the nameless grave, where the beggar who might have been a prince is laid, where the silent poet rots, according to the flesh. God knows every grave—the little child's few inches of sod, and the old man's last resting-place, and the sweet mother's, without whom the world would have been a waste. It is enough. These regions are not in our keeping, except in some cases as to their surfaces. The key is in heaven, and as to the time when the door will open, we know not; enough to know where the key is, and to know that it cannot be lost.

"... no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (v. 6).

There are unknown graves; there are places that are sacred only to God, because God only knows them. We cannot tell upon what ground we are treading; we do not know who is buried just under our feet. The earth has been a long time in building, bold men—and wise men—say thousands upon thousands of ages and incalculable periods. What little singing birds were buried just under our feet we cannot tell; or what

majestic beasts, or what hints of nobler life, or what men, women, and children, what prophets, sages, martyrs—we cannot tell. The house of the living is built upon the house of the dead. The whole world is sacred. We ought to hush our voices in the presence of its historic majesty, and call it the House of God.

Were we to finish here our perusal of the life of Moses, we should feel the incompleteness of the story. It has been full of event: it has kindled into heroic interest here and there, and again and oftentimes; but this cannot be the end. If we had courage enough to turn over the page, we should find that there is more to be read. What we lack in positive instruction, we find realised in positive instinct, in real and indisputable intuition. We do not possess all our riches in the letter. Writing can only go to a certain point; at its best it is but a make-believe, a help by the way, a hint to be going on with. We still have our instincts, intuitions; our mental impulses, convictions, inspirations. We cannot tell anything about them; we feel it is with them as it is with the wind: we hear the sound thereof, but we know not whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit—that has the spirit-eye, the spirit-genius, the prophetic faculty, the seer's agonising gaze. We are not to be bound by letters, and chapters, and verses; we cannot end here. As Moses went up, so must we, and on a later day we must hear more about this man. We are bound to do so by the very covenant of God, for he cannot have made man in his own image and likeness merely for the purpose of burying him in an unknown grave.

Great was Moses!

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (v. 10).

He was unique; he stands alone; no man can go near him. And yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than Moses!

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