

## EXODUS

by the same author

GOSPEL OF JOHN

PETER

THE WAY INTO THE HOLIEST

TRIED BY FIRE

CHRIST IN ISAIAH

THE PROPHET OF HOPE

OUR DAILY WALK

OUR DAILY HOMILY

# EXODUS

Chapters I-XX (v 21)

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*F. B. Meyer*

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*The Text of the Book of Exodus is from the Authorised Version. Quotations in the Commentary are in many cases from the Revised Version.*

## I

# FOREWORD: THE BOOK AND ITS MESSAGE

**The Purpose of the Book.** For our present purpose it is not material to consider how this Book came into existence. That is too wide a subject to be discussed in a treatise which is primarily intended for purposes of personal devotion. Let those whose training and taste incline them to such studies be permitted to pursue them without prejudice. Already the great and varied intellects that have wrought in this quarry have vastly enriched our stores of Bible-knowledge. But, after all, though the processes through which corn becomes bread are of themselves deserving of careful inquiry, the main question for those who need strength for daily living is, Whether the bread served on their tables is nutritious?—an inquiry which is best solved by experience.

**How to Study the Book.** As we open the Book of the Exodus, we are face to face with words that have been wrought into the life of successive generations of saints. The circumstances of their composition may be legitimate inquiry for the archaeologist and linguist, but for us there is a more absorbing question, How can we so consider these pages and paragraphs as to extract the greatest amount of spiritual nutriment? The geologist will delve into the earth, and show the successive strata of which it has been built up for the habitation of man, but when his investigations are completed, the main point for practical life is to discover whether the soil presents a healthy and solid foundation on which to build the homes of life. And the fact that from the days of our Lord and before, this Book has been prized and assimilated by the noblest of our race, is enough to whet our appetite and stir our souls in anticipation of its yield.

**The Story of God's Love and Care.** It is the story of Jehovah's espousals with the Hebrew race. When they were cast out in the open field, to the abhorring of their persons, the Almighty passed by and looked upon them. It was a time of love, when He spread

His skirts upon them and sware unto them and entered into covenant with them, and they became His.<sup>1</sup> He at least could never forget the kindness of their youth, or the love of those early days, when they went after Him even into the wilderness, a land that was not sown,<sup>2</sup> nor how He had borne them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself, that they might be a peculiar treasure above all peoples.<sup>3</sup> The hymn beside the Red Sea was the nuptial ode, celebrating the union between God and His people, which was intended to last for ever; and would have lasted, had they not turned aside after many lovers.

**The History of a Nation.** This book recites also how, for the first time, the chosen people commenced to have a history. From being a tribe under patriarchal government, they suddenly leapt into a kingdom of priests, a holy nation and peculiar people beneath the theocratic rule of Jehovah Himself. Bunsen said that history dates from the night of the Exodus. Whether that affirmation would stand in the light of recent discoveries, as, for instance, of the existence and might of the Hittite empire, is open to question; but this at least is true, that amid the anguish of a common suffering and the triumph of a common deliverance, in the brick-kilns of Egyptian bondage and the passes of the Sinaitic peninsula, the undisciplined shepherds of Joseph's day became a disciplined nation of more than two million souls, who went up harnessed, i.e. in battle array, to the conquest of Canaan. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? A land was born in a day, and a nation brought forth at once.<sup>4</sup>

**A Lasting Covenant.** The anguish was acute, but its results were lasting. Tribulation lasted for 230 years, but its effect has become the permanent possession of all the subsequent centuries. Scattered in every country, driven in turn from every great city, derided, persecuted, pillaged, and massacred, this people still subsists. "Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the Lord did choose, He hath cast them off? thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the Lord: If My covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David

<sup>1</sup> Compare Ezek. xvi. 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. ii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. xix. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Isa. lxvi. 8.



My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers: . . . for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them.”<sup>1</sup>

**Plan of the Book.** This book is divisible into three principal divisions:

REDEMPTION . . . . .	Chapters i-xv.
CONSECRATION . . . . .	„ xvi-xxiv.
WORSHIP . . . . .	„ xxv-xl.

And in each of these there is a climax towards which the subject-matter of each division culminates.

The *first* part culminates in the Passage of the Red Sea, when Israel went through the Flood on foot, amid the rattle of the storm; the *second*, in the giving of the Law amid the thunders of Sinai; and the *third*, in the erection of the Tabernacle according to the pattern shown on the Mount.

**A Great Story.** It is a great story. Through the centuries the gaze of myriads has been turned to that supreme hour when a nation of slaves went forth from cruel bondage and grinding tyranny into the broad spaces and exhilarating air of the wilderness—itsself the vestibule of a national existence, which has affected the history of mankind more deeply and permanently than of Greece or Rome or Britain. The principles, also, by which nations thrive and become virile are embedded in the subsequent pages. The statutes and distinctions of the Mosaic legislation lie at the basis of our own, and have powerfully influenced modern civilisation.

**Transition from Tabernacle to Church.** From the Tabernacle the transition to the Temple and the Church was natural and easy; and the Levitical Priesthood and institutions are strongly quoted by influential bodies within the precincts of Christendom. No intelligent person can afford to ignore this Book, which is only second in importance to that of Genesis in the Old Testament and the Gospel of Matthew in the New.

**Conspicuousness of Moses.** Throughout this Book the prominent figure is Moses, “the servant of the Lord,” whose song is sung around the sea of glass before the throne. His portraiture, as pre-eminently “the servant, faithful in all God’s House,” is the heritage of all who have sought to do the will of God on earth as it is done in Heaven. His unshaken fidelity, meekness, selflessness,

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxxiii. 24-26.

and faith stand out as conspicuously as the outlines of mountains that front the Western Sun. But for us the most salient characteristic in his commanding personality, and the one on which we desire to lay the principal stress, is his partnership with God.

**Exodus a Human Book.** But the story of the Exodus is repeated in every soul that seeks deliverance from the enmeshing and enervating influence of the World. From this point of view the Book is human from the first verse to the last. The things that happened were by way of figure, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.<sup>1</sup>

There are very few of us who have not gone down into Egypt; very few that have not tasted of the leeks, melons, onion, and garlic; very few that have not eaten of the flesh-pots; very few that have not been tempted to sell our birthright for a life of selfish and even swinish pleasure. The fact that the infant Jesus was taken down into Egypt is, in this sense, profoundly significant.

**A Significant Parallel.** There is, therefore, an extraordinary depth of meaning in the Evangelist's quotation of Hosea,<sup>2</sup> in his allusion to the flight of the Holy Family from Herod's destructive sword. Why should he say that "Joseph took the young child and His mother by night and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my Son"?

—**And Divine Appeal.** Is it not because the life of the Son of Man is the epitome of the experiences of the sons of men—sin excepted? Is not God always calling His sons out of Egypt? Is He not always summoning the souls of men to forsake the brick-kilns and flesh-pots, and become part of the elect race, the chosen generation, the royal priesthood? Life is one long appeal to arise and depart, since this world can never be our rest. Go forth, O Christian soul! Be not content with speaking of the Exodus that should be accomplished—arise to accomplish it!<sup>3</sup> Do not linger behind at the sounding of the trumpet! Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from hence, touch no unclean thing, be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord!

<sup>1</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. x. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hos. xi. 1; Matt. ii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Luke ix. 31 (*Greek*).

## II

# THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

### EXODUS i

1. Now these *are* the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob.

2. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

3. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin,

4. Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

5. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt *already*.

6. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.

7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.

8. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

9. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we:

10. Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and *so* get them up out of the land.

11. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.

12. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

13. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour:

14. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, *was* with rigour.

15. And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one *was* Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah:

16. And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see *them* upon the stools; if it *be* a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it *be* a daughter, then she shall live.

17. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive.

18. And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men-children alive?

19. And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women *are* not as the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

20. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty.

21. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

22. And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

## II

# THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

### EXODUS i

**Egypt the Strangest Country on Earth.** Rightly enough, Egypt has been described as the strangest country on earth. Strictly speaking, it consists of a long, narrow strip of green vegetation, stretching from south to north on an outspread carpet of bright yellow sand. This strip of fertile soil is about seven miles broad by five hundred miles in length, and is maintained against the incursion of drought and sand by the presence of the river, which annually overflows the lands on either bank, and holds dominion over them for one hundred days during which its waters amply enrich the soil.

**The Reason Why.** This marvellous phenomenon is due to rains and melting snows on the highlands of Central Africa, the waters of which flood the upper reaches of the river and enload its current with rich silt, to be spread over the waiting fields that eagerly anticipate its advent. So delicate and unerring are the balances of Nature, that for uncounted millenniums the Nile has continued to rise and fall, to enrich and fructify, as with the rhythm of the human heart.

**A Land of Ease and Civil Progress.** *Life, therefore, in Egypt has always been comparatively easy.* From the earliest dawn of history the valley of the Nile, like those of the Euphrates, the Ganges, and the Yang-tse, has been the home of a large and prolific family of the human race. The soil is most productive. The plough is hardly required. In the sculptures the ploughshare is a slight instrument that can be managed by a single hand. Though not manured by artificial means, the soil is as fruitful to-day as in the days of the Pharaohs. It is easy, therefore, to understand the ease and rapidity with which, under such circumstances, the apparatus of a complex and enduring society, highly organised, with its arts and sciences, its political and religious systems, came into existence. "While the Hebrew patriarchs were still feeding their flocks on the wolds of Canaan and struggling with the landowners for wells, Egypt had a settled and

complicated polity, castes of priests, soldiers, and labourers, a court of intricate ceremonialism, and relations with the most distant nations of the world, so far as it was then known."

But for this very reason, and because the means of obtaining a livelihood were so cheap, *life in Egypt was apt to become self-indulgent and stagnant.*

**Egypt not the Land to Produce Sturdiness of Character.** Wherever Nature smiles continuously upon her children, and scatters her gifts with lavish hands, man misses the highest incentives to action, and suffers from lack of that propitious environment in which the nobler qualities of the soul mature. For these the colder air and stormier aspect of the temperate and colder zones are needed. Not where the balmy breezes blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle, but where the north-easter sweeps through the forest with icy blast, lashes the waves to foam, and searches the house of life for the ill-clad and weakly, will you encounter the highest ideals and sturdiest heroism. Not where the rich soil laughs with plenty, though only tickled by the plough, but where the ground is sterile, where the tree-roots have to be extracted, and the wrestle with thorn and thistle seems endless, will you meet with the noblest examples of courage, patience, faith, endurance, and care for others.

**A Contrast and a Lesson.** Contrast, for instance, Naples and Helsingfors. In the sweep of that noble bay, lying always under the caress of the sun, vast numbers will be content, if you guarantee them a daily dole of bread, a slice of melon, and a drink of sour wine. Granted these, and they will be content to doze in indolence through the long and lazy days. During successive centuries the Neapolitans produced no hero, but lay under the heel of the tyrant. In an earlier age she harboured sins for which Sodom was destroyed. But under the sombre skies of the North, Finland had produced a race of strong men and women, who love liberty, and have elaborated a noble constitution, in which a virile people has grown to maturity. Not for nothing have they wrung their bread from the unwilling hand of Nature. The wrestle has strengthened their moral muscles and elicited the noblest attributes of the human soul.

**Egypt a Favoured Child.** But Egypt has been the favoured child of the family of nations gathered around the Mediterranean seaboard. It literally teemed with life. The waters of the Nile abounded with fish and its banks with fowl. The soil was prolific with various kinds of vegetables as well as with great harvests of corn. In after-

years the children of Israel wept, and said, "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic." There was every inducement, therefore, to say to the soul, "Eat, drink, and be merry." Under the spell of the enchanted air and the enchanted soil, the song of the Lotos-eaters might have come naturally to the lip:

"All things have rest: why should we toil alone?  
We only toil, who are the first of things,  
And make perpetual moan,  
Still from one sorrow to another thrown."

**Egypt the Emblem of the Evils of Worldly Prosperity.** There was a distinction in this respect between Egypt and Babylon. Babylon stood on the great highway of the world. For the traffic of the old generation the valley of the Euphrates was the natural highway between east and west; but Egypt lay as it were in a nook, a corner by herself, hemmed in by mighty deserts. She could live and die to herself. She could pamper and caress her children till their nobler qualities became enervated and dwarfed; and therefore she has always stood as the symbol of the enervating influence of worldly prosperity. There were the seed-germs of noble things in Egypt, as in the rest of the human family; but they were diverted from the service of God and man to the gratification of sense; and, as we know, the prostitution of the best is always worst. The soil that would be ideal for cereals is prolific in the poppy. So that the total contribution of Egypt to the world is a race of slaves, the poor ryots, who for two thousand years at least have been the drudges of their rulers and the helots of the human family.

**Enervating Effect on the Israelites' Morality.** *Into this land, as we learn from the opening verses of this chapter, Israel came. At first they met with great favour. The reigning family counted them as valuable allies. "In the best of the land," said the Pharaoh of that time to Joseph, "make thy father and brethren to dwell."* But evidently beneath the seductive influences of the Egyptian climate, to which we have referred, their character became greatly relaxed. The ideals of Abraham's monotheistic faith and strenuous hardihood grew dim and faint. On this point an interesting light is thrown by the prophet Ezekiel. He tells us that Jehovah pleaded with His people, as the time of their emancipation drew near, to cast away the abominations of their eyes, and forsake the idols of Egypt;

but they would not hearken; so much so that it became a question whether He would not pour out His anger upon them and consume them in the midst of the land of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The worship of the calf, the lusting of Kibroth-Hataavah, the outbreak of iniquity on the frontiers of Moab, all proved how deeply the taint of Egyptian idolatry and impurity had wrought. The Lord God brought a vine out of Egypt, but during the four hundred years of its sojourn there, it had undeniably become inveterately degenerate and wild. If the process had been allowed to run to its full course, obliteration must have ensued.

**A Peril Escaped.** The Hebrew race would have become intermingled with the Egyptians. Inter-marriage seems already to have commenced, and it would have become more and more usual till that absolute coalescence would have taken place which the Pilgrim Fathers dreaded for their children in Holland, and which is absolutely and surely obliterating the old spirit of antagonism between Boer and British in South Africa.

**Moses Typical of the Hebrew Race.** *But such a close to God's dealings with the fathers was impossible.* Let us recall that ancient word of Hosea: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called *My son* out of Egypt." In a special sense the Hebrew race had been called to a Divine Sonship. They were an elect race, elect in the sense of having capacity within them to become the Light-bringers, Prophets, Priests, and Psalmists of the world. The possibilities that were latent in the Hebrew people are apparent in the character and work of Moses, the Man of God. What he was actually, they were possibly. He was the flower of the race, revealing its rare quality. You must look to the great Lawgiver and Leader if you would see what it was that Jehovah espied in the chosen race and led Him to redeem it. The Divine purpose of revealing God to man through men would have been frustrated unless there had been an exodus from Egypt, with its idolatry, sensuality, and enervating luxury, to the free air of the desert and the highlands of Canaan.

**Are You in Egypt?** *Is this not always true?* God has His sons to-day who are capable of becoming the leaders of the coming time. Some of them may read these words! You are becoming enervated by success; your position is assured; your income is increasing; your prospects of a prosperous career are brightening; but your soul fibre is relaxing; you are becoming less strenuous in the quest of your

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xviii. 6-8.



olden ideals; your heart is suffering from fatty degeneration! It will never do! You were not made for this. A world's redemption needs you! The sins and sorrows of men may be relieved only through your agency! You are capable of playing a redemptive part in the great arena of the world! Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest!

**God Calls You Out.** In Matthew, as we have seen, we find that verse, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son," applied to our Lord. His going down into Egypt proves that this history is significant for all human life and for the race. If to you, therefore, there has already come the descent into Egypt; to you also comes the Divine Call.

*But when the Divine Call comes to the sons of God, it is for the most part accompanied by sufferings which make the earthly life bitter.* Whilst Joseph lived, for perhaps seventy years, the Hebrews received remarkable consideration. Then for some 260 years they were treated with quiet contempt by the Egyptian Court, Priesthood, and Aristocracy, much as Hindoos of the lower castes are treated by the Europeans in India to-day. Finally, when a new King arose, who had not known Joseph, their position became intolerable. This new King was probably Seti I, whose predecessors had driven Joseph's friend and patron from the throne. Nations soon forget benefits received. Within fourteen years of Salamis the Athenians banished Themistocles; and within seventeen years of Waterloo the Duke of Wellington was compelled to protect the windows of Apsley House with iron shutters.

**Beginning of the Oppression. A Reason for It.** At the time this Book opens, the Hittites were threatening the invasion of Egypt, and it was a grave question what might happen if the Hebrews, now probably 1,000,000 strong, joined Egypt's enemies. They occupied that part of the land which the hostile forces must first enter; and if, as an alien race, they allied with them, it would give the invaders a very important strategical advantage. It was deemed urgently necessary, therefore, that their power and numbers should be greatly diminished and crushed.

**Tasks—Brickmaking.** The methods for effecting this readily suggested themselves. The Pharaoh was a builder of cities, especially of store-cities, and needed immense quantities of bricks. The brick was the staple of Egyptian architecture, as only the temples and palaces were constructed of stone. The Hebrews were therefore

taken from tending their flocks and herds in the pasture-lands, and pressed into what to them was a particularly irksome service. They were compelled to dig the stiff clay, knead it with hands and feet, shape it in moulds, and produce a specified "tale of bricks," which had to pass under the sharp eyes of the taskmasters.

All the males not absolutely incapacitated were probably reduced to this hard and distasteful service. They were "afflicted" by these taskmasters, as ruthless as Turks to Armenians. Think of them labouring from morning to night, beneath a scorching sun, in constant dread of the lash, which the officers were encouraged to use freely, as the quickest method by which their lives might be worried out of them. Often, without doubt, the helpless serfs would be beaten to death.

**Field-service.** Another task is described as "service in the field." Probably, as Dean Stanley suggests, it was such as we still see along the banks of the Nile, where the peasants, naked under the burning heat, are engaged, as beasts of burden, drawing buckets of water from the river-level for field-irrigation. Here again every endeavour was made to add to the hardness of the service, with the object of breaking down their energy. "All their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour."

**Infanticide as a Means of Lessening the Israelitish Peril.** A further method of reducing the hated race is mentioned in verses 15-22. Infanticide was commonly practised by the nations of antiquity. Pharaoh, therefore, had no qualms in applying it as a swift expedient for diminishing the Hebrew race, first through Shiphrah and Puah! and, when they failed him, by open proclamation that all male children should be cast into the Nile. Perhaps he deemed, also, that in this way the River-god would be still further propitiated.

**The Measures Ineffectual.** It was expected that all these methods would soon bring the people under; but their persecutors were greatly deceived. "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." God's promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand upon the seashore, could not be set aside by the will of a cruel and heathen despot. Jehovah had promised, and would perform. Tyrants like Pharaoh and Herod have set themselves against Jehovah and against His Christ, But He that sits in the Heavens laughs!

**God's Reasons for the Sufferings of the Israelites.** Nevertheless, without question, the Hebrew people were at this time suffering

great bitterness of spirit, with the object of stirring up their nest, of making Egypt distasteful, and of preparing them to obey the supreme call to arise and follow God, even into a land that was not sown. These stern measures were needed to quicken that love of their espousals, of which their Almighty Lover speaks so touchingly in after days.

**The Clue to a Difficulty.** *Is not this a clue to the bitterness of our human lot, both of the whole and of the individual.* Life is bitter in many of its aspects. To the man accounted too old at forty, and doomed to inactivity, when his life is yet strong in him! To the woman who is condemned to spend her life yoked to a man for whom she has neither love nor respect! To the child who is cruelly repressed until all childlaughter dies from its pinched features! It would be impossible to give an adequate conception of the bitterness of human life, as myriads experience it, because so much is heroically concealed. Apart from the teachings of Scripture, the problem is inexplicable, but the line of argument suggested by the scope of the present chapter seems to point the direction in which an answer may be found.

**Love Behind It All—To Bring Out Hidden Possibilities.** When, for instance, we are told that the ground was cursed for man's sake, and that woman was called to suffering, does it not mean that the lot of man was purposely made bitter, that he might not settle down to the pursuit of animal enjoyment, but might become the pilgrim of the unseen? Does not the primeval sentence suggest that the cultivation of a garden could never be an adequate occupation for the sons of God? Was not the Angel who drove them forth, and kept them out, an Angel of Love? Is it not better to create a garden out of a wilderness; and to become pilgrims who seek a city, nay, who build a city? The long sad history of man bears witness that he has God-given qualities, that he is a son, not a brute, that there are possibilities within him, waiting to be evoked, which will never obey a summons unless accompanied by the embittering of most of the cups that Earth puts to his lips.

**—And also Hidden Beauties.** We do not realise the value of the human soul. Its greatness, its sub-conscious depths, its God-like and God-given qualities. We do not understand the transcendence and hollowness of the supports around which our weak heart clings, nor the worth and permanence of the unseen and eternal. All around us are things which eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the heart

of man conceived. Living waters bursting from the everlasting hills; amaranthine flowers that were grown on the soil of Paradise. But we heed them not; and some of us never will heed them, till our lives have become bitter with hard bondage.

**Man Craves Something Better than the Fleshpots.** This is the meaning of your life. Oh, sons of God, you cannot be permanently satisfied with the loveless kiss, and the contents of the swine-trough! You were not made for these! Your appetite may be arrested for the time, but it cannot be permanently satisfied. Not the flesh-pots but the manna: not the sweet waters of the Nile, but the water from the Rock: not the leeks, onions, and garlies, but grapes of Eshcol: not the land of the Sphinx with its open-eyed wonder, nor the Pyramids with their mystery are for you, but a land that is the glory of all lands! Oh, do not be surprised, if God has made the sense-world bitter, that you may arise to realise your sonship, and to start on an everlasting pilgrimage.

**God Offers Deliverance from Slavery.** You have groaned in the service of sin; you have hated and cursed yourself; you have longed to be free with a desire that God has implanted! You have awoke to know yourself a slave, and to long unappeasably for deliverance! Then the bitterness has done its work! The acid has gnawed your fetters, and you are able to hear and follow the call of God! Choose then! Arise! Is not the breath of a new era on your cheeks? Christ has come down to deliver you! He stands beside you at this hour! Rise and follow Him! What though the Red Sea lies between you and the Land of Promise, He will bear you on eagle-wings and bring you to Himself! See the Christ stand!

### III

## “THE MORNING COMETH, AND ALSO THE NIGHT”

EXODUS ii. 1-22

1. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took *to wife* a daughter of Levi.

2. And the woman conceived, and bare a son; and when she saw him that he *was a goodly child*, she hid him three months.

3. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid *it* in the flags by the river's brink.

4. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

5. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash *herself* at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.

6. And when she had opened *it*, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, *This is one* of the Hebrews' children.

7. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

8. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

9. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give *thee* thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

10. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, *Because I drew him out of the water.*

11. And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren.

12. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that *there was* no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

13. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?

14. And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

15. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

16. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew *water*, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

17. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.

18. And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, *How is it that ye are come so soon to-day?*

19. And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew *water* enough for us, and watered the flock.

20. And he said unto his daughters, And where *is he?* why *is it that ye have left the man?* call him, that he may eat bread.

21. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.

22. And she bare *him* a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.

### III

## “THE MORNING COMETH, AND ALSO THE NIGHT”

EXODUS ii. 1-22

**Opposing Forces.** “*By faith Moses . . .*” There is a moment in the dawn when the coming Day and the lingering Night appear to struggle for mastery. It is not for long, for the reign of darkness is doomed, so soon as the first glimmer of light trembles in the chambers of the East. Thus, in this chapter, we notice the conflict between hope and despair, between faith and doubt, between the heroism of the mother who hid her baby boy, and the pessimism of the nation, which sighed unto heart-break.

**The Birth of Moses.** THE RIVER’S BRINK. Already two children—Miriam, a daughter, and Aaron, a son, born twelve years later, had been given to Amram and his kinswoman, Jochebed.<sup>1</sup> These enlivened the humble cottage with those sweet child-voices that chime through all national and individual sorrow, as church-bells through clinging mists. Three years passed: a third child was given—a boy, “a goodly child,” “fair to God.”<sup>2</sup> But there was no other indication that the founder of the Hebrew nation, and one of the greatest of the sons of men, had stepped down into the arena of human history.

**A Brave Mother Who Reckoned on God.** Something in the babe’s lovely countenance appeared to the mother’s eye as the halo of special Divine affection. A voice whispered to her heart that her child was specially dear to God. Was not its smile the result of the Divine embrace? And did not those limpid eyes look into the face of the Angel of the Covenant? She was, therefore, encouraged to brave the royal edicts, and screen the little taper from the gale of destruction that was sweeping through the land. She probably hid him for three months in the female apartments, reserved for women. Each

<sup>1</sup> vi. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 20; Heb. xi. 23.

day his lungs were stronger and his infant-cries more likely to attract attention; but her faith was steadfast and immovable. She reckoned on God. Greater was He who was for her than all they who were against her. By faith Moses was hid by his parents, and "they were not afraid." This act of theirs secured their admission to that long sacred corridor, where the busts of the great cloud of witnesses to the power of faith stand chiselled by immortal strokes.

**The Ark of Bulrushes, an Expression of Mother Love.** Finally, acting beneath a divine impulse, she made "a paper-boat," i.e. an ark or chest with a cover, by weaving together rushes of papyrus. Its slight texture was made strong and waterproof by repeated coats of vegetable-pitch; but her love and faith lined it with the softest down, and built up the strongest safeguards that ever sheltered a tiny babe. With a devouring kiss, she placed the babe within its novel cradle, bore it to the river-side, and laid it in a thicket of reeds, lest it might float out on a voyage to distant and unwelcoming banks. "His sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him."

**Waiting for God to Act.** That something would be done they had no doubt. They knew that God always prepared good things for those who love Him, which pass human thought; but what they might be, was a matter of reverent interest, not of fear or mistrust.

**Turning Evil to Good Account.** Pharaoh's cruel edict was turned to good account. There is always a soul of good in things evil. The glory of God's providence is to carry out His eternal purposes, in spite of human opposition, and often by His reversal of human plans. Had it not been for those extreme measures of repression, the child would never have been exposed; and if it had never been launched in its slight skiff on the waters of the Nile, Moses would have missed the education "in all the wisdom of Egypt," which became so important a factor in his after history.

But it was a remarkable reversing of the situation, when Pharaoh's designs were neutralised by the action of his own daughter, and when the emancipation of the hated Hebrews was nurtured in his own court. God maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of it He restrains.

**A Warrant for Other Parents.** There is abundant warrant, afforded by this narrative, for Christian parents to cast their children upon God. The mother whose child goes to earn her living among strangers; the father whose son must leave the quiet homestead for the mighty city; the parents who, as missionaries, are unable to



nurture their children on the mission-field, because of the pernicious moral climate, more harmful than the heat of the plains of India; or those who on their death-beds must part with their babes to the care of comparative strangers, may all learn a lesson from the faith that cast the young child on the providence of God, even more absolutely than on the buoyancy of the Nile. God lives, and loves, and cares. More quick and tender than Miriam's, His eye neither slumbers nor sleeps.

**The Princess Finds Moses.** The providence of God, ever working through means, brought the princess to the river-brink at the critical moment, accompanied by the high-born maidens who constituted her personal attendants. It was His hand that guided her eye to the ark half concealed by the rushes; and it was at His prompting that her maid was sent to fetch it. All this came forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in effectual working.<sup>1</sup>

With her own hands the princess opened the lid of the little basket. It is not impossible that she guessed what its contents were. In any case, she was not surprised when she saw the babe, who had just awoke from its sleep and was crying for its mother. Was it the Hebrew physiognomy, as marked then as now, or a swift intuition, that made her exclaim, "This is one of the Hebrews' children"? But however it was, she was more than willing to fall in with the shrewd suggestion of Miriam that a nurse of the Hebrew race would be the more fitting to rear it.

**Till Three Years Old He is Called "Moses."** So it befell that Moses' life was saved, that he was nourished from the breasts of his own mother, and received as his earliest impressions those sacred teachings which had come down as a rich heritage from the tents of Abraham. Till he had grown, probably to the age of three years, he remained under the protection of the princess, though in his parents' home, and Jochebed's wages were duly paid till she brought him to the palace, and he became her son. "And she called his name Moses" ("Drawn forth").

**Amram's Faith.** We generally ascribe the faith that saved Moses to his mother: but his father also must have been characterised by it to no ordinary degree. That he married in face of the strong current flowing against family-life; that he dared risk the punishment of death, by sheltering his helpless child; that he encouraged his wife

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxviii. 29.

in her project of casting him on the care of the Almighty, *all* testify to Amram's faith. "Faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."<sup>1</sup>

**The Childhood of Moses.** THE TRAINING OF MOSES. The sapling grew as other saplings grow in the deep forest. His own mother's training must have been an important factor in it. The knowledge of God, the God of his fathers; the certainty that the God of Abraham would be true to the ancient Covenant; the love of liberty; devotion to the national ideals—these and such-like must have formed part of the curriculum by which Jochebed prepared her son, being a proper child, i.e. a marvellously quick and intelligent lad, for his life-work.

In addition to this, he was sent to the great city and university of Heliopolis, by the banks of the Nile, to be instructed in all the learning of that time. It was with considerable emotion that, on one memorable afternoon, I stood on the ruins of that ancient city, and tried to imagine Moses as a young man, one of 10,000 students, drawn from the whole known world.

**The Youth of Moses.** Of the result of this training, Stephen says, "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works."<sup>2</sup> As to his *words*, it is remarkable that he afterwards excused himself from the great task to which he was summoned, because he was not eloquent, but of a slow tongue—showing how profound an effect the desert silence had had upon him. As to his *works*, Josephus tells us that he became an illustrious soldier, and led the Egyptian troops against the Ethiopian city of Meroë, which he took.

**Moses and "His Brethren."** But in the hours of greatest success, so far as this world was concerned, he never forgot his brethren, the children of Israel. His *brethren*! Note that word. We shall never get society right, until that word, brotherhood, becomes its keynote. That Moses and the Hebrew slaves were brothers was no more a truth than that the millionaire of Park Lane and the docker, fighting for his place at the big gates to earn bread for wife and bairns, are brothers, sprung from the same father, and sent forth to share together the heritage of the earth. Well is it that there is an increasing willingness on the part of the upper classes to visit their brethren and share their burdens!

**The Example of Moses.** The conditions of poverty, misery, and

<sup>1</sup> James ii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 22.

temptation, in which large numbers spend their lives, are admittedly bitter in the extreme, and would never be tolerated, if the principles of Christ's kingdom were universally practised. It may be long before His ideals are the actual code of personal and collective existence; but in the meanwhile we can at least manifest sympathy both in word and act, and may win the welcome which the King shall utter to those on His right hand, "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: I was naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me."<sup>1</sup>

**The Vision of Duty.** THE IMPOTENCE OF MERE HUMAN FORCE. "When he was well-nigh forty years old," so Stephen told the Sanhedrim, "it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

It may be that that visit transformed the career of the future law-giver of Sinai. He may have gone merely out of curiosity, or at the passing impulse of pity; but the scenes he witnessed changed his life-current, and diverted it into an entirely new channel. Vows were made for him, that he should become, else sinning greatly, "a dedicated spirit."

**A Noble Resolve.** Gradually the sentiment of casual interest and pity strengthened into a noble resolve that he would descend from the steps of Pharaoh's throne, refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Already some dreams of a deliverer—"the Christ"—had floated before the minds of his suffering compatriots, though they were the subject of ridicule and reproach among their Egyptian oppressors. What deliverance could that suffering race count on? But he reckoned that dim hope to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt; for he looked unto the recompense of reward, of which his mother had spoken, years before, as the undoubted heritage of Abraham's race.<sup>3</sup>

**A Deed that was a Turning-point.** Among other heart-rending scenes in the slave-camp was that of an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew. Probably the Hebrew was doing his best; but either because of imperfect nutrition, or old age, or fever, was unable to supply the prescribed tale of bricks, much as the Congolese the required amount

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 35, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. xi. 24-26.

of rubber. In any case, Moses felt that he was suffering a grievous wrong, and defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed.<sup>1</sup> The arm that was wielding the scourge was suddenly arrested. With one blow of that powerful fist the Egyptian official was felled to the ground, and lay dead. It was not entirely an act of reckless passion, because we are told that "he looked this way and that" before delivering the death-dealing blow. But, after making all allowances, we can hardly admit that he was authorised to interfere, either by God or man.

**Motive of the Act.** Certainly the punishment was disproportionate to the offence. It was the act of a warm, sympathetic, masterful nature, apart from the guidance and control of the Spirit of the Highest.

Some consciousness of this appears to have occurred to Moses himself so soon as the deed was done, for we are told that he hid the body in the sand. The man whom he had delivered was apparently too exhausted, or too terrified, to lend a hand in the interment, and crept away home. Moses also went from the scene, not altogether easy in his mind, but comforting himself with the thought that the rescued would surely, for his own sake, not scatter the intelligence of what had transpired. He little realised that by that one act he had disqualified himself for the service he longed to render, or that long years must pass before by his hand God could give deliverance.

**An Unexpected Result.** On the second day, it was no longer the case of Egyptian against Hebrew, but of Hebrew against Hebrew. It was not a question of the foreigner demanding enforced labour, but of hot blood between brethren of the same race. The memory of yesterday withheld Moses from using force. He did not smite the wrong-doer; perhaps because his conscience was slightly uneasy. He was content to remonstrate with the wrong-doer, who—having no sufficient answer to give to his inquiry, "Why smitest thou thy fellow?"—turned on Moses as a meddler, and cast in his teeth the memory of the high-handed act, which had already got wind: "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?"

**The Symbol of Degradation.** Did not that sharp repartee reveal the besotted degradation of the Hebrew soul and temper? What but a slave's tongue could have reproached a Hebrew for slaying an

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 24.

Egyptian? Surely, if this were the depth to which the Hebrew race had sunk, they required long years of stern, strong discipline before becoming the teachers and inspirers of mankind.

The Swiss still acclaim the assassination of a Gessler, and had the Hebrews not sunk to a low degree of demoralisation, they would have gloried in the consciousness that at last one of their race would face and floor an oppressor. By their silence, they would have become accomplices in his act. None would have reproached him with what would have seemed a generous and splendid act.

**The Fruits of Oppression.** This pusillanimity is the invariable result of centuries of oppression. The oppressed not only lose all hope, and resign themselves to their fate, but they imitate the vices of their oppressors. If an Egyptian smites a Hebrew to-day, a Hebrew will smite his fellow-Hebrew to-morrow; and even if a deliverer appears, his intrusion will be resented as an impertinence.

**National Perils.** Read again the story of the French Revolution. The long pent-up passion of the people at last burst all bounds, destroyed the ancient barriers of law and order, brought Louis and his Queen to the guillotine, and sought to inaugurate an era of liberty, equality, and fraternity. But in fact they installed a more hideous tyranny than that which they superseded.

You may change the constitution of the state by some summary act of revolution, but unless the moral and religious elements have been consulted and conserved, unless your new state expresses, not passionate revenge, but a regard and veneration for higher ideals than those of the system you destroy, you only erect one despotism on the ruins of another,—the smiting of the Hebrew by the Hebrew, instead of by the Egyptian.

—**And Mixed Motives.** Through the long centuries of our island story, Britain has escaped the sanguinary scenes of revolution, witnessed in other European capitals, by the religious spirit of her people, which has pervaded them, and prepared the way for each upward step in the great process of historical evolution. For instance, the accession of William and Mary was brought about, less by a passion of resentment to James II, than by that devotion to the highest ideals of patriotism and freedom which religion inspires.

**Reform v. Revival.** Political movement must follow and express the high and noble sentiments by which the community is animated. The emancipation of the slaves, the amelioration of the condition

of the working-classes, the vast advance in prison-reform, which marked the nineteenth century, were only possible, because the great Methodist revival, followed by the revival in the Church of England, had moved and moulded the religious conditions of the entire nation.

**Moses has Still Much to Learn.** It was clear that Moses had acted unadvisedly. His impulse was in the right direction, but it was hot, raw, and ill-considered; and the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. You can never redress a nation's wrongs by offering brute force to brute force, or by a number of rash, violent acts. More haste makes worse speed. What would have been the end for Moses or for Israel, if he had gone on day after day smiting this man and that? Even if his strong hand had enforced a temporary cessation of wrong-doing, it would have reasserted itself so soon as he had turned his back! He had much to learn before he became the meekest of men.

**His Efforts Vain Because not God-directed.** How often the young reformer, the student fresh from college, the brilliant dreamer of noble dreams, supposes that he has only to wield axe or sword with a few swift, strong strokes, and at once a way will be cleft through the jungle to the canopy of the over-arching sky; but at forty or sixty he still finds himself labouring to disentwine the entangling branches, or tear up the resisting roots. We can effect nothing effectual or lasting apart from God. It is not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit that the world will be saved. Not what we do for Him, but only what He does through us, will be wholly beneficent and permanent in result. But our hands must be very clean, if God is to use them; and our tongue must have become empty of its own speech, if God is to put His Word there.

**The Flight of Moses. Why He Chose Midian.** THE LAND OF MIDIAN. There was a special clause in the treaty between Rameses II and the contemporary Hittite King to the effect that fugitives along the northern route to Syria should be arrested and extradited. The knowledge of this fact probably led Moses to turn his steps to the S.E. "Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh"—who sought to slay him—"and dwelt in the land of Midian." Egypt had possessions, especially mines, in the Sinaitic peninsula, but it was quite easy to avoid them; and before Sinai was reached the fugitive would be in complete safety, for the Egyptians seem never to have penetrated to the southern or eastern portions of the great triangle. He was

probably further attracted by the knowledge that the Midianites on the further side of the peninsula were monotheists, and cherished the knowledge and workshop of God Almighty.

**Moses and the Priest's Daughters.** No sooner had he reached that distant spot than Moses found himself face to face with the same high-handed wrong that had aroused his soul in Egypt. Here it was not the tyranny of man over man, but of man over woman. There a weaker race had been oppressed, here the weaker sex. In Egypt woman held a high place, and therefore he was the more incensed, when the unmannerly sons of the desert not only would not wait their turn, but actually used the water which the priest's daughters had drawn. The following verse, with the exclamation of their father's surprise, shows that this had become a matter of daily occurrence, and that these lazy shepherds made it a practice to evade the trouble of drawing water for themselves. Though one against many, Moses would not brook this act of oppression. He sprang up from the well, beside which he was seated, helped the girls, and saw that their flocks were watered.

**He Marries Zipporah.** The temporary residence in Reuel's encampment led to a permanent relationship. "Moses was content" to dwell with him, and he gave Moses Zipporah, his daughter, to wife.

**Oppressed by Loneliness, Yet Trusted in God.** But the name given to his first-born—Gershom, "a stranger here"—suggests that a sense of depression still clung around him. In those great desert spaces, far removed from the life and stir of Egypt, the isolation and exile of his lot bore down upon him, with the weight of an overwhelming incubus. The confession of his fathers was often on his lips. He had no abiding-city under those silent stars, or beneath that majestic canopy of intense blue. He was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth.

Probably by the time his second son was born the depression had somewhat lightened, and faith had asserted itself. He named him Eliezer, "my God is my help." But these alternations between the depths of despair and the heights of courageous faith were destined to give place to the settled resolve of the servant in God's House, who would merge his private concerns in uncompromising fidelity to the vast responsibilities with which he became charged.

#### IV

### THE DARKEST HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN

Exodus ii. 23-25

23. And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage.

24. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

25. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto *them*.



## IV

# THE DARKEST HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN

EXODUS ii. 23-25

**The King—Rameses II.** Who this King of Egypt was is not of great importance, from the standpoint of these chapters. On the whole, it seems probable that the Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph"<sup>1</sup> was Rameses I, or his son Seti, the great conqueror, renowned for having carried his victorious arms as far as Mesopotamia. The flight of Moses to Midian would then have taken place under Rameses II, under whom Egyptian civilisation reached its highest point; and it is he who is referred to here as having died.

After eighty years of life and sixty-seven of regal power this illustrious ruler was gathered to his fathers, having built up the national magnificence at the cost of myriads of lives, partly in war and specially in his colossal works. A modern writer says that every stone in the edifices which he reared was cemented by the blood of a human victim. Thousands of miserable slaves wrought incessantly to add to his glory and cover his land with obelisks, temples, and cities. For years the toiling masses had longed for his death, as likely to bring a relaxation of their miseries, but when at last it befell and he passed, and when his successor, Menepthah, instead of relaxing the inexorable cruelty of his father, maintained and enforced his measures, it seemed as though their heart-strings, long stretched to breaking-point, could endure the strain no longer.

**The Oppression Becomes More Intense.** "It came to pass in the course of those many days, that the King of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage."

**The Sigh of Oppressed Nations.** It is terrible to hear a sigh—a child's, a woman's, a man's! But how much more a nation's! The sigh of the Congo! The sighs of oppressed nations, doomed to see their liberties suppressed and their free-speech forbidden! The sigh of the enslaved everywhere! "The children of Israel sighed."

<sup>1</sup> i. 8.

It is an inexplicable problem why the good God should permit it all. Surely the goal for which He has destined our race must be one of transcendent glory, or He would never conduct it thither at such an awful cost. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, the noblest Epic ever penned to human love, proves surely that thoughtful men at the close of the last century not only recognised the sorrow of the world, but felt that, in the last resort, it must be traced back to God.

**The World's Sorrow Traced Back to God.** He cannot have been surprised by the entrance of sin, with its attendant pain and anguish. It must have been included in His original scheme. Though in no sense the Author of evil, He anticipated it, for the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. Apparently there was no other way by which the highest happiness of the greatest number could be secured than by the endowment of freewill, with its evident and awful liabilities of abuse.

**Why God Permitted Sin.** But the Heavenly Father accepted these, as a small price to pay for the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; and when the whole plan has been worked out to its completion, and He shall have put down all rule and authority and power, and shall have gathered all things together in Christ, the whole universe of intelligent moral beings will acknowledge that He has done all things well, saying, "Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy righteous acts have been made manifest."<sup>1</sup>

This only is our solace amid all the awful perplexity of the world's anguish; that God is not indifferent, that He is infinitely the greatest Sufferer of all, that in bringing His many sons unto glory He has made the Captain of their Salvation perfect through suffering.

**The Sighs of the Saviour.** We turn from the sighs of the world to those of our Lord. When they brought the deaf-mute to Him, He looked up to Heaven and sighed; and when the Pharisees tempted Him, He sighed deeply in His spirit.<sup>2</sup> These are the two causes of His sighing, not then alone, but always. Human suffering and human unbelief! Undoubtedly He knew that ultimately He would succeed in banishing all sorrow and sighing from the world, but so long as it lasted it lay heavily—and lies heavily—on His holy and tender heart. In those two single instances He saw specimens of the whole weltering sea of pain and sin that rolls round the world.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Mark vii. 34; viii. 12.

Can we wonder that in the midst of the throne He is beheld as a Lamb that was slain? He knows what man might have been.

**The Burden of Sin and Suffering Rests on the Saviour's Heart.** He comprehends the entire aggregation of sin and sorrow. The burden of it all rests on His heart—a burden that He alone can sustain. When we bear one another's burdens, we fulfil the law of His life, to which He is perpetually subject.

The unbeliever taunts us with believing in a God of Love, and we might feel the justice of the taunt, had our Lord passed through this world with dry eyes and unmoved heart, or if He had only taught with dry logic and elegant phrase, or if He had never wept with the sisters or groaned at the gates of the grave. But how triumphant is our reply to the taunting cynicism of unbelief, when the ancient words have had such ample verification in His life: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."<sup>1</sup> "It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest."<sup>2</sup>

**What is Meant by the "Angel of His Presence."** Isaiah's allusion to the Divine sympathy with Israel is full of pathos, when He says: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them." Exactly what is meant by the Angel of His Presence is difficult to define; but this surely implied that He was at hand, walking beside them in the iron-furnace, passing with them through the rivers of sorrow, and seeing to it that they did not absolutely despair.

**Four Statements.** Four statements are made here: God heard; God remembered; God saw; God knew.

**God Heard.** "Their cry came up unto God." Probably it did not articulate itself in petition. It was just a cry of misery, in which the deeper voice of manhood blended with the anguish of the bereaved mother and the wail of the babe. But God understood it, and was able to trace each formative element to its source. In the graphic language of the chroniclers, it "came up unto God."

There are times when we cannot speak, and our minds, bewildered with grief and pain, refuse to formulate specific petitions. We can only lie at the foot of the throne, and cry, as startled babes might. But our cries enter unto the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. Each is registered, and kept, as a letter may be, to which you have not yet returned an answer. God hears the voice of our groaning;

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 4; Matt. viii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 17.

and listens to the language of the tears, which we brush away almost before they form.

Tears have a voice: and God interprets it.

**The Seeming Silence of God.** Silent as God seems through the long hours and years, He is not indifferent. He is only waiting that He may be gracious. The hour has not yet struck for emancipation, though the hands on Heaven's Great Clock are moving inevitably towards it. Presently He will rend the Heavens, and come down; but in the meanwhile there is not a groan in all this travailing Creation which is undetected. Each drop which exhales from the ocean of pain is conserved somewhere. It is transfigured in the rainbow, and shall return in showers of blessing.

**God Remembered.** "They were rebellious in their counsel, and were brought low in their iniquity. Nevertheless He regarded their distress, when He heard their cry." "He remembered His holy word, and Abraham His servant."<sup>1</sup>

We are carried back to that solemn watch of two nights and a day that Abram kept, and when, conforming to the wont of the sons of the desert, God gave visible confirmation of the validity of His Covenant. "And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."<sup>2</sup>

**The Covenant that was Ratified with Additions.** That Covenant was afterwards solemnly ratified with additions, and is described as an everlasting or eternal Covenant.<sup>3</sup> In some respects it still lies at the basis of all God's dealings with those who, by faith, are the children of faithful Abraham. Though four long centuries had passed, that covenant was as fresh as at its inauguration in the heart of Jehovah, and not because of the worthiness of the people, but because of the two immutable things that made it impossible for Him to lie, when the time of the promise drew nigh, He began to carry its provisions into execution.

**The Covenant is Ratified in Christ.** With us also God has entered into an eternal Covenant, and has ratified it with the Blood of His Son, who on the night when He was betrayed took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Drink ye all of it;

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cvi. 43; cv. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xv. 13, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xvii. 7.

for this is My blood of the Covenant." It was through the blood of that Eternal Covenant that He approved Himself worthy to become the Great Shepherd of the sheep.<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, we place that cup to our lips at the Holy Supper, we remind God of that Covenant, on the sanctions of which we venture all that we are and hope for, in time and eternity.

**The All-embracing Provisions of the Covenant.** On His part, also, He comes near to us, and says, "I remember: Not one jot or tittle shall pass, until all be fulfilled: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Recount to yourself the seven-fold provisions of that Covenant, as they are set forth in Hebrews viii. There is no circumstance that can befall you that may not be brought in under one or other of those gracious provisions. Though there be no answering voice, you may be absolutely certain that your appeal is acknowledged and responded to. As you draw nigh to God, He draws nigh to you.

**God Saw.** "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry"; and though Israel was not righteous for their own sake, they were beloved for their father's sake. "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt."<sup>2</sup>

There is a remarkable succession of affirmations made of the Father by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount:<sup>3</sup>

**God Sees and Knows.**

*Your Father which is in Heaven:*

*Thy Father which is in secret:*

*Thy Father which seeth in secret:*

*Your Father knoweth:*

*Your Heavenly Father will forgive you:*

*Your Heavenly Father feedeth:*

*Your Father which is in Heaven shall give good things.*

To realise that He sees and knows, that nothing which concerns us is hidden from Him, that the darkness shines as the day, and the lowest part of the earth conceals nothing from His omniscience—this carries with it all the rest: for He cannot see without coming down in pitying help. When in after days the children of Israel were assured that Jehovah had seen their affliction, "then they

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 27; Heb. xiii. 20.    <sup>2</sup> Psa. xxxiv. 15; Exod. iii. 7; Matt. vi. vii.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vi. 7.

bowed their heads and worshipped," as though they had nothing more to ask<sup>1</sup>; and the result justified their act.

Every blow of the hand that buffets you, every cut of the scourge, every scorching hour under the noontide sun, every lonely hour when lovers and friends stand aloof, every step into the valley of shadow, every moment of sleep beneath the juniper-tree, is watched by the eyes that never slumber nor sleep.

**A Holy Watcher.** "I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from Heaven."<sup>2</sup>

"When even was come, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land. And seeing them distressed in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them, about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them, walking on the sea."<sup>3</sup>

"I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: and I have said, I will bring you out of the affliction of Egypt."<sup>4</sup>

**God Took Knowledge.** "*God took knowledge of them.*" Literally, "And God knew." He notes all things in His book, puts every tear into His bottle, counts the hairs as they fall from the head or turn white with anguish. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people. . . . I know their sorrows."

**We are Individuals to God.** God knows with a *personal* knowledge. It has been truly said that the word "masses" does not occur in God's vocabulary. We are not masses, but units; not a forest, but trees; not a race, but individuals. It is as though there was but one child in the Father's house, and each of us is that child.

**He Feels with Each One.** God knows with a *sympathetic* knowledge. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and whatever is done to us is accepted as done to Him. "I was in prison, . . . and ye visited Me not." "He that rejecteth you rejecteth Me; and he that rejecteth Me rejecteth Him that sent Me."<sup>5</sup> Just as the head suffers with each throb of pain in any of its members, so does Christ suffer through the centuries each slight or wrong meted out to one of His own. God knows with a *knowledge, bathed in love*.

**His Love Transcends His Knowledge.** It is much to know that God knows, but infinitely better that God loves us better than He knows. He is not primarily Knowledge but Love, and His love is different from human love only in its intensity and profundity. It has heights

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iv. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. iv. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Mark vi. 47, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Exod. iii. 16, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Luke x. 16.

and depths, lengths and breadths, that pass our discovery, but it is essentially the same as inspires the love of mother, father, husband and friend. These are bars in its oratorio, notes in its organ, flashes of its radiance, syllables in its majestic speech. We could not bear to think that He knew all, unless we were assured of this perfect, all-understanding, enduring, and patient love, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and never fails, until it has brought us into perfect unity with itself.

**And Waits to Perfect Us.** That love waits to perfect whatever concerns us. Through all the dark maze of life, it will accompany; by every fiery furnace it will act as a refiner of silver. It will wipe all tears from our eyes, it will comfort us as a mother comforts her firstborn, it will explain in the peace of eternity the *wherefore* of life's sad discipline. Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing into Zion. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrows and sighings shall flee away. Weeping can endure only for the night, but Joy shall usher in the Eternal Dawn.

## THE PREPARATION OF THE MESSENGER

EXODUS iii. 1-12

1. Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb.

2. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed.

3. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

5. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.

6. Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

7. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11. And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12. And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.



## V

# THE PREPARATION OF THE MESSENGER

EXODUS iii. 1-12

*"I am come down . . ."*

*"Come now, I will send thee . . ."*

**God Works Through Human Instrumentality.** Is there no discrepancy between these two announcements? If God has Himself come down to do the work of redemption, what need of Moses? Would not a word from those Almighty lips be enough? Why summon a shepherd, a lonely and unbefriended man, a man who has already failed once, and from whom the passing years have stolen his manhood's prime, to work out with painful elaboration, and through a series of bewildering disappointments, the purposed emancipation? But this is not an isolated case. Throughout the entire scheme of Divine government, we meet with the principle of mediation. God ever speaks to men, and works for them, through the instrumentality of men. Chosen agents are called into the inner circle, to catch the Divine thought and mirror the Divine character, and then sent back to their fellows, to cause them to partake. God never works from the many to the individual, but from the individual to the many. "He made known His ways unto Moses," but only His acts unto the children of Israel.

**What is My Part?** Each of us should therefore put to himself the questions: What is my destiny? What am I here for? What part am I to play in the Redemption of this world? How can I best help Christ in His mighty programme of putting down all rule and authority and power, so that God may be All in all?

Quite certainly a project vast as this may involve long and stern education; but more than half the bitterness of human sorrow disappears, if we understand that we are being trained for some high purpose, which shall react, not only on ourselves, but on others in ever-widening circles.

NOTICE THREE OF THE FACTORS THAT WERE EMPLOYED TO FIT MOSES FOR THE STUPENDOUS TASK THAT AWAITED HIM:

**Three Kinds of Preparations: In the Home.** (1) **THE TRAINING OF THE HOME.** In after-life he described himself as a nursing-father, carrying the whole congregation in his bosom—a metaphor surely borrowed from his experiences with his two infant-boys. We can hardly imagine Elijah being qualified to lead a great mixed host of men, women, and children! He lacked some of that humanness which characterised the great lawgiver, who was probably less stern than Michael Angelo's noble statue suggests. Even the greatest mountains have foothills covered with gardens and vineyards. The letters of Martin Luther to his little daughter reveal the tender warmth of his strong and virile nature. Gershom and Eliezer probably awoke emotions of pity and patience, which stood Moses in good stead in after days, when the petulance and murmuring of the people threatened to become unbearable.

**In the Desert.** (2) **THE SILENCE AND SOLITUDE OF THE DESERT.** For the most part, so travellers say, the Sinaitic region is one of unvarying calm and stillness. The sun rises out of a dull haze in the East, and moves through the heavens in unclouded majesty, bathing the earth in a perfect flood of light. The great gaunt mountains cast broad shadows, morning and afternoon, over the plains and valleys at their base; whilst at noon they are scorched by an almost vertical heat. In the evening, the orb of day sets in a purple haze. The stars come out immediately in the purple sky, till all their hosts are assembled. "No song of birds enlivens the solitude. No hum of insect life breaks the stillness." The bleat of a goat by day may be heard at a distance of half-a-mile; and by night the occasional cry of a jackal makes the environing silence only more absolute.

**The Value of the Solitudes.** When the shepherd has led his flock from the rude sheepfold where they have spent the night, to the pastures where they are to browse—he has little else to do, but watch that they do not stray far away. What an opportunity is thus afforded, and was afforded to Moses, for recalling the past, anticipating the future, or meditating on those great mysteries of life and death, of God and the future life, which have always wielded so great an influence over the Oriental. Solitude like this is of priceless value in the nurture of strong and noble souls, and has given the wilderness, the hermitage, and the monastic cell a singular power in the formation of the religious leaders of the world.

**Heart Hunger.** (3) **THE HUNGER OF AN EXILE'S HEART.** There are clear evidences of an Egyptian occupation of the Sinaitic peninsula, in those portions at least, adjacent on the Red Sea. Mines were worked there, in the workings of which, long deserted, inscriptions have been discovered that throw a flood of light on the early inhabitants of this region. It is more than probable, therefore, that though the secret was rigorously withheld from Pharaoh, Moses' resort was well known among his kinsfolk. He would be kept informed of the increasing anguish of his people. Suffering as a mother suffers when watching her sick child, he was quite powerless to assist, and this sense of impotence wrought powerfully in tempering the impetuosity of his nature.

**The Service of Waiting.** A Christian minister, invalided from active service, whilst his life was yet young in him, once told the writer that he felt as the prisoner in some embattled fortress may, who from the beetling crag on which his prison is perched looks down on the former scenes of his activity, compelled to watch others engaged in prosecuting and achieving the very objects to which he was once devoted. Some such heart-sickness must often have eaten like acid into the eager nature of Moses. It seemed as though he were a lover doomed to stand by and see his betrothed perish at his side, whilst he was unable to give succour, or even warning. All that he could do was to pray with strong cryings and tears.

**The Influence of This Training.** The effect of all this revealed itself in his response to the first intimation of the Divine intention for him to become the chosen messenger and instrument of Redemption—"Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

**Modesty of Moses Accompanies Competence.** The idea staggered him. The light shone too strongly for eyes long accustomed to obscurity. He could mind a flock of sheep, but never emancipate a nation. But in speaking thus he showed how perfectly the discipline of the forty years in the wilderness had wrought his fitness for the stupendous task. As long as a man holds that he is easily able to do some great deed of heroism and faith, he is probably incompetent for it, but when he protests his inability, and puts away the earliest proposals, though made by the Almighty Himself, he gives the first unmistakable sign that he has been rightly designated.

**God's Noblest Servants Similarly Humble.** This sense of unfitness has been characteristic of God's noblest servants. When Israel

was brought very low because of Midian, and the Angel-Jehovah bade Gideon go and save his country, he replied, "Oh Lord, where-with shall I save Israel? behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And when the word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah with the assurance that he was to be a prophet unto the nations, the young scion of a family of priests answered, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." It was only after Peter had confessed that he was a sinful man, and had asked Christ to depart from him, that the Lord told him he should henceforth catch men.

**The Evidence of Later Centuries.** All through the subsequent centuries, the men who have felt that they were not worthy or able, have been God's chosen instruments, it being always granted that with their sense of incompetence there have been present also a willingness to yield themselves to the will of God, and a strong faith in His almightiness. I cannot, but He can; I am but a brittle shaft, but He can wing me to the heart of His foes; I am but a broken pitcher, yet if I can only hold a cup of water, He will use me! The jawbone of an ass, an ox-goad, a sling and stones, five barley-loaves and two small fish, a quill dropped from the wing of the bird—such are the instruments by which the Master wins His greatest victories!

**The Burning Acacia Bush.** THERE MUST BE ADDED THE SYMBOL OF THE BURNING BUSH. The tree most characteristic of that locality is the wild acacia, a shaggy thorn-bush. On one occasion—perhaps at night, else it had been less easy to discern the gleam of sacred fire—when the sheep were folded in some rude pen, or resting on a green oasis, Moses suddenly found himself confronted by a thorn-bush wrapt in flame. Such a spectacle was not absolutely novel. The ashes of an Arab fire, or the flash of the forked-lightning, will sometimes kindle the dry gorse or grass of the wilderness. The flame suddenly darts upwards and lightens the whole sky, but as suddenly dies down.

The remarkable fact in the present instance was, that though the bush burned with fire, it did not crackle or diminish, no leaf curled and no branch charred. It burned, but was not consumed.

**Its Import.** It has been generally supposed that this was intended as an emblem of Israel in Egypt, existing undiminished amid their fiery trials. The fathers of the Presbyterian Church took it to be a symbol of the words: "Persecuted, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroyed." Undoubtedly it is a great truth, that we may be

enwrap in the flame of acute suffering, and the fire will only consume the cankerworms and caterpillars that preyed upon the verdure of our spiritual life, without scorching the tiniest twig, or consuming the most fragile blossom. The burning fiery furnace will not singe a hair of your head, though it will free you from your fettering bonds. But this can hardly be the truth which the Divine Spirit designed to teach, for it would not have been needful to bid Moses unsandall his feet, if the fire had simply stood for pain. Great as is our respect for suffering, and for those who are called to suffer, we could not feel that so it demanded a homage which is befitting for God alone.

**Fire an Emblem of Deity.** Throughout Scripture, Fire is the emblem of Deity. Even the rites of heathendom were based on the belief that the swift power and ruddy tongues of fire were symbols of Divine attributes. When God entered into covenant with Abram, His Presence was denoted by the lamp of fire that passed between the pieces. The pledge of God's leadership of Israel was the pillar which in the daylight seemed only a column of wavering smoke, but when darkness fell was shown to be composed of flame—a veritable fire-cloud. "Who among us," exclaims Isaiah, referring evidently to the envining Presence of Jehovah, "shall dwell in the everlasting burnings?" The mission of our Lord was a Baptism of Fire; and on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit's chosen symbol was the fire that sat on each meekly bowed head. In the Apocalyptic Vision seven lamps of fire are seen burning perpetually before the Throne.

**The Burning Bush the Symbol of God's Presence.** Therefore when this bush is said to have burned with fire, which evidently differed from all other fire in not requiring fuel, and in the presence of which Moses must needs take the lowliest posture of reverence, we are constrained to conclude that it was the symbol of Jehovah's Presence, and that in its undiminishing yet unreplenished energy, this unfuelled fire was another expression of the Divine announcement, I AM.

**God does not Despise the Humble Bush.** It is not said that the bush was in the fire, but that the fire was in the bush; clearly, therefore, we have here a picture of God's Presence in the midst of His despised and suffering people. Note that the selected emblem for them was not the oak in its strength, the cedar with its fragrance, the fir-tree for its elegance or height, but just a common thorn. The same Hebrew word is used here as in Judges ix. 14, where it is rendered "bramble"; and yet God condescended to make this lowly common

shrub His Throne. It is the old old story: "The base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are: that no flesh should glory before God. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

**He Dwelt 'Midst a Nation of Slaves.** IT WAS TRUE OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE. Amid all their degradation and misery they were dear to God. Though to the proud Egyptians they seemed as the common bramble, God was in the midst of them, and God would help them right early. Let us not forget this, when we look out upon the masses of mankind, and especially the savage-races, and the child-races. Wordsworth taught us the value of lives which were apparently commonplace and uninteresting. Here are the titles of some of his poems: *The Little Cottage Girl*, *Alice Fell*, *Lucy Grey*, *The Old Wagoner*, *The Sailor's Mother*, *The Old Leech Gatherer*. In the meanest flower that blows, and in the humblest life embosomed in our great cities, lie thoughts too deep for tears. This, however, is the greatest glory of all, that there is no stratum of the world's population, no classes in the national life, no circles or sects which God contemns. He who broods over the waste places of the wilderness, and clothes the grass of the field, cares as much for the gypsy encampment on the common as for the occupants of an imperial palace.

**God With Man.** Though He is the High and Holy One, "inhabiting Eternity," a stable is His chosen birthplace, and a borrowed grave His only resting-place after the sore travail of the Cross. Emmanuel is His rightful name—"God with man."

In the glow of that celestial fire, Moses caught sight of the light of heaven shining above the lot of his enslaved brethren; his faith beheld their dearness to God, their safety under His care, their glorious destiny, and the recompense of their reward; and he felt more than ever ready to suffer in their affliction, to share their present nearness to God, and their ultimate recompense of reward.

**Moses' Humility Brings Him Renewed Hope for His People.** IT WAS ALSO TRUE OF HIMSELF. Before that bush burned at his feet, Moses had probably felt his limitations so acutely that he had seemed to himself a sherd of broken pottery, forgotten as a dead man out-of-mind, forsaken and forlorn. But when he beheld the emblem of the Almighty burning steadily in a common bush, a new conception

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 28-30.

leapt up in his heart. His life-work might yet be accomplished by the union of his worthless nature with the Eternal Being of God. He was required to become, not an agent, but an instrument; not a promoter, but a conveyer; not a source, but a channel.

This transformed him. The question was no longer, What can I do for God? but, What may not God do through me? He had simply to walk with God, and do His bidding; nay, to yield himself to God, that the Almighty might work in and through him for His own good pleasure.

On one occasion, when a crowded audience had assembled to hear Paganini play, the great violinist, to the dismay of those who had paid great prices for their seats, deliberately broke all the strings of his instrument save one; and then triumphantly holding up the violin before the people cried, "One string and Paganini!" Ah, what cannot God do, when He obtains entire possession and control of one nature, wholly yielded to Him? There are no limits, except those imposed by our Unbelief.

**The Fire of God's Presence Needs no Fuel.** Yield yourself to Him; and if you should ever be tempted to fear that you cannot retain His mighty indwelling by your vows, prayers, or tears, remember that this Fire needs no Fuel, that it is not by our works of Righteousness, but by His grace that He comes to dwell with us and in us. You need supply nothing, but a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.

"When I am weak, then am I strong."

"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

"I can do all things in Christ that strengtheneth me."

"His strength is made perfect in weakness."

"And the Lord clothed Himself with Gideon."

## VI

# THE NAME OF NAMES!

EXODUS iii. 13-22

13. And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them?

14. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

15. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations.

16. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt:

17. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

18. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.

19. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.

20. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.

21. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty:

22. But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put *them* upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.



## VI

### THE NAME OF NAMES!

EXODUS iii. 13-22

**Jehovah or Jahveh.** "I AM THAT I AM." The capital letters here indicate that "the Lord" stands for the four Hebrew consonants which represent the personal name of the God of Israel. For centuries they have been pronounced *Jehovah*, but probably that pronunciation is a mistake. Scholars tell us that the sacred Name should be pronounced *Jahveh*. It is impossible, however, to be sure that even this is the correct pronunciation, because the Jews have always refused to utter that mysterious and awful word. They shrink from taking it on mortal and polluted lips. Whenever they meet it in reading the Scriptures aloud they substitute the word *Adonai*.

It is strange that for some reason this name of God is obscured to the English reader. For the most part it is rendered by the word "Lord." And though the printers have tried to remedy the mistake by printing *Lord* in capitals, whenever it stands for the sacred name, yet the English Version misses its majestic repetition. In this the American Revised Version is to be preferred to our own; for there the Name is printed as *Jehovah*, whenever these four consonants occur in the original. Whilst admitting that *Jehovah* is probably not the original pronunciation of the word, it has so many hallowed associations, that, in face of the difficulty of knowing what the original pronunciation was, common use and wont justify us in retaining it.

**The Divine Name.** I. THE DIVINE NAME. When Moses anticipated that the Hebrew people would almost certainly ask for the Name of the God Who had commissioned him, he did not mean that they had no knowledge of the God of their fathers, but that they would be anxious to be assured as to His essential quality and nature. In the ancient world a name stood for some special trait or characteristic; and men gave names to their gods, to specialise

some attribute of their nature that seemed predominant. The Egyptians, for instance, set much store by the names of their gods, which in every case had a significance. Ammon was "the concealed"; Phthah, "the revealer"; Ra, "the swift." Hitherto the God of Israel had borne no name which could be called His proper name. He had been described as El "the High"; or Shaddai, "the Mighty"; or Jehovah, "the Existent"; but none of these had been distinctly His proper name. What was done at this time was to select from among these titles one that should be distinctly His own, and to impart to it a new connotation.

**The Name Becomes Fixed.** Henceforth this Name, which had previously been little used, and perhaps less understood, predominated over every other, was cherished by the Hebrew race as a sacred treasure, and recognised by those around them as the proper appellation of the one and only God whom they worshipped. In this sense it is inscribed on the famous Moabite Stone.

**Its Significance: Personality.** The significance of this word is so deep, that, as the margin indicates, no one rendering can convey all its connotation. The first element in it is *the Personality of God*. Mark that sublime egoism, "I am." We may not be able to define what personality is; but we know what we mean when we speak of ourselves or of others as persons; and whatever we mean to convey, when we use the term in these limited senses, is obviously what we mean when we speak of the personality of God. There cannot be less in the Creator than we discover in the creature. God could not be less a personality than Moses, whom He addressed and called into fellowship with Himself. Over the veiled statue of the Egyptian Isis was the famous inscription, "I am the thing that is, and was, and shall be": but henceforth Israel was not to bear witness to a mere characterless substance underlying the universe, but to a living Personality, distinct from all other beings and things, and transcendent above them—not It, but He. "There is one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all";<sup>1</sup> and John, writing to the seven Churches, is equally emphatic in his benediction: "Grace to you, and Peace, from Him which is and which was and which is to come . . . the Almighty."<sup>2</sup>

We must beware against losing the Personality of God in a formless mist of being. He is in all, but He is distinct from all; and if we are humble pupils of our Lord He will reveal to us the Father, "for no

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. i. 4, 8.

one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."

**Not an Egyptian "It" but a Living He.** We should be unwilling to receive anything less. As the Spirit reveals the Son, so does the Son reveal the Father. In our daily prayer we should linger before the Infinite Holy, until we become aware of the personal contact of our nature with His. It is a supreme moment in the experience, when what had been a cloud of nebulous luminosity suddenly yields to the lens of faith, and the Sun of the Divine Nature becomes apparent. Such was the experience which befell Moses at the burning bush, when his spirit was confronted by the Spirit of the Eternal God, and when that Voice broke the silence of the ages, saying, I AM. The words of another of God's ancient saints must have been suggested by just such an ecstatic hour: "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee."<sup>1</sup>

**The Eternity of God.** The next element in this sublime name is THE ETERNITY OR UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD. "I AM." The Eternal is not primarily the ever-enduring or everlasting; but that which is independent of time, which is not measured by the flight of years, which is unregistered by the revolutions of the earth, or unaffected by the sweep of systems through vast cycles around some central sun. Strictly speaking, there is no past or future tense in the Divine Vocabulary. When God appears to employ them, it is by way of accommodation to our limited horizons. There is no *was* or *will be* with Him, but always the present tense. All that He was to the fathers, He is to-day; and all that He will be to their children, He is now. Nothing to learn: nothing to acquire: nothing to become. He alone is Reality, as contrasted with the vanities of heathen deities. "The gods of the heathen are idols, but He made the Heavens."

**The Reality of God.** He alone exists in the majesty of unchanging Being, and abides unaltered amid the ceaseless flux and mutation of His creations. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the Heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish; but Thou continuest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a mantle shalt Thou roll them up . . . and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Job xlii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. i. 10-12.

**The Unapproachable Glory of God.** There is a further suggestion in this Name—THE UNAPPROACHABLE GLORY OF THE DIVINE BEING. “I am *that* I am.” There is no equivalent for God but God. If you place God on the one side of your symbol of equation (=), there is nothing to put on the other but Himself. The whole creation, from the loftiest seraphim to the lowest zoophyte, would not balance the scale of His Ineffable Personality. When we speak of Him, we have no comparison with which to describe Him. God is God. “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?” “To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal to Him? saith the Holy One.”<sup>1</sup> “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me.” “I am *that* I am.”

**The Redemptive Purpose of God.** In addition, this further thought may be added, as suggested by the tense in the Hebrew, OF THE DIVINE GOINGS FORTH OF GOD IN REDEMPTION. It would take too long to prove the identification of the name of God with Redemption. It is one of the commonplaces of biblical knowledge and interpretation. But the superlative glory of God’s redemptive purpose cannot be realised in any one age or act. It is progressive, ever-widening in scope, ever-increasing in volume. The deliverance of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt was but one of the earliest chapters in the great volume of redemption, which is being studied in successive chapters by other orders of being, as they are struck off from the types of our human story. When, therefore, the margin suggests, as one rendering of Jehovah, “I will be that I will be,” we are not to infer that God was capable of becoming what He was not already; but that He was going to unfold before the eyes of men thoughts and purposes which from the beginning had been latent within His nature, but waited to be unfolded in acts of grace and salvation, that in turn were destined to live for ever in the memory of man.

These then are the contents of this great Name, which is God’s “memorial to all generations.” The name by which He would be recognised; His signature written across nature, history, and religion; the keep-sake and forget-me-not in the hearts of those who love Him. There is an especial tenderness and beauty, therefore, when we utter reverently and humbly that great name in our devotions, never forgetting that our Father which is in Heaven is Jehovah.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 18, 25.

**God's Immanence.** II. THE UNITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE. That Jehovah should make Himself known in the bush teaches us His Immanence in the commonplaces. As we have already seen, Israel, in comparison with the mighty nations around, was only as a thorn-bush. Those might be compared with oak, cedar, or elm, but the chosen people with the bramble. One obvious lesson of the extraordinary phenomenon that arrested Moses must therefore have been, that God, whose presence is ever symbolised by flame, was in the midst of His people.

**The Symbolism of the Burning Bush.** But is not the symbol capable of further applications? *May not that bush stand for Nature generally?* The ordinary man sees in the world around only what a brute sees, but the saint detects a divine beauty there. The Poet-priest of nature, Wordsworth, was on one occasion rambling through his beloved Lake District, and came on a single primrose growing upon a rock. He began to think about it, and all that lay behind and beyond its fragile beauty, until it opened as a door into the infinite. His mystical reverie finally expressed itself thus: "Thou hast become to me court of Deity." Did not the fire burn in that primrose! The poet Blake has given utterance to the same thought in his own gorgeous phrasing: "When the morning sun ascends the Eastern sky, you may behold a yellow disc, whereas I shall see and hear the infinite multitude of the heavenly host, crying Holy, Holy, Holy."

**The Christian Doctrine not Pantheism.** These moods and expressions must not be confounded with pantheism. Pantheism says, All is God, and God is the All. But to us God is more than the totality of His works. He is in all, but He is above all. The Bible affirms that everything which our senses and minds are aware of is part of a universal order, and the manifestation of the Will, the Thought, and Being of God: but that God is as distinct as the artist from the picture. In a book recently published there are some interesting reminiscences of a very brilliant woman, Susan Ferrier. She was once asked to write her name in a birthday-book, and in addition her deepest wish. She wrote, "My deepest wish is, that life to me may never lose its halo." That was a noble wish. That there should always be a mystical light on life, a mysterious significance, a divine fire; that from everything there might be a path leading out to the infinite; that on common objects might tremble the gleam of that light which is the light of all our seeing, and which never shone on

sea or shore. This, however, is not given to every one. Mrs. Barrett Browning spoke truly when she sang:

“Every common bush aglow with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.”

May we, like Moses, ever have the seeing eye which is begotten by Purity of Heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

**Jehovah the God of the Past.** III. THE UNITY OF THE GENERATIONS OF MANKIND. Twice over Jehovah spoke of Himself as the God of the great past. “I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And again: “And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.” How tender was that assurance! As the people reviewed the past, together with their reverence for the patriarchs, they must have been aware of phases of character and incidents of experience which were far from creditable. Did not Abraham go down into Egypt, and deny Sarah? Did not Isaac do the same? Did not Jacob merit the name which was afterwards altered to Israel? Yet God bore with, forgave, and saved them! Would He do less for their children?

**He had Saved Their Fathers of Old.** Did not His past mercies and promises to their fathers prove Him to be the God of their succeeding race? Need they fear One who for so many centuries had shown Himself to be long-suffering and gracious, full of mercy, and abounding in loving kindness and truth!

IV. Our Lord discovered yet more in these words than all this. THEY SPOKE TO HIM OF THE UNITY BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS.

**The Testimony of Jesus.** The Sadducees came to Him one day. Their main position was that there could be neither resurrection, angel, nor spirit. They challenged therefore the teaching of Jesus as to the eternal world and life beyond death. The only authority that they would acknowledge was that of Moses, and our Lord had to rebut their theories from the Pentateuch. This He did with amazing and crushing power, by referring to this passage. “What,” said He in effect, “did God mean, when He described Himself as the God of men who had died long before? Did He not infer that they were still alive? He is not the God of dead people, but of living.

When therefore He said, I *am* the God of your fathers, He must have meant that they were all existing somewhere, within His ken, and beneath His care."

**Jehovah not the God of the Dead, but of the Living.** In other words, you cannot predicate non-existence of souls that He describes as living unto Him! The dead are only the living who have passed through the experience of dying, which is as definite and specific as birth. Death is an act, not a state; a transition, not a condition; a passage across a bridge, like that which links palace and prison above the still lagoons at Venice. Some one has said that death is no more than if in an express train a man were suddenly to stand up, take off his coat, wrap it together, and cast it through the window on the metals—he would go on with his journey without it.

**Death but a Passage Across a Bridge.** What a thought is this! All the myriads that have fallen on the battlefield or gone down to the depths of ocean, or have been overwhelmed in the snow or sand, the myriads upon myriads of the human family who have died, are all living somewhere, in the full possession of their faculty, in the buoyant exercise of their energy, revelling in a life not less but more intense, than that which was theirs in the days of their flesh.

**The Meeting at the Bush in the Presence of Witnesses.** May we not combine with the idea of their continued existence the further thought, which seems implied in the Divine reference to the fathers, that they were watching the evolution of the Divine ideal? It was as though God felt (speaking in human terms) that with their expectant eyes fixed on Him, he could not do otherwise than redeem the chosen people and perform the promises, on which He had caused them to hope. It was in the presence of a great cloud of witnesses that God met Moses at the bush, pledged Himself to deliver His people, and ultimately led them forth.

It is in the presence of our fathers that God still deals with *us*! He remembers the prayers which they poured out for our welfare and salvation, and can never disappoint them. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, who are not only watching us, but watching the steps by which God is working out His perfect plan with regard to us.

**The Active Invisible.** In a subsequent interview God is represented as saying: "I am Jehovah. I also established my covenant with

Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob . . . and I have remembered My covenant, and I will bring you out." This again corroborates what we have just said. With the wistful, expectant gaze of "the fathers" upon Him, it was as though God had no alternative but to act as He did

—**the Cause of God's Covenant.** He would have been ashamed to be called their God, if He had not led their children forth to the City which He had prepared.<sup>1</sup> He cannot deny Himself: He must needs work for His own name sake. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

**Covenant Ties.** Let us look often into the Covenant with which our God has bound Himself with Christ and His Seed. Let us claim its provisions: let us expect Him to do as He has said: let us push the fences of our appropriation further and further back, until they reach the furthest limits of His engagement with past generations and our own. He owes much to them as well as to ourselves!

**Men "Die" but Are Alive with God.** There is a sense, therefore, in which our fathers and we are one. We are come to the spirits of the just made perfect. Those who have passed the flood, and those who are passing it, compose one great congregation, one mighty host. The Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all. In sympathy and love the sainted dead are still with us. We touch them in our loftiest experiences, and commune with them when nearest to our Lord. Though in man's common talk they are said to be dead, it is not so. They have died, that is all. They are yet with us in sympathy and love, because without us they cannot be made perfect.

"Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,  
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays  
Of morn on them, white shields of Expectation.  
I with uncovered head  
Salute the sacred dead;  
They come transfigured back.

**New Testament Testimony in Christ's Words.** IV. THE FULFILMENT OF THIS NAME IN CHRIST. We recall Christ's own words: "I am come in My Father's Name." On three separate occasions He used the great and awful Name which was spoken at the bush. Once it was in the murky night, when He came to His disciples through the

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 16.



storm, and quieted their outcry, saying, "Be of good cheer, *I am*."<sup>1</sup> Another time it was uttered, not to the teachers of Israel, or to the listening multitudes, or even to His disciples, but to one sinful woman, an outcast and an alien, and He said, "*I am*, I that speak to you."<sup>2</sup> The third time was when the Jews were insisting that He could not have seen Abraham, and He replied, "Before Abraham was, *I am*."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, throughout His earthly ministry, He was filling in the meaning of the great words, I AM. "I am the Bread of Life"; "I am the Light of the World"; "I am the Door of the Sheep"; "I am the Good Shepherd"; "I am the Resurrection and the Life"; "I am the true Vine." Age-long is the cry of the human heart, "What is His Name?" "Show us the Father." There is but one answer: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"; "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." "He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." "The Word was made Flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His Glory, as of the Only Begotten of the Father."

" And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the Creed of Creeds,  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought."

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 20.

<sup>2</sup> John iv. 26.

<sup>3</sup> John viii. 58.

## VII

### THE CREDENTIALS OF THE MESSENGER

EXODUS iv. 1-9

1. And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.

2. And the Lord said unto him, What *is* that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.

3. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.

4. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand:

5. That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.

6. And the Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous as snow.

7. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his *other* flesh.

8. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign.

9. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour *it* upon the dry *land*: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry *land*.

## VII

# THE CREDENTIALS OF THE MESSENGER

EXODUS iv. 1-9

**“Wonder” and “Sign”, how they Differ.** “THE VOICE OF THE SIGN.” The word *sign* should be noticed. The Hebrew word thus translated is entirely different from that rendered *wonder*. A “*wonder*” is marvellous and terrific. It represents the startling and awful. It is used in Exodus xxxiv. 10 to give prominence to the terribleness of the wonders by which Jehovah would compel the attention of the heathen. But “*a sign*” is rather the revelation in our ordinary life of some characteristic of the Divine nature or work. It is a symbol of the Unseen. In the *wonder* there is a predominance of the Divine Power and Majesty; in the *sign*, of the Divine Truth and Grace. The one is terrible, the other tender.

**Christ’s Miracles Were Signs.** It is interesting to find that our Lord’s miracles, especially in the fourth Gospel, are repeatedly described as *signs*; i.e. they were revelations in view of men of the benevolence of His heart, the beneficence of His will. The three signs described in this chapter were symbolic revelations, therefore, to Moses and the Hebrew race, of the methods which the Almighty Jehovah was about to adopt in the redemption of His people.

**Egyptian Magic.** It should be remembered that Egypt, whence we derive our word “Gypsy,” was steeped in belief in supernaturalism apart from God. The Egyptians, to use the common speech of our time, were adepts in spiritualistic beliefs and practices. They practised necromancy and magic. On one of the monuments “a planchette” is depicted in bas-relief. Whether the phenomena generally designated spiritualism are due to disembodied spirits, or to other spirits not human, or to an unknown power of the human mind, it was absolutely necessary to prove that they were easily within the province of the God of Israel, and that His servants could be empowered by His aid to perform equal and greater marvels.

**Three Signs.** Therefore these three signs were communicated to Moses, to accredit him for the work on which he was about to engage, and compel the attention of Egypt.

**The First Sign.** THE SIGN OF THE ROD. What is that in thine hand? It was just a simple shepherd's crook or club; but it was destined to play a notable part in the history of the Exodus. In verse 20, and afterwards, it is described as "the rod of God"; and it was used as an essential feature in many startling miracles that followed, notably at the Red Sea and at the smitten rock. What could more suitably symbolise Moses, in all his limitations and helplessness, than that rod, cut from its root, dry and sapless, without vitality or power of its own?

**Moses Cites His Seven Disqualifications.** Seven distinct objections were raised by Moses as reasons why he should not undertake the arduous task to which he was called. They have been thus epitomised: Lack of fitness, "who am I, that I should go?" (iii. 11); lack of words, "what shall I say?" (iii. 13); lack of authority, "they will not believe me" (iv. 1); lack of power of speech, "I am not eloquent" (iv. 10); lack of special adaptation, "Send by whom Thou wilt send" (iv. 13); lack of success at his first attempt, "neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all" (v. 23); lack of acceptance, "the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me" (vi. 12). There never was a completer list! Yet if only he would yield to God, as the rod did to him, if only he were content to be whatever God would have him be, if he would but let God work His will in and through him, there was simply no limit to the service that his individuality might render to God and man.

**Steps to the Higher Life.** There are three steps which every individual must take in order to fulfil the highest life. Obviously, the first step is *the consciousness of our individual and personal existence*. To some this awakening comes with startling suddenness. In rare biographical records cases are cited of a supreme moment, in which the soul suddenly awoke, and knew that it was distinct from all other beings and things, as an individualised personality. But for most of us self-consciousness comes gradually, as of a sleeper stirring, and starting, and awakening. In one way or another it comes to us all. It is sometimes associated with a revelation of God. We hear Him say, as to Moses, I AM; and we answer forthwith, "Here am I."

**Consciousness of Special Gifts.** The second step is to self-consciousness, when we become conscious of *capacity; with its special*

*gifts and endowments.* God says to us, "What is that in thine hand?" These are very various. The gift of *speech*, the eloquence of a Robert Hall or a Dale, of Burke or Sheridan. The gift of *song*, as of a Jenny Lind or a Clara Butt. The gift of *musical composition*, as of a Handel, a Mendelssohn, or a Mozart. The gift of *discovery of natural laws*, as of a Humphry Davy, a Newton, or a David Brewster. The gift of *scholarship*, as Dr. Johnson; or of *healing*, as Sir Frederick Trèves. The gift of *leadership*, as of a Gordon or Havelock; of *teaching*, as Arnold of Rugby; of *statesmanship*, as of a Gladstone or Disraeli; of *mechanical construction*, as of a Brunel; or of *quiet plodding work*, the inestimable gift and capacity for taking pains.

**There is always Something in Our Hand.** Every life has some capacity. God says to each of us, "What is that in thine hand?" He takes it for granted that there is something there. Do not envy each other, or despise one another. For if you do, you will paralyse your personal capacity and threaten your life with failure. To every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of God; and perhaps the hardest lesson that any one can learn, is to believe that every gift from heaven is of equal intrinsic worth. Our success is to be measured, not by the character of the capacity, but its realisation and full use.

**God Uses what We Have.** God always begins by using what we have in hand. Page after page of God's Word reveals that there is a chance for true usefulness, in the consecrated employment of whatever we have already in possession. In the Book of Judges, left-handed Ehud had a single dagger in his hand, and Shamgar an ox-goad: Gideon's three hundred had only pitchers and lamps, and Samson the jawbone of an ass. When David went to smite Goliath, he had a sling in his hand. When the widow appealed to Elisha for help, he said, "What hast thou in the house?" and though there was only a pot of oil, it was sufficient. Six waterpots full of water were all that was needed for our Lord's first sign at Cana; and five barley-loaves with two small fishes were sufficient for the great miracle of hospitality.

**But the Capacity must be Trained.** This capacity must, of course, be trained by use. We need to be industrious; quick to take the suggestions of friends, and learn from failure; willing to discover many mistakes, but careful never to make the same mistake twice. Many pages of MSS. will be cast into the waste-basket; many a canvas will be spoiled; many a piece of wood or metal will be

rendered useless! No preacher and no poet is born. A Robert Hall breaks down in his first sermon, a Tennyson fails to mount at once to fame. The vocalist who is one day to move vast audiences to passionate tears, will have to practise for hours daily and for years. The little girl whose work will one day be the admiration of a wide circle begins with large rude stitches. Dare to begin: dare to fail: dare still to persevere. The muscle grows by use. The hand becomes defter by each fresh operation.

**And All must be Consecrated to God.** All faculty must be consecrated to God. He gave it. It is the offspring and bears the image of Heaven. The Hallmark of the Creator is upon it. And as we surrender all to His use, we simply give Him back His own. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. In His hand are life and breath and all things. How many of us have really placed our all at His disposal? How many are ready to hold their position, not for the red gold it earns, but as a means of glorifying Christ? Every morning we should kneel down before our Redeemer, and say, "Thou hast made me a physician or a surgeon, a merchant or a salesman, an architect or contractor, a mechanic or a domestic servant, and now I consecrate this calling for to-day, and the opportunities it may bring, to be used by Thee for Thy blessed service." Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. . . . He shall direct thy path.

**Capacity and Opportunity.** God unlocks the door of opportunity. It stands open. "Behold, I have set before thee an open door." But it needs pushing and entering. God gives me the chance, but I am responsible to Him for stepping out to use it. It is here that so many lives have failed. Men and women have been conscious of possessing faculty, and have allowed the years to drift past whilst they have been expecting the advent of a supreme crisis. Finally, as they look back, they see that the opportunity did come in some insignificant and commonplace appeal, which they overlooked; and once forfeited, it is never allowed to return.

**The Call not Recognised Except by the Few.** It was because Dr. Barnardo recognised the appeal of one little street arab, that his noble work for waifs and strays was inaugurated; and because General Booth spoke to a few outcasts in Whitechapel, that the Salvation Army sprang into existence. How apt are those words that Shakespeare puts into the lips of Brutus:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and miseries."

Tennyson puts it in another way, when he says:

"But well I know  
That unto him who works, and feels he works,  
This same grand year is ever at the doors."

Of course the fact that the opportunity is a lonely and solitary one, of which no one knows but we, or the fact that the exercise we made of it holds us in a secluded and unvisited spot, matters nothing. It is glorious when a human soul is content to work for the eye of God alone, in the spirit of the old monks, who carved the unseen stonework of the minster-roof with as much care as the screen-work of the chancel. Those often quoted words of Gray are not quite accurate:

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Sweetness is never wasted, and there are no deserts. The Lord peoples every solitude with His Presence, and accepts the incense of each sweet floweret. He rejoices in His works. The door of opportunity is there, just where you are, only ask for wisdom to see, and grace to use it aright.

**What Opportunity Is.** May we not say that opportunity is Christ moving on with set and earnest face towards Jerusalem, and calling on us to accompany Him; or Christ feeling for the multitude thronging Him and asking us to discover who touched Him; or Christ, seeing the crowds gathering, and asking for our loaves and fish, and using our poor service to distribute the fragments from His hands!

It may be that your long years of preparation may eventuate in but one brief hour of triumph, but you will have lived. It may be that after one great act, you will be, like Florence Nightingale, doomed to years of patient suffering, but all those years will be radiant with the after-glow.

It may be that none will understand, none appreciate, none thank you, but you will hear heavenly voices, like chimes of golden bells, hailing you as a companion of their high order.

**Heed the Call of God.** Be heedful to the call of God; His voice is very small and still. Submit without complaint, not answering again. Obey promptly and courageously the call of duty, which is the call of God. Trust that He will bear the responsibility and ensure success. Be faithful in God's house, as a servant. Thus you will be led in the paths of useful service. God will be glorified and His name hallowed; and you will realise that as you draw upon Him, you can draw; as you give, you can give; as you work, you can work. Whatsoever they did there, He was the doer of it, for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory for ever!

**The Second Sign.** THE SECOND SIGN WAS THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPROUS HAND. We may not be able to understand all that the sign meant for Moses; but it means for us, and it may have meant for him, that the terrible taint of pride and uncleanness which besets all God's people, and especially threatens those who are engaged in Christ's work, needs to be cleansed away. It is so easy to become contaminated by the corruption which is in the world through lust. We may be taught a profound lesson by the care with which the instruments required for a surgical operation are rendered aseptic.

**God's Instruments must be Clean.** The life that is to be a mission from God to the world must be a clean, pure, and holy one. There is the animal in us all, and the man or woman who is anxious to help others must first take that animal by the throat, and choke it, and beat it, until the life is pounded out of it. But this goeth not forth, save by prayer and fasting.

Dr. Labaree was a notable Presbyterian missionary in Persia. After forty years of service he died on the Atlantic, on his way home to the United States. At his funeral, a Persian who had lived from boyhood in the city where Dr. Labaree laboured, said that the two traits which most impressed the natives of that city were, first, his carefulness—he was so faithful and punctilious in the little veracities of life—and second, his unsullied innocence. He had lived for seventy-two years, and went back in cleanness and honour to the great God from whom he came.

**"A Message for All."** The last address of Bishop Philips Brooks to young men was delivered at the Convention of St. Andrew in his own church at Boston. He came down out of the pulpit, and spoke to them out of his own pure heart from the words, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." It is a message for us all.



The holy chalice of God's grace may not be carried by a leprous hand. And if any are conscious of the defilement of flesh or spirit, from which the apostle bids us cleanse ourselves, let us now repair to Him Who of old said to the leper "I will: be thou clean." Thrust your hand into your own bosom, and it becomes leprous: thrust it into the wound pierced by the soldier in the side of the Redeemer, and it will become clean as the flesh of a little child.

**The Third Sign.** THE THIRD SIGN WAS THE WATER TURNED TO BLOOD. We will not stay on it now, because we shall have further opportunities of doing so. It is enough to say that when men are unclean and evil, Nature herself seems to be affected. The whole creation groans and travails until now for the reason of human sin that has subjected it. Indeed, sometimes she seems sentient, and suffers after her fashion. We need not wonder that the rocks were rent when Jesus died; and may be quite willing to believe that even water ran red. There are houses to-day where enormous crimes have been committed, which are uninhabitable, because of the impression which those scenes of blood have left behind on the sentient atmosphere, together with the accompaniment of awful sounds.

**Moses is Punished for Holding Back.** But though these three signs were given, Moses still held back, and a terrible thing befell. As he declined the sole leadership, he was deprived of its honour and happiness. Aaron was summoned to meet him, and appointed to share the honour of the office, and when speech was needed he must be the chief speaker. "In all outward appearances," as Dean Stanley observes, "Aaron, and not Moses, must have been, in the eyes of the Egyptians, the representative and leader of Israel." Moreover, by his persistent refusal, Moses lost the chance of the high gifts that God would doubtless have conferred.

Let us all beware. If you refuse to use your powers, they will atrophy. If you will not step up to the opportunity which God offers, you will not only miss it, but will live to see it filled by an inferior man to yourself, through whom you may have to suffer many sorrows:

"Children of yesterday; heirs of to-morrow,  
What are you weaving—labour or sorrow?  
Look to your looms again; faster and faster  
Fly the great shuttles, prepared by the Master,  
Life's in the loom; Room for Him—room."

## VIII

### FROM SERVANT TO FRIEND

Exodus iv. 10-17

10. And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

11. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?

12. Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

13. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand *of him whom* thou wilt send.

14. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, *Is* not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.

15. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.

16. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

17. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

## VIII

### FROM SERVANT TO FRIEND

EXODUS iv. 10-17

**The Struggle between Moses and the Angel.** It was a long struggle between the Angel of the Covenant and Moses, which the division into chapters somewhat obscures, for it is almost certain that this wonderful dialogue continued unbroken from the first arrest of the shepherd before the burning bush till his ultimate decision to go and return to Jethro.

**His Excuses.** When Isaiah was charged with his great commission, he did hesitate for a moment, but cried, "Here am I, send me." Not so, Moses. Again and again he sought to excuse himself; but as often as he alleged excuses, the Divine Spirit met his objections with infinite patience and tenderness.

*And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?*

And He said, Certainly I will be with thee.

*And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?*

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM.

*And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.*

And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?

*And Moses said unto the Lord, Oh, Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant: for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.*

And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth . . . is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak.

*And he said, Oh Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.*

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said . . .

**A Wonderful Colloquy.** This was a most remarkable colloquy, and showed with convincing cogency that this diffident and modest man was the predestined instrument for the stupendous work of Redemption. It must be borne in mind that God Himself had come down to redeem. His own right hand and His holy arm were to get Him the victory. He needed no assistance from man, but only an instrument or agent, through whom He might pour forth His saving might.

**The Pride and Self-will of Moses.** At first, as we have seen, there was much proud self-will in Moses, which needed to be eliminated from his resourceful nature, and therefore he was sent into the wilderness to tend the sheep for forty years, on such pastures as were afforded by the scanty grass or the aromatic shrubs which grew on the rocky ledges of the hill-sides and by the margin of the still mountain lakes. On every side he would be environed by mighty wastes of sand, and red sandstone peaks resembling pyramids of solid flame; whilst over all reigned the silence of an intense solitude, broken only by the occasional bleating of sheep or the musical rush of sand in a tiny gissade—the hour-glass of the desert.

**The Advantages of Solitude.** It is well for all God's servants to get to the back parts of the desert. There the world and its prizes seem to be child's baubles. The din and noise, the strife and rivalry of human life fail to reach the ear; the crash of an empire, the rumours of war, the plaudits and curses of the crowd are but whispers. No sigh of ambition is heaved there, no fading laurels tempt, no thirst for gold parches the lip. All is hushed, that the soul may sink to its true proportions before the great Glory of God.

**Moses had Learned.** Moses had learnt his lesson well. Indeed, there was now the danger of exaggeration on the other side. Henceforth he would be as an emptied channel, along which the saving strength of the Most High would pass forth to save Israel from the extremity of suffering in which they sighed, and from which their cry came up unto God. His long sojourn amid the silences of the wilderness, the rusticity of a shepherd's lot, his estrangement from the ways of courts, the slow movement of his speech, the shy diffidence of a man who had become content to be forgotten—these were the reasons why he would have gladly evaded the Divine commission, and dropped back into his lonely and uneventful life.

**The Losses of Moses.** In his last reply, however, Moses had clearly yielded a pace or two backwards. When he said, "Send, I

pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send," he had practically surrendered his resistance. It meant that God must have His way, even though the Divine choice involved his own mission. It was as though he said, "I go because I must: I have no hope of success: I greatly question Thy choice: but if there is no alternative, be it so." "Then was the anger of Jehovah kindled against him." Only on one other occasion did this befall—at the waters of Meribah. In that case he lost Canaan, and in this, as we have seen, he forfeited the sole leadership, which henceforth he shared with his brother, and he missed the endowment of forcible and persuasive speech which seemed to be within his reach, for had not God said, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say?"

**Danger of Being too Humbleminded.** Well indeed is it when the soul cries with the great Apostle, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." It is good to go further and, like him, even rejoice in our infirmities, as supplying a better opportunity for the exercise of that Divine Power, which is only perfected in weakness. But we must beware, for there is a hidden line over which self-distrust may not pass, lest it become unbelief. Cherish the lowliest thought you choose of yourself, but unite it with the loftiest conception of God's All-Sufficiency. Self-depreciation may lead to the marring of a useful life. We must think soberly of ourselves, not too lowly, as not too extravagantly. The one talent must not be buried in the earth. Jacob may be only a worm in his own thought, but God can make him a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth, before which the mountains shall become as chaff.

**The Result in the Hour of Hesitation.** Many of the greatest in the history of the Church have shrunk back abashed and afraid before the call of their age, which has been the call of God. But they have been driven back on Him Who shepherds the starry hosts as flocks in the plains of heaven, gives power to the faint, increases might to them that have no strength.

**Moses Yields, and is Rewarded.** While there was much in Moses' attitude that grieved the Holy Spirit of God, it is clear, as we have seen, that there was finally the yielded though reluctant will, and the desire to fulfil God's behest. "Send me, if there is no alternative"—that was the utterance of one in whom the Spirit of God had prevailed, and it constituted this the crucial hour in Moses' career. For forty years Moses had acted as a servant, performing his Master's

will, so far as he knew it. He had been faithful in the great Household of God as a servant. He had no far horizon, and knew not what his Lord was doing. But from this solemn interview the Lord began to speak with him "face to face," as a man speaketh with his friend.

**God's Agents are Helped by Him.** The Lord can do much with us as servants, because He knows exactly where to place and how to direct us; but when we have served our apprenticeship on the lower level He summons us, as Moses, to the higher, saying, "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known unto you."<sup>1</sup>

**The Experience of Moses may be Ours.** Such a transition from the attitude of the servant to the happy fellowship of a friend is within the reach of us all. It is the peculiar glory of Christianity that it annihilates the gulf of the centuries, and admits its adherents to become the trusted Friends of its Founder. Of course it is impossible that we should ever cease to be His loyal and obedient servants. Redeemed at so great a cost, we can never have anything but the most profound reverence for our Redeemer. The surrender with which our real life began will always deepen. Paul, the great apostle, commences his most important Epistle by inscribing himself as "the bondservant of Jesus Christ." Even in the blessed future, we are told that His servants shall serve Him.

**Passing from Servant to Friend.** But as time goes on, a subtle, but most real, change takes place. We still serve, but as friends, with the most exact and careful service that love inspires. For the wife and mother will do what paid service would never do.

The bondservant has no option:

*but the friend serves by choice.*

The bondservant has his work entrusted to him in pieces:

*but the friend is initiated into the programme.*

The bondservant is not at liberty to discuss:

*but the friend's suggestions are welcomed.*

The bondservant counts on a reward:

*but the friend's reward is in the fellowship.*

The bondservant is jealous of his fellows:

*but the friend is only too glad of any help that may hasten the conclusion on which his friend is set.*

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 15.

**The Confidences of Friendship.** It is part of friendship to trust your friend with your ideals and plans. When two of the three mysterious guests who had come to the patriarch's tent went on their way down the descending pathway to the plains of Sodom, and Abraham stood yet before the Lord, the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do . . . for I have known him." Surely the Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His secret counsel to His friends! "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."

This gives us the precise view-point of this great interview with Moses, when the entire landscape of the future was divested of clouds and exposed to his view. Read again iii. 16-22, where the programme of the Exodus is recorded with the precision of history. God set before His servant the line of procedure which He was about to adopt, that he might become an intelligent participant.

**A Parallel.** May we not compare this experience with the relations between a Michelangelo and a Raphael? At first the young student would be bidden to perform the elementary service of the studio; but as he showed himself attentive and careful in cleansing the brushes or preparing the palette, he would be promoted to higher and more delicate duties, until the master would unfold to him the glorious fancies that filled his own heart, and confide to him the execution of certain portions of the canvas which was to live for ever.

There was a sense in which God was alone responsible for the redemption of His people and their creation into a nation; but it was also certain that He could not do it apart from Moses. Browning says, "If any two hearts shall grow into one, they will do more than the world has done." If this is true as between man and man, how much more between man and God; and how truly the might of that union was manifested in the Life-work of "the man of God!"

**The Description of Time.** To such a Fellowship we are called. It may be that at the beginning of our life we made some egregious blunder, which has cast its shadow on our whole after-career. We also slew our Egyptian and hid him in the sand, but the slow-moving years which have succeeded have altered a great many things in us. We are less confident and boastful, more humble and dependent. The tongue is less arrogant and the bearing less masterful. You have quieted yourself as a wearied child, as a child weaned from its mother. The desert solitudes and silences have wrought their last

effect on your character. Reluctant you may be, but you are not rebellious, neither do you turn yourself backward. You have stood the ordeal of perfect obedience and submission. Faithful in a few things, you are now to rule over many, and to enter into the joy of your Lord, which is surely found in the inner secrets of Fellowship.



## IX

### MEET FOR THE MASTER'S USE

EXODUS iv. 18-26

18. And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which *are* in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace.

19. And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.

20. And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

21. And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand; but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

22. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel *is* my son, *even* my firstborn:

23. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, *even* thy firstborn.

24. And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sough to kill him.

25. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me.

26. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision.

## IX

### MEET FOR THE MASTER'S USE

EXODUS iv. 18-26

**Moses Sets Out.** Every objection that Moses could advance being answered, he set out on his return journey from the central uplands of the Sinaitic Peninsula. It was, of course, necessary that he should hand over the flock to the head of the clan, and receive his permission to return to Egypt on the proposed visit to his people.

**A Tedious Journey and Many Reflections.** Long and slow would be the progress of that return journey. The flocks must not be over-driven; and thus ample time was given him for reflection on the revolution in his thoughts and plans which the vision of the burning bush had caused. Did he ever question the reliableness of his senses, and wonder whether he might not have been the victim of delusion? Did the objections and arguments which he had already advanced return in all their apparent cogency? How strange it appeared that he, an old man, from whom the world seemed to have receded for ever, and who had absolutely no ambition but to die quietly in a shepherd's tent, should be suddenly summoned to lead to freedom a nation of slaves! The children of the promises had already surrendered many of the noblest traditions of their race, and lay as an abandoned child, weltering in blood.<sup>1</sup> Was it possible to resuscitate a nation?

**The Pharaoh of the Exodus.** The power and pride of the Pharaohs showed no symptom of waning. Indeed, Menephthah had inherited so much of the arrogance and cruelty of his father that the task was as formidable as if the great Rameses were still alive. He claimed to be equal with the gods! For him the Nile flowed, and the heavenly bodies cast their horoscope. To him the unseen world, as well as the seen, yielded tribute; and if a nation of slaves perished in adding one sand-weight to his magnificence, it was no more than his due! Son of a union between the Hittite and Egyptian empires, no

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xx. 7-9; xvi. 4-6.

obstacle that man could raise seemed likely to arrest or dim his glory. It was against this man that Moses was sent with the summons, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve Me."

**Stephen's Reference to Moses.** There is a ring of exultation in Stephen's reference to the setting forth of Moses on this great programme: "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? him hath God sent to be both a ruler and a redeemer."<sup>1</sup> The contrast between the last word in each sentence is very remarkable. The people resented his coming as a judge, but were quite willing to accept him as a redeemer. Men are always afraid of the advent of Divine help, because they suppose it is certain to condemn; they do not realise that God comes forth not to judge, but to save; not to condemn, but to redeem. Moses returned to Egypt as a redeemer and saviour.

**The Angel of the Presence.** Stephen also lays stress on the Divine Companion who went beside Moses on that return journey. "God sent him to be a ruler and a redeemer *with the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.*" More than once in subsequent Scriptures we are reminded of the co-operation of that gentle and strong hand. The Psalmist prays: "*Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand,* upon the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself."<sup>2</sup> We are told of the simple evangelists, who founded the Church at Antioch: "*The hand of the Lord was with them:* and a great number believed."<sup>3</sup> Stephen goes on to say that Moses was in the congregation in the wilderness "together with," or in partnership with, the angel that had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. Was not this what the great lawgiver referred to when he cried: "Except Thy presence go with me, carry us not up hence?" Did not Isaiah have the same thought in his mind when he spoke of "the Angel of His presence," as having saved them, bearing and carrying them all the days of old?<sup>4</sup>

**All Illustrated.** The most perfect illustration of this hand of the accompanying Angel is presented by the statue of the great bishop, Philips Brooks, in the precincts of the churchyard in Boston, U.S.A., where he ministered during so many brilliant years. No one who has seen it can forget it. In the busy streets of the great city, it is a perpetual reminder of things not visible to the eye, but which the

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xi. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxx. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. lxiii. 9.

heart-instinct recognises as true. The bishop stands in a characteristic attitude, with uplifted right hand. His left hand is on the open Bible, and in the background stands the Cross. Just behind him on the left is the figure of Christ, which is evidently intended to represent Him as ascended and glorified. His right hand rests on His servant's left shoulder, as though empowering and strengthening him. Would that every servant of Christ could claim the same endorsement; and that every congregation might be conscious of that two-fold ministry!

**Man Allied with Nature Capable of Great Deeds.** I. THE ALLIANCE OF THE DIVINE WITH THE HUMAN SPIRIT. We are living through a silent revolution. In the last hundred years vaster changes have taken place than in all the thousand years that lie behind us. Our fathers were content with the stage-coach and the sailing-vessel; but to-day the aviator navigates the air, the automobile flashes along the country road, and the express train covers sixty miles an hour. Nothing seems too great to attempt, or too impossible to conquer. The reason for all this lies in the fact that man, by patient observation, has mastered the laws and conditions on which the vast forces of Nature, unknown before, operate, and has suited his machinery to entrap and compel them. What neither Caesar nor Napoleon could do is easily possible to a child who presses a button or turns a switch, because she puts herself in alliance with stupendous natural forces, working strictly on ascertained and unchanging condition.

It is an overwhelming moment in a man's life when, for the first time, he awakes to see what co-operation with a newly discovered force may effect; and in the spiritual realm some such discovery broke on the mind of Moses, when God called to him out of the infinite, and said, "Certainly I will be with thee." What mattered it though he was reduced to the lowest and least, if he was included in a divine partnership and allied with Him Who spoke worlds into being at His word! Under such circumstances, all things would be possible.

**Alliance with the Creator of Nature Possible.** This should be the attitude of Christian people still. We have been called into partnership with the Son of God.<sup>1</sup> Our mission to the world, touching as it does the most stupendous spiritual issues, is only possible when we recognise and use the union of the human and the divine, of the spirit of man and the Spirit of God, which is the special gift of the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 9.

Incarnation and Work of Christ. To know this union makes us strong and confident in the face of difficulties which would otherwise prove insurmountable. Still God says: "I will be with thy mouth, and with this mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do."

**Conditions of Partnership.** II. THE CONDITIONS ON OBEDIENCE TO WHICH THIS PARTNERSHIP CAN BE REALISED. We have already seen that the human partner must be reduced to a sense of his own nothingness and helplessness. So long as Moses was confident in the prowess of his own courage, and the might of his own right hand, there could be no effective co-operation.

**Moses Prepared for Union with God.** God will not give His glory to another. Not for nothing is it written that He hath chosen things that are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. It may be that the long weary disappointments through which many of God's children pass are intended to reduce them to this emptiness and helplessness, that God may be all in all.

The only fear is lest they should become so hopeless of effecting aught in their lives, that they become hopeless of God effecting anything through them. God's discipline is intended to reduce their self-sufficiency, but to enhance their faith in His all-sufficiency. It was therefore when Moses confessed that he was not able to fulfil the Divine commission, that he had clearly attained to that precise level of death to his own resources, at which the soul is best suited to become the vehicle for God.

**Jethro Gives Moses His Blessing.** But there is another condition to be fulfilled—absolute obedience, and at all costs. Apparently Moses had no great difficulty in obtaining Jethro's leave to revisit Egypt. There was no need for him to rehearse the incident that had given a new direction and incentive to his life, or tell of that wonderful vision of the possibilities of God in and through man, that had been vouchsafed to him. These were secrets locked in his own heart, even from his wife. It was enough to obtain permission to see if his kinsfolk were yet living. The "Go-in-peace" of the head of the clan was sufficient carrying as it did the implicit promise that God would prosper his journey, and speed him in every step.

**Moses Halts in Midian.** It seems as though Moses lingered longer than was necessary, as years before Abraham did at the fords of the Euphrates; for a further enforcement of the Divine call was required. "The Lord said unto Moses *in Midian*, Go, return into Egypt." So

he departed. One ass, on which were mounted his wife and children, served for his modest requirements. His rod was his only equipment; the Divine promise his guiding-star and stay.

So fared forth the man who was to meet Pharaoh in the greatest duel that ever shook the world, wrest Israel from his hand, and return thither, having spoiled the Egyptians.

**Renewal of the Rite of Circumcision.** It is clear that either in deference to the wishes of Zipporah, or for some other reason, he had failed to comply with the initial rite which had been enjoined on Abraham as the sign and seal of the covenant. However insignificant this omission may have appeared in itself, it could not be tolerated in one who was to stand out as God's chosen and honoured servant. If God remembered the covenant, it was surely necessary that His servant should; and if the covenant was the basis of His interposition, it was imperative that the whole congregation should stand true to its obligations as well as its privileges. A sharp illness that smote Moses in the Khan seems to have reminded his wife as well as himself of this neglected rite; and Zipporah with an ill-gace yielded beneath the stern pressure of the hour. Probably she had been the stumbling-block, and now only gave way because she must. So her husband's life was spared.

**Zipporah Sent Back to Jethro.** It was clear that Zipporah would be of no real help to him in the difficult and perilous enterprise on which he was engaging; and Moses appears to have renounced his intention of taking her. Probably he sent wife and children back from this point, under the care of some attendant whom he could trust. They were not destined to meet again until the Exodus was complete.<sup>1</sup>

**Conditions of Service Fulfilled.** Thus, without having heard them formally enunciated, Moses fulfilled two New Testament injunctions, compliance with which is absolutely necessary, if God's work is to be wrought through the human instrument. The first of these bids us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us; and the second insists that if a man is not prepared to hold as second to his life-call, father and mother, wife and children, brethren, sisters, and his own life, he cannot be a disciple. In fulfilling the omitted rite, Moses laid aside a weight, if not a sin; and in overriding the reluctance of his wife, and finally sending her back to Midian, he showed that he was prepared to count all things but loss, if only he might fulfil the high commission on which he had been sent.

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xviii. 2-4.

**To Serve God the Whole Will must be Surrendered.** The scientific man, intent on unravelling the secrets of Nature and utilising her powers, knows by experience the necessity of minute obedience and absolute devotion to her least demands; and it is equally imperative for all who would serve God. You must live up to the furthest limit of your light. There must be no conscious defalcation from the standard of your high calling. Any secret rift will make the music mute. Any speck of decay will spread rottenness in the fairest promise of fruit. The great God whom we serve is particular of the jots and tittles of commandment. The finest machinery may stand absolutely useless if there is the smallest failure to obey. Only as the soul yields itself utterly and absolutely to God, will He give Himself utterly and absolutely to the soul. We must not confer with flesh and blood; and we must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision. This story of Moses shows that God would rather have us die than take up His work with unconsecrated hearts and unsundered wills.

## THE FIRST CHALLENGE TO PHARAOH

EXODUS iv. 27-vi. 1

27. And the Lord said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.

28. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him.

29. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:

30. And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people.

31. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

1. And afterwards Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

2. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

3. And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us; let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.

4. And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens.

5. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now *are* many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.

6. And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying,

7. Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves.

8. And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish *ought* thereof: for they *be* idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God.

9. Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words.

10. And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw.

11. Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished.



12. So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw.

13. And the taskmasters hasted *them*, saying, Fulfil your works, *your* daily tasks, as when there was straw.

14. And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, *and* demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to-day, as heretofore?

15. Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants?

16. There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants *are* beaten; but the fault *is* in thine own people.

17. But he said, Ye *are* idle: therefore ye say, Let us go *and* do sacrifice to the Lord.

18. Go therefore now, *and* work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks.

19. And the officers of the children of Israel did see *that* they *were* in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not minish *ought* from your bricks of your daily task.

20. And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh:

21. And they said unto them, The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.

22. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou *so* evil entreated this people? why *is* it *that* thou hast sent me?

23. For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.

1. Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

## X

# THE FIRST CHALLENGE TO PHARAOH

EXODUS iv. 27-vi. 1

**God's Call to Us.** MOSES AND AARON. There are divine promptings which come to us all, and to which we do well to take heed. The nearer we live to God, the more sensitive we become to His presence, and the quicker we are to detect His voice. It is only in the beginning of our spiritual experience that we think that Eli has called us, when in fact the voice is God's. As we become more filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, we become more quick of scent and swift of hearing. By reason of use our senses are exercised to discern good and evil, and to detect the Shepherd's voice.

**God's Adjustments for Us.** It is perfectly wonderful, as we live near God, how many adjustments He makes for us. It seems as though there is an invisible power always at work in our lives, planning for us, arranging meetings with persons we need to meet, introducing us to those whom we are to address. He besets us behind and before.

**Aaron Goes to his Brother.** It is not surprising therefore that "the Lord said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." For forty years he had not felt that movement or heard that summons: but now the predestined hour had struck, and the divine voice sang as an alarum in his heart. Here were two old men, separated for half a life-time, set in motion to each other. Moses knew that Aaron was on his way, and Aaron knew that Moses was coming towards him. Each step they took diminished the space between them; and each quickened his pace, in the anticipation of that greeting and reunion. An unerring hand was conducting them from opposing points of the compass, and could not make a mistake. The next jutting corner of sandstone rock might hide the long looked-for figure of a brother. Each sun rising at early dawn from the blood-red hues of the Eastern heavens might witness the embrace of long-severed lives.

**The Meeting.** Presently, in the solemn recesses of Sinai, they caught sight of each other, hastened forward, and became locked in each other's embrace. "He met him in the Mount of God, and kissed him." How much there was to talk of! On his part, Aaron would tell of the old home, of the passing away of the generation to which they belonged, of Miriam, of his own marriage and children, and specially of the gathering shadows and deepening anguish of their people.

**Moses has News for Aaron.** Moses, on the other hand, had news of an even more thrilling nature. Of Zipporah and his two boys, of course, there was much to tell; but he soon passed from matters of personal interest to tell Aaron "all the words of the Lord wherewith He had sent him, and all the signs wherewith He had charged him." The extent of the Divine commission; the assurance that God would be with them, and that the emancipated hosts would worship on that very mountain-range, the lower slopes of which they were skirting; God's remembrance of the ancient covenant and determination to fulfil it; the certainty that Pharaoh would not let Israel go until Egypt had been smitten with all God's wonders—all these things were carefully detailed, as he had himself received them from the voice that spoke to him at the bush. The signs of the burning-bush, of the rod transformed and retransformed, of the cleansing of the leprous hand, and of the water changed to blood, would be minutely detailed.

**The Need of a Colleague.** Finally, this humblest of men, on whose lips the solitude of the desert seems to have imposed a great silence, confessed to Aaron his distrust of himself, and told him of the provision which Jehovah had made to meet his felt deficiency. "You, dear brother," he would say, "are to be the spokesman. The God of our fathers has promised to be with my mouth and thy mouth, and teach us what we shall do. I shall wait for the words of God, and pass them on to you, that you may speak them in the ears of the people and Pharaoh."

**The Support of God's Power.** In such loving converse the two brothers journeyed forward, not knowing all that awaited them, but knowing enough to make them pause, were they not conscious that He who was with them was greater than all that could be against them. He was their Rock, His way was perfect, a God of faithfulness, and without shadow of turning. As the eagles that had their nests in those towering splintered peaks, and rose like black specks into

the blue heavens, would flutter beneath and around their fledglings teaching them to fly, and bearing them on their mighty pinions, in order that no hurt should befall them, so the Lord was leading them, and would make them ride on the high places of the earth.

**Divinely Appointed Companionships.** He Who sent forth His disciples two by two, and knows well how our human nature craves for sympathy and support, thus helped His servants by pairing them for their mighty task, and through the two wrought out His eternal purpose. Yet one questions whether Aaron's weaker nature did not introduce an element of anxiety into Moses' career, which added to his already heavy burdens.<sup>1</sup> From this, Elijah, the man of God, was saved; yet Paul needed Timothy and Luke; and Luther Melancthon. Be it so; only let us see to it that our companions are tried by long spans of fellowship, before we finally adopt them; and only when we are absolutely sure of our affinity and comradeship should we enter into an inseparable alliance. In some respects it is best to stand alone, with no ear but God's for our secrets, and no hand but His for our help.

**The Summoning of the Elders.** MOSES, AARON, AND THE ELDERS. The marching-orders had been definite and precise. At the bush, Moses was bidden to go and gather the elders of Israel, his very address to them had been outlined.<sup>2</sup> Without delay, therefore, a summons was issued for a consultative gathering, to which all the elders of the children of Israel came. It is clear that the nation, through all its trials, had retained its tribal and patriarchal organization.

**The Elders' View of Moses.** What a gathering that must have been! It was probably held under shadow of night, and at some secluded spot in the heart of Goshen. Stealthily, and by ones and twos, the grey-beards of the oppressed race gathered for conference with one of whom they had probably heard, but whom they had never seen. The strange story of his rescue from the Nile, of his adoption by the Egyptian princess, of his renunciation of the proud position to which she had raised him, was still passed from lip to lip. But he had vanished into the wilderness; nothing had been heard of him for decades of years. His own family were ignorant of what had become of him. That he had fled from the wrath of the King was well-known, but the veil of the desert-solitudes shrouded all else. It

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxxii. 1-25; Num. xii. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. iii. 16.

was almost weird to look on the face of one of whom they had heard so much. They saw his face, but apparently he maintained his shy reticence. "Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people."

**Objections Met.** Whether they asked for the name of the God of their fathers, i.e. the special characteristic or quality of His Being by which He was about to help them, or whether they professed themselves incredulous, we are not told. Moses expected that he would be met by these two objections.<sup>1</sup> But, in any case, he was forearmed with the fitting answer, and the representatives of his people were satisfied. "The people believed." Probably they were predisposed to believe, because, according to their calculation, the prescribed period, of which the Almighty Covenant-keeper had spoken to Abram, was on the point of running out. "Know of a surety," He had said, "that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward they shall come out with great substance. . . . In the fourth generation they shall come hither again."<sup>2</sup> To borrow Stephen's words, "the time of the promise drew nigh."<sup>3</sup>

**Prayer and Patience.** Probably this consciousness had led them to pour out their souls in prayer. We are told that their cry came up unto God.<sup>4</sup> In after years, when Daniel understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem, he set his face to seek the fulfilment of the promise by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and the pious Hebrews may have acted on the same principle. A later voice put into immortal words the petitions that must have emanated from their lips:

*"Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord,  
And that a foolish people have blasphemed Thy name.  
O deliver not the soul of Thy turtle-dove unto the wild beast:  
Forget not the life of Thy poor for ever.  
Have respect unto the Covenant:  
For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of  
violence."*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 13; iv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Acts vii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xv. 13, 14, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Exod. ii. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. lxxiv. 18-20.

**The Israelites Recognise their God-sent Leader.** It was not difficult therefore, for them to believe that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction. It was enough! They bowed their heads in solemn worship and assent. Recognising that God had taken their cause into His own hands, there was nothing more to do, except to follow the leaders whom He had so clearly designated, and await the unfolding of the Divine plan.

**We Rest on God's Promises.** It is not enough for us to have the promises which are Yea and Amen in Christ, or the covenant ordered in all things and sure. It is our part to claim their fulfilment, not with a prayer that doubts the Divine willingness or ability, but with an assured faith that knows that God can be reckoned on. There is no need, by vehement and importunate entreaties, to urge God to keep His word. It is enough to place our finger upon the letter of His Covenant, and say reverently and humbly, "Do as Thou hast said." The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, before God can be unfaithful to His promise. He will not dishonour the drafts that bear His autograph. Wait, child of God, His time! He will not be a moment before the appointed hour, not a moment behind.

**King and King's Messenger. MOSES, AARON, AND PHARAOH.** The Pharaohs still look forth from their statues and inscriptions, with the air of imperial and arrogant strength, their lip curled with scorn, their haughty pose betokening centuries of unbroken pride. It required no ordinary daring to confront the representative of a long line of kings who had been taught to consider themselves as the representatives and equals of the gods. They were accustomed to receive Divine titles and honours, and to act as irresponsible despots. Their will was indisputable, and all the world seemed to exist for no other reason than minister to their state. It was before such a man, seated in the inner court of some sumptuous palace, decorated with the hieroglyphed writing of his ancestors, and thronged with courtiers, statesmen, soldiers and priests, that the two aged Hebrew brethren appeared. How little he realised in that hour that his one claim on the attention of coming generations would be in his behaviour to that deputation!

It was not unnatural, then, when he heard Moses and Aaron challenge him in the name of Jehovah to let the people of Israel go, that he should reply, "I know not Jehovah."

**Akhnaton.** More than a century before this reign, the throne of the Pharaohs had been occupied by Akhnaton,<sup>1</sup> whose view of God had more nearly approximated to that of the Bible than that of anyone of whom we have record in those far-away days. For him God was the tender Father of all creation, and ever present in all the beauties of Nature, and in the sanctities of human life. No graven image was to be made of Him. The sun's disc was His symbol, from which numerous rays extended, each ray ending in a hand; but this symbol was not to be worshipped. Not a sigh from the lips of a babe that He did not hear; no lamb bleated for its mother, but He hastened to soothe it. He was the Loving Father and Mother of all creatures that He had made, compassionate and merciful, knowing no anger, and without wrath. His love included men, women, and children, the beasts of the field, the flowers, and the birds.

**The Pharaoh with a Tender Heart.** God's unspeakable goodness and love were as clearly interpreted by Akhnaton as ever they have been by mortal man. But he was born before his time, and was unable to cope with the opposition of the traditional religion. When war and bloodshed broke out, and he refused to offer armed resistance because his deity was too tender of heart to permit it, he was overwhelmed in darkness and death at an early age, though still trusting in Aton—the name he gave to God. The priests of Amon, the chief deity of Thebes, triumphed, and they took care that all traces of these religious novelties should be obliterated. The Pharaoh of Moses' time, therefore, knew nothing of them, and certainly did not associate them with Jehovah of Israel, in whose name Moses spoke.

**The First Refusal.** "I know not Jehovah." The reply was neither unnatural nor unreasonable, and the plagues, as they are called—plague meaning stroke—were enacted in the realm of Nature, which he well understood and appreciated, that he might be without excuse. If the first, which involved no loss of life or property, and was only the source of much inconvenience, had been properly apprehended and appreciated by him; if he had been willing to admit the lesson of the Divine Superiority which it taught; if he had acted on the summons of Jehovah and conceded Israel's demand for liberty, there would have been no need for the other nine plagues, and we should never have heard of the death of the firstborn or the overthrow in the Red Sea.

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Times of Akhnaton.* Blackwood & Sons.

**The Hardened Heart.** But beneath his plea of ignorance there was another reason for refusal. Not only did he say, "I know not Jehovah," but he added, "Neither will I let Israel go." That was the stronger argument, which hid beneath the other, and made him secretly glad that he did not know Jehovah, and unwilling to know Him, that under the excuse of ignorance he might still have his way.

**Pride Leading on to Wilful Resistance.** It is impossible to find a more exact illustration of the truth of Rom. i. than that presented in this story of Pharaoh's conflict with Jehovah. His invisible perfections—i.e. His eternal power and Divine nature—were rendered intelligible and clearly visible by His works, so that Pharaoh was without excuse; but when he came to know God he did not give Him glory as God, nor render Him thanks, but yielded himself to his own self-will, so that his senseless heart became darkened; and as he refused to have the perfect knowledge which the Divine Spirit endeavoured to impart, God, after nine proofs of His power and grace—power towards Egypt and grace towards His shielded people—gave him up to learn in the terror of the Red Sea the lesson which he had refused to learn in an easier school. This pride of heart flamed forth in the vehement outburst of angry utterance with which he fell on the two brethren. He upbraided them for raising false hopes and hindering their people in their toils. They were sedition-mongers, dangerous firebrands, mob-orators, and the like. Instead of dictating to him, let them get back to their own burdens among the brick-kilns! What were they but insolent bondmen, who thought to conceal their indolence beneath the plea of religion!

**But the Refusal not Surprising.** The royal refusal could not have been a great surprise. When furnishing Moses with his earliest commission, Jehovah had made it clear that at the first he must expect it. "I know that the King of Egypt will not give you leave to go, no, not by a mighty hand." It was, moreover, only what he had told Aaron to expect, when they found the door angrily slammed in their faces. Probably they had not expected the aggravation of the situation which was meted out on that same afternoon, at Pharaoh's own initiative.

**The Harsh Resultant Sentence.** At a meeting of the taskmasters, who were probably Egyptians, and of the Hebrew officials and representatives, Pharaoh announced that from that time onward



no straw would be given for the binding of the clay in the brickyards, and yet the daily tasks must be maintained.

**The Anguish of the Oppressed.** As these orders were passed on to the miserable people, already strained to the utmost, they must have seemed weighted with the sentence of doom. What hope had they of rendering their tale of bricks under that new and heavy addition to their tasks! A sob of bitter anguish must have broken forth in each squalid hut, as the news was discussed that night in whispered tones. Their lot had become more unbearable! The Hebrew gangers were beaten with the terrible knout! Their appeal to Pharaoh was received with heartless disdain! And their bitter retaliation on Moses and Aaron, who awaited them on their way back from the royal audience-room, must have stung the latter to the quick. "The Lord look upon you, and judge."

**The Helplessness of Man.** MOSES AND JEHOVAH. Moses could not take Aaron with him on this errand. As Jehovah had sent him, he must deal with Jehovah alone. He must enter his closet, and shut the door, and pray to his Father in secret. Ah, there are moments in the lives of all God's servants when they must have matters out with God—they and He alone—in the bitterness of their soul. When they have been true to truth; when they have done what they thought was His will; when they have wrought their utmost, and all has ended in failure; when they seem to have done harm rather than good, and to have marred what they longed to adjust—what resort is there save that of prayer? "Lord, why is it that Thou hast sent me? and where is Thy promised aid? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath evil entreated this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all!"

But all these things were working together for good!

**The Salvation of the Lord.** Listen to God's reply. It was not for that moment only, but for all time; not for Moses alone, but for thee! "*Now*"—when thou art reduced to the very dust of despair, when all hope is abandoned, when Aaron and you are at the end of yourselves—"now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh." It was thus that Moses first learnt those memorable words which rang out over the Red Sea, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord!"

## XI

### ON EAGLES' WINGS

EXODUS vi. 2-9

2. And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, *I am* the Lord :

3. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name* of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.

4. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.

5. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage ; and I have remembered my covenant.

6. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, *I am* the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm, and with great judgments :

7. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God : and ye shall know that *I am* the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

8. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob ; and I will give it you for an heritage : *I am* the Lord.

9. And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel : but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

## XI

### ON EAGLES' WINGS

EXODUS vi. 2-9

**Chapter VI a Repetition of III and IV.** The longer this paragraph is studied the more clear does it become that it is a retelling of the contents of III and IV. It seems to be another version of the same wonderful incidents of the call of Moses and the Divine commission with which he was entrusted. There is no mention of the burning bush, of the special signs given him as credentials, because there was obviously no need to repeat these; but there are several sentences and phrases included in this narrative which are peculiar to itself, and abundantly justify its inclusion. Just as Matthew and Mark give in their Gospels fragments of our Lord's sayings which had escaped the evangelist Luke, which either he never heard or which were not pertinent to his object, so here are gold-shavings and diamond-filings, carefully gathered from the floor, and collected and passed on from hand to hand, to confirm and illustrate the main statement already made.

For this we must thank the Spirit of Inspiration, who has set His seal on these sacred reminiscences, transmitted at first orally, but finally set down in writing for the nourishment of all generations.

**The Sacred Name.** I. JEHOVAH'S FRESH REVELATION OF HIMSELF. Three times over we meet the remarkable phrase, "I am Jehovah." In the Hebrew, "Jehovah I" (see vv. 2, 6, 8). This mysterious and sacred name was not absolutely unknown among the Hebrews. For instance, it was incorporated in Jochebed, the name of Moses' mother; but it was not in common use, and the truth which it contained was not generally recognised or appreciated. There is all the difference between our hearsay knowledge of a word, and our appreciation of its meaning, when associated with the personality of a beloved friend. A word which has passed the lips a hundred times may suddenly become almost too sacred, for love's sake, to

mention, except in circles where the beloved one is known and appreciated.

**Knowledge of God and Names of God.** The upward march of the generations has been determined and marked by successive names for God, indicative by an ever-increasing knowledge of the Divine nature. Each new development of religious experience has dated from a better understanding of God. It was when Abram's faith was strained to breaking-point by the delay in the gift of the promised heir, that God revealed Himself as El-Shaddai. From that name sprang the promise that he should become Abraham, the father of many nations, and from that hour the river of his life issued into further reaches of deep and hallowed experience.

**Jehovah-Sabaoth, First Use of the Name.** It was when Israel came into collision with the marshalled hosts of the heathen that Jehovah became known as Jehovah-Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, as though to hearten them in conflict by the knowledge that unseen squadrons were riding through the Heavens to their help.

**Later Names of "Father" and "Redeemer."** It was when the world lay crushed under the iron empire of Rome; when, throughout the break-up of the old mythologies, men were becoming disillusioned and hopeless, that Jesus made God known as the Father in Heaven. Throughout the Christian centuries the Divine Teacher has been unfolding new and unexpected qualities in the Word that was made flesh. Each Council of the Church, called to deal with a fresh heresy, has affirmed some fresh aspect of the Redeemer, as the antidote and corrective of the error.

**The Saviour's Supply of Our Needs.** In Christian experience, also, we find that each fresh temptation or trial serves as the background against which some unexpected jewel of our Saviour's character will be exhibited. The precious stones of His breastplate lie, so to speak, in a deep chest or coffer, from which, as the need arises, the Spirit takes and holds up to view the appropriate stone which will befit our need. It was therefore in harmony with the experience of the Church and of the individual, when the great name Jehovah became the formative conception of the Exodus. The sorrows of Israel were the foil on which it flashed to fullest advantage. We recall the words, "To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it."

**"For His Holy Name's Sake."** JEHOVAH'S OBLIGATION TO HIMSELF. In a very illuminating chapter,<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel unveils a principle of Divine providence, which had characterised the successive epochs of Hebrew history. Four times over, we are told, He wrought for His holy Name's sake, that it should not be profaned among the nations.<sup>2</sup> Often and again He must have cast the chosen people aside, if His action had been simply determined by their merits; but other considerations prevailed. His name and character were so intimately wrapt up in the fortunes of His people that He could not abandon them to the full consequences of their sins, without endangering the cause of religion in the world.

This also was a potent argument with the noblest of His servants, who stood in the breach and pleaded it, when there was no other excuse to be made for the people. "If," argued Moses on one occasion, "Thou shalt kill this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of Thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore unto them, therefore He hath slain them in the wilderness."<sup>3</sup> And when Joshua was lying in the dust, after the defeat at Ai, he cried, "Oh Lord, what shall I say, after that Israel hath turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall compass us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and *what wilt Thou do for Thy great name?*"<sup>4</sup>

That thought underlies the remarkable references of Ezekiel xx. 5-9, to Israel's sojourn in Egypt:

#### **A Later Reference to the Bondage of the Israelites.**

"Thus saith the Lord God: In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am Jehovah your God; in that day I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands: and I said unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am Jehovah your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me; they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xx.

<sup>2</sup> vv. 9, 14, 22, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Num. xiv. 15, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua vii. 8, 9.

anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. *But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt."*

**God's Dealings with the Israelites an Object Lesson for Mankind.**

This paragraph is one of the most illuminating and touching references to the facts of the Egyptian bondage on the page of Scripture. We learn from it, what we infer from the inveteracy of their love for the calf-god and its lascivious worship—that the chosen people became deeply infected with Egyptian idolatry; that the God of their fathers was constantly pleading for a fuller consecration; and that their ultimate deliverance was due, not to any outstanding merit, but to those plans for the education of mankind on which God was set. It was necessary for the world's redemption that the Hebrew race should be disintegrated from Egypt as ore from its matrix; and lodged in Canaan, that it might provide the Psalms, the Prophecies, the moulds for Apostolic thought, and, above all, the proper setting for the white flower of the race—the human nature of Jesus. Poor as the material was, the Divine Potter had no alternative but to make it again and yet again. "I do not this," He said frankly, "for your sake, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name, which ye have profaned among the nations, and I will sanctify my great name"<sup>1</sup>

**Our Unworthiness and His Covenant.** This also is in harmony with experiences with which most of us are familiar. Are there not times when we feel more deeply than ever that we have forfeited all claim on God? We cannot base our plea for help in our dire extremity upon our victories or services. Indeed, our faith lies stifled under the weight of our shortcomings. We cannot believe that God can help us, until we recall the covenant. Placing our finger on its provisions, we falter: "Remember the Covenant by which Thou hast bound Thyself: have respect unto it for Thine own sake. Interpose, and work for Thine own great name after which we are called; we cannot believe, but do Thou remain faithful, for Thou canst not deny Thyself." "Help us, O God of our salvation, *for the glory of Thy name*: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for Thy name's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?"<sup>2</sup> When we have begun to plead thus, the clouds seem to part and the

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxix. 9, 10.

blue sky gathers overhead. We know that God cannot put us away. He may have to chasten us for our sins, but He cannot abandon, or allow us to be desolate. You have no plea of your own? Be it so; then ask Him to work "for His Name's sake."

**The Seven "I Wills."** II. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE. As we glance down the seven "I wills" of this paragraph, they become very remarkable, as contrasted with the condition of Israel at that time:

- "I will bring you out,"*
- "I will rid you out of their bondage,"*
- "I will redeem you,"*
- "I will take you to me for a people,"*
- "I will be to you a God,"*
- "I will bring you in unto the land,"*
- "I will give it you for an heritage."*

**The Impossible Suggested.** Nothing could have seemed more unlikely. The nation had descended into the valley of Death-shadow. The dread sentence of gradual destruction and extinction seemed brooding over them. Strange to be told that they would soon be transported to the broad wolds of the wilderness, with the rights and opportunities of free men! It seemed absolutely incredible that they could arise from that low level of degradation to those fair tablelands, on which as they lifted their heavy eyes they could see the sun was shining!

**But God Brought It to Pass.** But so it befell. Within a twelve-month of this time the transition had been made, and Jehovah, addressing them through Moses, said, "Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself."<sup>1</sup>

The imagery is sublime. We catch sight of some parent-bird, bearing on its mighty wings the young fledglings of its nest, and carrying them through the dizzy steeps of air to the crested summits of the mighty Sinaitic range, 10,000 feet above the sea-level. How magnificent, how effortless, how incomparable, that flight! So God spread abroad His wings, took His people, and bare them on His pinions, and made them ride upon the high places of the earth; they ate the increase of the field, sucked honey out of the rock, and drank wine of the blood of the grape.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xix. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxii. 11-14.

**The Christian Path.** Christian living often resembles the climb of a mountain range. You pass easily through the cornfields at the base, and over the foot-hills, with their woodlands and lawns. The walk through the firs and pines is comparatively easy; but when all these are left behind, and the steep mountain cliffs spring perpendicularly upwards, opposing themselves to your further advance, your resolution is challenged, and your ambition threatened with defeat. So in the early stages of Christian experience, it is not impossible to cut off the right hand or foot and pluck out the right eye, and to deal with obvious inconsistencies and faults. But when these stages are passed, the soul is repeatedly brought up face to face with unscalable cliffs. Amongst them we may cite these: To love your neighbour better than yourself; to pray for the success of another as you would for yourself; to be glad for the Master to obtain more glory from the labours of others than your own; to love perfectly, not with an effort, but naturally and gladly! Those peaks of unconscious humility, of unstudied meekness, of genuine child-likeness, how hard they are to climb! It is not so difficult to seem good; but to be really good, here is the work, here the labour. It is not so hard to frame the lips in pious prayer for others; but to intercede for them as though for our own life, this needs Divine grace. To hear a rival receive his just mead of praise, and to be really glad! To make a sacrifice which costs blood, and to delight in it for the love of God!

**Difficulties Only to be Conquered by God's Grace.** Are not these steep and beetling cliffs? Thank God that they face us! We would not have a soft and easy life! Yet as we come back to them again and again, they defy us. The young ruler came to their foot, and turned back foiled; though probably he came again, and surmounted them, having learnt what the Master meant when He said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible." Saul of Tarsus, whose early life might have been described in the same terms as his, said that he was easily able to scale those cliffs, because he did all things in the strengthening grace of Christ. By no other talisman can we conquer; by no other clue extricate ourselves from the meshes of selfishness. But God's grace is sufficient for us, and is made more evident and abundant in our weakness. Our Lord spoke of some poor labourers who had only wrought for one hour in the vineyard, but the difference between their legitimate wage and the full day's wage, which was paid them, was compensated



by the generosity of their employer; and He surely means us to infer that those who by reason of their natural inabilities seem least able to scale inaccessible heights, shall find more grace than others, grace adequate to their need, grace that shall laugh at the impossible.

**Jehovah the Strength of His People.** Is not this what God meant when He told Moses that He had borne the people whom He loved on eagles' wings, and brought them to Himself? Will not He do as much for each of us? Whilst you stand at the foot of the cliffs, overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task to be accomplished, and whilst you steadfastly look away from yourself to God, you will find yourself transported by strong and steady wings upward. As the aviator cannot rise into the air by his unaided powers, but must skilfully utilise the laws and forces of Nature, so the soul that must fail, if left to its unaided efforts, succeeds when it unites itself by faith to the power of God. What we cannot do of ourselves, we can do in union with Him! When we are weakest, we are strongest! He gives power to the faint, and to those that have no might He increases strength. The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but they that wait on the Lord shall change their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles.<sup>1</sup> "Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength, and He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and will make me to walk upon mine high places."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> Hab. iii. 19.

## XII

### THE SECOND CHALLENGE TO PHARAOH

EXODUS vi. 10-vii. 13

10. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
11. Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.
12. And Moses spake before the Lord, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who *am* of uncircumcised lips?
13. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.
14. These *be* the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel; Hanoah, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi: these *be* the families of Reuben.
15. And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman: these *are* the families of Simeon.
16. And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari: and the years of the life of Levi *were* an hundred thirty and seven years.
17. The sons of Gershon; Libni, and Shimi, according to their families.
18. And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath *were* an hundred thirty and three years.
19. And the sons of Merari; Mahali and Mushi: these *are* the families of Levi according to their generations.
20. And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram *were* an hundred and thirty and seven years.
21. And the sons of Izhar; Korah, and Nepheg, and Zichri.
22. And the sons of Uzziel; Mishael, and Elzaphan, and Zithri.
23. And Aaron took him Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Naashon, to wife; and she bare him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.
24. And the sons of Korah; Assir, and Elkanah, and Abiasaph: these *are* the families of the Korhites.
25. And Eleazar Aaron's son took him *one* of the daughters of Putiel to wife; and she bare him Phinehas: these *are* the heads of the fathers of the Levites according to their families.
26. These *are* that Aaron and Moses, to whom the Lord said, Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies.

27. These *are* they which spake to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt: these *are* that Moses and Aaron.

28. And it came to pass on the day *when* the Lord spake unto Moses in the land of Egypt,

29. That the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I *am* the Lord: speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee.

30. And Moses said before the Lord, Behold, I *am* of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?

1. And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.

2. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.

3. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

4. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, *and* my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

5. And the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

6. And Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded them, so did they.

7. And Moses *was* fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pharaoh.

8. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying.

9. When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast *it* before Pharaoh, *and* it shall become a serpent.

10. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the Lord had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

11. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.

12. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

13. And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them: as the Lord had said.

PSALM CV. 23-26.

23. Israel also came into Egypt;  
And Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24. And he increased his people greatly;  
And made them stronger than their enemies.
25. He turned their heart to hate his people,  
To deal subtilly with his servants,
26. He sent Moses his servant;  
And Aaron whom he had chosen.

## XII

### THE SECOND CHALLENGE TO PHARAOH

EXODUS vi. 10—vii. 13

**Moses and Aaron are Commanded to again Approach Pharaoh.** Once more, because God, in His loving-kindness and justice, always repeats His demands, to prevent the possibility of mistake, the brothers were commissioned to demand from Pharaoh that he should grant the request of the children of Israel for liberty. It seemed to Moses a useless and futile errand. His old haunting self-distrust awoke. At the bush, he had repeatedly insisted on his incompetence. His lack of eloquence, through the disuse of public speech for forty years, clung to him, like saturated clothes around the spent swimmer. He was not eloquent, but slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. To increase his self-distrust, when he had addressed words of encouragement to his people, they had turned from him, sick of heart, "for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage." How then could he expect better success with the proud tyrant, who had already dismissed him from his presence with arrogant contumely!

**The Discipline of Failure.** I. THE DISCIPLINE OF FAILURE. "How then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?" That qualifying adjective seems to mean more than that he was uneloquent; it carries with it the suggestion of uncleanness and unworthiness. We recall the words of another, in the same great line of prophets, who cried beneath the vision of the seraphim, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."<sup>1</sup>

—**Hard to Bear.** Probably there is no pain more acute and crushing, with the exception perhaps of jealousy, which is more terrible to a sensitive spirit, than the sense of failure. In proportion to the greatness of the ideal, and the precision of previous preparation, will be the poignancy of the regret, when the kite has failed to rise,

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi. 5.

and the arrow has become a spent force before it reached the mark. You shrink from speaking of your failure, you hide your chagrin from your closest friends, you affect an outward interest in the achievements of your rival, when your heart is being drained of life-blood. You secretly vow that you will never make another effort; you wonder where you can hide; you are reminded of your failure in the expression of every face, in the considerateness of every voice, and in the kindness which invents apologies.

—**But a Divine Revelation.** If your sense of failure arises from mortified pride, it is well to let the acid eat out the proud flesh, and to permit the fire to search for the dross. Dare to regard the process as a permission of the Great Refiner to reveal what you are, and as a prelude to the operation of His more tender and compassionate grace.

**Some Causes of Failure.** The sense of failure often arises from an overtaxed nervous system, which has been strung almost to breaking-point, and has suddenly collapsed. It was so with Elijah, when he lay beneath the juniper tree, and asked for death. But He who knows our frame knew better than to send the Angel of Death, and commissioned another to provide him with food and sleep. Often, after some great deliverance, the late Dr. Maclaren would be overwhelmed with the sense of failure. "I must not speak again on such an occasion," would be his exclamation, whilst the whole audience, as they dispersed, went away inspired and blessed. We must always allow for the depression which comes from the rebound of the overstrung bow.

Failure sometimes arises from the nature of the soil which we are sent to cultivate. Suppose that the husbandman has only the stony-ground or the light sandy-soil in his fields! Suppose, as in Moses' case, the people are so engrossed in their bitter struggle for bread that they have no thought or care for anything beyond! Suppose, as in Isaiah's case, hearts are fat and ears are heavy!

**Times when Failure is no Failure.** Failure under such circumstances is not really failure, so far as the workman is concerned. His Master has no fault to find with him. In the words of the great Servant, he may say,

"I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God . . . Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlix. 4, 5.

At such times, God will even grant a wider commission to His servant.

“Thus saith the Lord . . . to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose thee.”<sup>1</sup>

In such cases, when the son of peace is not within the house, peace comes back again to the heart from which it issued forth.

**Where the Blame Should Lie.** At the same time, we should be more willing to blame ourselves than the people; and more anxious, like Moses, to find the cause of failure in our uncircumcised lips, than in the obtuseness and hardness of their hearts. Perhaps there has not been enough of the wooing-note in our voice! Perchance our manner disinclined them to receive our matter! What if they discerned the coldness and indifference of our stony hearts! Better that we should accuse ourselves wrongfully, than that we excuse ourselves wholly!

Always go into your own uncircumcised heart, to learn the reason why the people are gainsaying and rebellious, until God comforts you by saying,

“I will call that my people, which was not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall be that in the place where it was said unto then, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called sons of the living God.”<sup>2</sup>

**Our Source of Help.** In the meanwhile, if our lips are uncircumcised, let us ask that a live coal may be brought from the altar of God and laid on them, that our iniquity may be cleansed, and that we may become the fitting spokesmen for God.

**A High Calling needs High Living and Thinking.** Let us specially remember and act upon the Apostle's injunction, that fornication, and all uncleanness, and foolish talking, and jesting, must be put away, as becometh saints.<sup>3</sup> No speech of such things may defile with its muddy foot-prints the lips which belong to God, for the utterance of His messages to men. Only high-born thoughts, clothed in white vesture pure and clean, may tread on thresholds where the feet of the King are wont to go to and fro. It is too sad, sometimes, to hear men, who, an hour before, had been apparently the vehicles and mediums of the oracles of God, stooping to silly and foolish

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlix. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ix. 25, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. v. 3, 4.

stories, utterly unworthy of their high vocation. It would seem as though they made haste to prove that they were even as others, whereas the fact that God has condescended to use them as His messengers should for ever impose a careful reserve. The wearer of royal livery, carrying royal letters, is expected to bear with him the manners and speech of the court.

**The Family of Moses and Aaron. II. AN OLD-WORLD CEMETERY.** Tread gently here! This is a private burying-ground, the last resting-place of the founders of a family to which the world is deeply indebted for priceless service. The reference to the sons of Reuben and Simeon is only casual and introductory. The main object of this genealogical table is to trace the roots of the family out of which Moses and Aaron sprang. Not far from London, near Chalfont where Milton first conceived the plan of "Paradise Regained", is the quiet Friends' meeting-house of Jordans, and in front a few little mounds of earth that mark the sacred spot where lie the remains of William and Gulielma Penn, and of others of their family. One bares one's head, and hushes one's voice, as the presence of the mighty dead seems to enwrap one. With similar emotions, we may thread our way through these names. Amram and Jochebed are already familiar.

**Their Ancestors.** We shall hear again of Phinehas, Eleazar, and Korah. Prophets, Priests, Judges, singers, statesmen will come from this family, whose words and acts shall light the march of generations, when the proud Pharaohs shall be forgotten, and Egypt has become one of the servile nations of the world.

**Aaron the Elder, Moses the Greater.** "These are that Aaron and Moses," says the sacred scribe of some far-off time, observing the order of their birth.<sup>1</sup> "These are that Moses and Aaron," says some later scribe—it may be Ezra—who revised the Sacred Canon, and who desired to place them in the rank of historical achievement.<sup>2</sup> For there are last which shall be first, and first that shall be last. The order of Nature is reversed by grace. The elder serve the younger, for that is not first that is spiritual, but that which is natural, and the Divine purpose must stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth. Moses might do his best to put Aaron forward as first and foremost in the challenge to Pharaoh, but inevitably he sank to the second position, and his illustrious brother, though meekest of all men, was compelled to assume the foremost place.

<sup>1</sup> Exod. vi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

**Moses, though Younger, First in God's Plans.**

"And it came to pass on the day when the Lord spake unto Moses in the land of Egypt, that the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, I am Jehovah: speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak unto thee."

**The Second Challenge.** III. THE SECOND CHALLENGE. The brothers were to speak to Pharaoh and show their signs, with the clear knowledge that he would not hearken unto them, until Jehovah had laid His hand on Egypt, and brought forth the hosts of His people with great judgments. It was necessary that they should realise the need for patience. After long pondering some heaven-given programme at a distance from courts and camps, a man is apt to suppose that he has only to propose it, to see it carried into effect. He becomes unaware of the dead dull incubus of human inertness and indifference, to say nothing of obstinate resistance.

Moses might naturally have expected that Pharaoh would give way before his first miracle. He had to learn the necessity of a Divine patience; that much labour, apparently abortive, would have to be sunk before the roadway for the Exodus could be made; and that he must carry out his instructions in absolute indifference to the behaviour of the King, as the share cleaves the soil at the summons of the ploughman.

**Two Issues Made Plain.** Two things were made clear from the outset, first, that the hold of Egypt on Israel was to be loosened and overthrown by sublime manifestations of the Divine power; and second, that Pharaoh's heart would be gradually hardened in the conflict, till the waves of the Red Sea closed over him and his armies.

**God's Dealings with Pharaoh.** Why did not God crush Pharaoh by one terrific miracle? Because he never terrifies men into submission. He respects the understanding, the judgment, and the will-power, which He has given; and by appealing to these, He seeks to lead them to penitence, faith, and obedience. It is not to be wondered at that this descendant of a long line of kings, who were treated as demigods, should resent the interference and dictation of a race of slaves. For them great Egypt existed, and her peoples toiled. For them magicians and priests, philosophers and statesmen, generals and builders wrought. Their will was law; in their hands were life and death.

**Pharaoh a Deeply Religious Man.** At the same time the Pharaoh's were an eminently religious race. Behind the whole system of



Egyptian idolatry and animal-worship there was a profound reverence for the unknown Power which held the world in its grasp, and ruled in its palaces. If this had not been so, is it likely that the King would have been so dependent on his magicians? There was a mysterious awe in his deepest soul, begotten by the secret belief that these men were in touch with the One Being, to which the inscription on the Temple of Isis made reference:

**A Wonderful Inscription.** "I am that which was, and is, and shall be, and no man hath lifted my veil."

It was to this deepest principle in Pharaoh's nature, his sense that there must be something beyond the phenomena which he worshipped, his religious awe, that Jehovah made His appeal.

**A Pauline Parallel.** Moses did not accost Pharaoh as a heathen, but appealed to him almost precisely as, centuries after, Paul addressed the assembly on Mars Hill: "Men of Athens, I perceive that you are in every respect remarkably religious. For as I passed by, and observed the things you worship, I found also an altar bearing the inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. The Being, therefore, whom you, without knowing Him, revere, Him I now proclaim unto you."<sup>1</sup> It was as though Moses said, "You admit that there is a Power at work in Nature, beyond your furthest imaginings; but He is the God Who has sent us, to whom this people belongs, and who asks you to set them free. To prove that this is so, behold these wonders, wrought in the sphere of Nature, and mastering the very symbols and elements which you are wont to associate with your deities. Does not this prove that I, through whom these wonders are wrought, am the messenger and spokesman of the God of gods and the Lords of lords?"

All this was involved in Pharaoh's demand for a sign, in answer to which the rod was cast down, to become a serpent.

**The Magician's Miracles—Were They of God?** It is noticeable that in this and one or two of the earlier plagues, "the magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their enchantments—they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents." This was permitted, because they possessed some knowledge of the Power behind Nature. The fact that they could work similar miracles to those of Moses seemed to prove that he and they were working in the same sphere. Perhaps also, legerdemain, in which they were adepts, accounted for their earlier successes.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 22, etc. (Weymouth).

**The Magicians Defeated.** But when Aaron's rod swallowed their rods, when the magicians could turn water to blood, but not blood to water, when presently they failed in the third great plague, when finally they cried, This is the finger of God, and retreated from the conflict,<sup>1</sup> there could be no reasonable doubt that there was none like unto Jehovah among the gods, none like unto Him, glorious in Holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders: for what god was there in Heaven or on Earth, that could do according to these works, and according to these mighty acts?

<sup>1</sup> Exod. viii. 19; ix. 11.

### XIII

## THE NINE PLAGUES

EXODUS vii. 14-x. 29

14. And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart *is* hardened, he refuseth to let the people go.

15. Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning, lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand.

16. And thou shalt say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear.

17. Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I *am* the Lord: behold, I will smite with the rod that *is* in mine hand upon the waters which *are* in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.

18. And the fish that *is* in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river.

19. And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and *that* there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of wood*, and in *vessels of stone*.

20. And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that *were* in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that *were* in the river were turned to blood.

21. And the fish that *was* in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

22. And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the Lord had said.

23. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his heart to this also.

24. And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.

25. And seven days were fulfilled, after that the Lord had smitten the river.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

2. And if thou refuse to let *them* go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs:

3. And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading troughs:

4. And the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants.

5. And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.

6. And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.

7. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

8. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Intreat the Lord, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord.

9. And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, *that* they may remain in the river only?

10. And he said, To-morrow. And he said, *Be it* according to thy word: that thou mayest know that *there is* none like unto the Lord our God.

11. And the frogs shall depart from thee, and from thy houses, and from thy servants, and from thy people; they shall remain in the river only.

12. And Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh: and Moses cried unto the Lord because of the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh.

13. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields.

14. And they gathered them together upon heaps: and the land stank.

15. But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

16. And the Lord said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

17. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

18. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.

19. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, *This is* the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

20. And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

21. Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of *flies* upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of *flies*, and also the ground whereon they *are*.

22. And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell,

that no swarms of *flies* shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I *am* the Lord in the midst of the earth.

23. And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to-morrow shall this sign be.

24. And the Lord did so; and there came a grievous swarm of *flies* into the house of Pharaoh, and *into* his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of *flies*.

25. And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.

26. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?

27. We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as he shall command us.

28. And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me.

29. And Moses said, Behold, I go out from thee, and I will intreat the Lord that the swarms of *flies* may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, to-morrow: but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.

30. And Moses went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the Lord.

31. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; and he removed the swarms of *flies* from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; there remained not one.

32. And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.

1. Then the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

2. For if thou refuse to let *them* go, and wilt hold them still,

3. Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which *is* in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: *there shall be* a very grievous murrain.

4. And the Lord shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all *that is* the children's of Israel.

5. And the Lord appointed a set time, saying, To-morrow the Lord shall do this thing in the land.

6. And the Lord did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.

7. And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

8. And the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh.

9. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth *with* blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.

10. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth *with* blains upon man, and upon beast.

11. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians.

12. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had spoken unto Moses.

13. And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

14. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that *there is* none like me in all the earth.

15. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth.

16. And in very deed for this *cause* have I raised thee up, for to shew *in* thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

17. As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go?

18. Behold, to-morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now.

19. Send therefore now, *and* gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; *for upon* every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.

20. He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses:

21. And he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field.

22. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.

23. And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt.

24. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.

25. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that *was* in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.

26. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel *were*, was there no hail.

27. And 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.

28. Intreat the Lord (for *it is* enough) that there be no *more* mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.

29. And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the Lord; *and* the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth *is* the Lord's.

30. But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the Lord God.

31. And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley *was* in the ear, and the flax *was* boiled.

32. But the wheat and the rye were not smitten: for they *were* not grown up.

33. And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the Lord: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth.

34. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

35. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the Lord had spoken by Moses.

1. And the Lord saith unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him:

2. And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I *am* the Lord.

3. And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.

4. Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to-morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast:

5. And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field:

6. And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh.

7. And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?

8. And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the Lord your God: *but* who *are* they that shall go?

9. And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we *must* hold a feast unto the Lord.

10. And he said unto them, Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look *to it*; for evil *is* before you.

11. Not so: go now ye *that are* men, and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

12. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, *even* all that the hail hath left.

13. And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord

brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all *that* night; *and* when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.

14. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous *were they*; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such.

15. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

16. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you.

17. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.

18. And he went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the Lord.

19. And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.

20. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.

21. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness *which* may be felt.

22. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days:

23. They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.

24. And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you.

25. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt-offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God.

26. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither.

27. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

28. And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in *that* day thou seest my face thou shalt die.

29. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.

#### PSALM cv. 27-35

27. They shewed his signs among them,  
And wonders in the land of Ham.

28. He sent darkness, and made it dark;  
And they rebelled not against his word.

29. He turned their waters into blood,  
And slew their fish.

30. Their land brought forth frogs in abundance,  
In the chambers of their kings.



31. He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies,  
*And lice in all their coasts.*
32. He gave them hail for rain,  
*And flaming fire in their land.*
33. He smote their vines also and their fig-trees,  
*And brake the trees of their coasts.*
34. He spake, and the locusts came,  
*And caterpillars, and that without number,*
35. And did eat up all the herbs in their land,  
*And devoured the fruit of their ground.*

### XIII

## THE NINE PLAGUES

EXODUS vii. 14-x. 29

**The Plagues and Their Purpose.** Three months, or at the most six, is the period that must be assigned to the plagues. As we have seen, they were primarily intended to answer the question which Pharaoh had very naturally asked, "Who is Jehovah?" By entering into the spheres which were ruled by the gods of Egypt, and by overruling them; by predicting exactly what would happen, and by causing the prediction to come to pass; by leaving the magicians, with all their arts, out-distanced and ashamed; Jehovah, through His servants, answered that question to the full, and gave incontestable proof that He was God of gods. And further, when Pharaoh, knowing that he was now face to face with the demands of the great God of Nature, resented and resisted His claim, the Plagues set forth in the realm of Nature the horror and awfulness of sin. It was only as the evil of Pharaoh's heart was projected on the screen of the natural world, that he could be made to realise that he was in conflict with the natural order of the universe. Therefore these plagues were "signs."<sup>1</sup>

**Miracles as "Signs".** It is familiar to all students of the New Testament, that two words are used to describe our Lord's miracles. The Synoptics describe them as mighty acts of power, whilst the Fourth Gospel refers to them as *signs*.<sup>2</sup> There are these two aspects of the miraculous elements, whether we regard it simply as the calling into exercise of forces which are outside the ordinary course of Nature, or as the revelation, in a sudden flash, of the processes which are always at work around us. The miracle of Cana compressed into a moment the production of the juice of the grape, which through many months each year is formed in the vines of the South from the waters of rains and dews. The multiplication of the bread was not really more wonderful than the production of the annual harvest that golden each autumn throughout the world.

<sup>1</sup> x. 2.

<sup>2</sup> John ii. 11.

**Our Lord's Miracles Thus Viewed.** Looked at from this point of view, the miracles of our Lord were indications of the Divine power which is latent in Nature around us, but which is so ordinary and gradual in its operations that its glory and divinity are hidden from our eyes. When compressed into a single flash, we recognise it, and cry, "This is the finger of God." But God's handiwork is equally present in the vineyard or cornfield, the formation of the eye in the babe, the healing processes of the human body, and the daily triumph of life over death. The Lord's miracles were signs, therefore, that the same divine power which was admittedly at the back of all these familiar processes, was in a unique and special manner resident in Himself.

**What the Plagues Signified.** What is true of the beneficent acts of Jesus is also true of the plagues. They were signs, i.e. they revealed in a flash of pain and distress, that self-will and pride are contrary to the Divine order of the world, and destructive of all human well-being. It would seem as though the Almighty withdrew the restraints which, in the present-time of discipline and probation, are holding back the immediate consequences of wrong-doing, so that men might be able to see what an evil thing sin is, and how terribly it injures their own best interests. For the most part, the processes of retribution are so gradual that we fail to connect them with their causes. For instance, in a vague way, we believe that luxury and debauchery ultimately destroy noble families, but, in our hurrying and migratory days, we do not stay long enough to be impressed with the certainty and terror of the Divine judgments. Given some overwhelming act of retribution, like the fate of Belshazzar on the night that Cyrus took Babylon, and the heart of humanity instantly recognises that there is One who judgeth in the earth.

**The World Suffering Under Sin.** As our bodies are affected by indulgence in sin, so probably the natural world, and even the brute creation, are powerfully influenced by the indulgence of human passion. Creation, says the apostle, groans and travails together with man; the revelation of the sons of God is to inaugurate her emancipation from the bondage of corruption.<sup>1</sup> The rending rocks and veiled heavens of the Crucifixion were the natural expression, in the earth-plane, of the love and hate which met in dread collision at Calvary. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that the land

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 19-22.

mourns and the herbs of a whole country wither for the wickedness of them that dwell therein, and that even the beasts and birds are consumed.<sup>1</sup> It has never seemed remarkable that when the Puritan Commonwealth expired with Cromwell, so vast a revolution was accompanied by one of the most terrific storms that ever devastated Britain; or that on that momentous afternoon when the assembled conclave at the Vatican pronounced the dogma of Papal Infallibility, the reading of the decree was rendered almost inaudible by peals of reverberating thunder that shook the city.

**Nature and Soul.** By its constitution, Nature is sympathetic with the motions of the soul. Man acts on his environment, as his environment reacts on him. The scars on the world's surface, in many cases, are directly attributable to enormous crimes, such as the desolation of the Dead Sea, or the masses of scoriae that buried Pompeii. It is through such natural correspondences that God speaks to men, compelling their attention, and forcing them in these catastrophes in the world around to understand the perilous and harmful nature of sin.

**Natural Calamities the Voice of God.** His Hand is everywhere, sustaining and directing, but at times it is manifestly stretched out. His finger is always present, but sometimes it indicates its meaning with awful accuracy; and traces in characters of fire upon palace-walls the sentence of doom—"Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."<sup>2</sup>

**Mercy in God's Severity.** Granted that there is a great apparent contrast between the beneficence of our Lord's healing work, and the terrific strokes of these successive plagues; yet the Psalmist is undeniably right when he interludes his enumeration of the plagues with the refrain, "For His mercy endureth for ever." "To Him that smote Egypt in their first-born for His mercy endureth for ever." There is mercy in the severity, as in the goodness of the Lord. There is stern severity in the inevitable pain which follows on the violation of natural law, as when the fingers of your little child are blistered if it reaches out to the ruddy flame; but is not the Love greater which insists that it should learn to conform to those conditions on which the elements achieve their useful ministry to mankind?

**The Exodus to Benefit Egypt Also.** The ill-usage that Egypt was meting out to Israel, the overbearing insolence of the task-masters,

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. v. 27.

the indifference of the masses of the people who profited by their toils, the heartless cruelty of King, Court, and Priesthood, were really hurting Egypt more than Israel. In the best interests of each the intolerable situation had to be ended; and if these months of pain were comparable to the pangs of birth, surely the undoing of wrong and the birth of a nation to its rightful liberty were ample justification of the infliction of the plagues. With the froward God shows Himself froward, as with the merciful He shows Himself merciful. But this is His strange, unwelcome work.<sup>1</sup>

**The Plagues and Their Order.** The plagues<sup>2</sup>—and we use this word, as most familiar—have been divided into three triads, leading up to the last and most terrible, which naturally stands by itself. Each triad is severer than the preceding; and in each the successive blows culminate, like the third wavelet which runs further and breaks with a louder splash than the two preceding.

*Each Series begins in the Morning.* "And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, he refuseth to let the people go. Get thee unto Pharaoh *in the morning*."<sup>3</sup> "And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early *in the morning*, and stand before Pharaoh."<sup>4</sup> "And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early *in the morning*, and stand before Pharaoh."<sup>5</sup>

**The Triads.** In the first triad—of the Nile, the frogs, and lice—all the land was smitten indiscriminately; but in the last two triads the land of Goshen enjoyed immunity from harm, showing that the successive strokes were not the result of a chance combination of the elements, but were directed by a presiding Mind.

In the first triad, Aaron is to the front; but in the second he falls into the background, and Moses leads the fight. In the third, the invariable formula employed by Jehovah to Moses is "Stretch forth thine hand toward Heaven." In the two first, he stretches out his rod, but in the last his hand only.

**Similarities in Each Triad of Plagues.** In each triad there is a long warning before the first stroke, a shorter one before the second, and none before the third. The announcement of what is about to happen, when given, is very precise; and these accurate forecasts of what no mortal prescience could foresee, and their exact fulfilment, compelled the frank confession of the College of Magicians, that the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xviii. 26; Isa. xxviii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> vii. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> ix. 14.

<sup>4</sup> viii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> ix. 13.

portents were not casual, but catastrophic, and due to the direct interposition of God.

**Plagues not Casual.** Those who stood in Pharaoh's inner circle of advisers were certain that he was engaged in conflict with a greater Deity than any known to them, and founded their conclusion on the twofold ground, first, that the magicians themselves had been driven from the field; and, second, that nothing failed of all that Moses spoke.<sup>1</sup>

**The First Triad. THE NILE IS TURNED TO BLOOD.** The Nile was worshipped as a beneficent deity, in whose honour hymns were chanted by the priests. The papyri furnish the very words of those ancient odes. Probably Pharaoh's visits to the river at early dawn, which gave the Hebrew brethren the opportunity of an interview, were for purposes of worship. Not only did the Nile-water provide a daily beverage of exceptional sweetness, and an abundant supply for the ablutions in which the Egyptians excelled; but the annual inundation, when the river covered the adjacent lands with rich alluvial soil, transformed the arid sand into a broad riband of green verdure.

**The River of Blood.** What terror and horror must have smitten the universal heart of the people, when the waters suddenly became ghastly to sight, putrid and poisonous in the scorching heat, and impossible for any purpose! The ponds left by the receding tides, the pools or cisterns where water had been carefully stored, suffered equally with the river; only the wells sunk in the sands yielded a scanty supply of water; and this deprivation lasted for seven days.

**The Frogs.** A frog-headed deity has been discovered on the monuments. It was the symbol of fecundity and affluent life. Loathsome in appearance, tormenting with its incessant croak, hideous to trample on or touch, poisonous in the stench of its putrifying body when dead, the frog was the symbol of everything that could produce disgust in the cleanly and fastidious Egyptian. That frogs should cover their land and fill their homes, and be found in the bedchambers of the king, was unbearable. Ancient history tells of a tribe being driven out of their territory by a visitation of this sort. Small wonder, then, that Pharaoh, for the first time, gave signs of relenting. "Entreat the Lord, that He take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice unto the Lord." Moses asked him to fix his own time,

<sup>1</sup> viii. 19; ix. 11; x. 7.

in order that the Divine aspect of the visitation might stand out in clearer relief; and in his reply of "to-morrow," Pharaoh intimated that there was sufficient ground for its infliction, so much so that he dared not ask for instantaneous respite.

**The Lice.** The frogs invaded their homes, the lice their bodies. Travellers in Egypt have described experiences in which the very dust seemed turned to lice. This, and the fact that lice would be extremely repulsive to the magicians and priests, who were accustomed to shave themselves every other day in order to avoid this very pest, incline us to accept the traditional view of this plague, rather than that it consisted of mosquitoes or midges. It was this that elicited the conviction of the magicians that they were in the presence of a new and greater deity.<sup>1</sup>

It is specially noticeable that beasts are mentioned here, as though the sacred animals themselves, in their sacred shrines, were smitten. Their glossy skins, kept with so much care by their attendants, were suddenly infested by the pernicious and insidious plague. How could the sacred bull-calf help its votaries, if it could not save itself? And what sanctity could attach to shrines, the walls and gates of which could not defend from these hideous intruders?

So the first triad closed, but "Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not; as the Lord had spoken."<sup>1</sup>

**The Second Triad. The Flies.** These "swarms of flies" are supposed by some to refer to the dog-fly; but more probably the phrase denotes the beetle, and refers specially to the sacred Scarabaeus beetle, an emblem of the Sun and of the abiding life of the soul. Every monument, every mummy-chest, innumerable amulets and charms bore the effigy of this revered symbol. But the multiplication of this creature became so intolerable, together with the swarms of other flying things that filled the air, that for a second time Pharaoh showed signs of relenting. He "called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land." So far he was prepared to admit that Jehovah was specifically the God of Israel—*your* God. But he intimated in this reservation that he did not admit that *he* was under the necessity of obeying Him. Further, he made the cautious condition that if they went into the wilderness, they were not to go far away. It was easy for Moses to convince him that it was impossible to conform to his first condition. The Egyptians would resent such profanation of their

<sup>1</sup> viii. 19.

sacred soil as blasphemy. It was certain that the feast must be celebrated beyond the limits of the land of Egypt.

**The Murrain.** The heavy strokes of Divine chastisement were to become heavier, as the king's obstinacy became more intelligent and reasoned. Hitherto they had been annoying and painful, but no life had been sacrificed. Now death appeared on the scene, and though at first beasts alone perished, before long there would not be an Egyptian home that should not have been entered and visited.

It is startling to find the beasts now included, directly and specifically, in the incidence of God's stern dealings with the land of Egypt; and yet is not their lot always intimately bound up with ours?

**Man's Sins Infect the Beasts.** Those who object to the plague of murrain that swept Egypt, as the Rinderpest has depleted parts of South Africa in recent years, must equally resent the entire scheme of Providence, which binds the lower orders of being in such extraordinarily close connection with the human family. The whole creation is bound together by invisible cords. None can sin or suffer alone. No man liveth or dieth to himself. Our sins send their vibrations through creation, and infect the very beasts. Our want of harmony with God jars on the music of the spheres.

It is not surprising therefore that the prophets speak of the rending of the veil that sin has cast over the whole creation, and which may stretch back into the dim past, as the efficacy of Christ's redemption does, for was not He the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world? Did not Isaiah catch sight of this truth when he said after his glowing fashion, that the lion shall eat straw like an ox, that the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and that they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain?<sup>1</sup> In these directions we must seek the explanation of the murrain, which specially revealed the inability of the sacred animals to protect either themselves or their votaries.

**The Boils and Blains.** These were a further warning of the gathering vehemence of the fever heat of sin. The lice were loathsome, but these were loathsome and inflammatory sores, painful to endure and loathsome to behold. The magicians, who up to this point had endeavoured to keep up with Moses, though unable

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xi. 9.



to repeat their wonders, seem now to have abandoned the field, as though their own appearance was revolting to themselves as well as to others. We recall the awful descriptions of the Apocalypse, founded on this plague: "They gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works."<sup>1</sup> So the second triad of signs and wonders came to an end, but still the king is obdurate. "He hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had spoken unto Moses."<sup>2</sup>

**The Third Triad.** The last and most tremendous blows were to be struck. Once more, in the early morning, the two brothers break in with their inexorable demand: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, Let My people go, that they may serve Me." And following this challenge, with tremendous directness and urgency they foreshadowed the awful risks that the king was incurring for himself, his servants, and his people. He was told that he had been raised up for this very purpose, that God might show him His power, and that His name should be declared throughout the earth. This does not necessarily imply his overthrow at the Red Sea or his ultimate destiny, but simply that Jehovah desired to illuminate him, and through him the world of men, as to His supremacy and attributes. He had already done so, and if only Pharaoh had acted on the knowledge that he had already received, no further harm would have accrued. Up till now no human life had been sacrificed. The losses and privations already sustained, having accomplished their purpose, would have passed away. Israel would have been emancipated, and the world would have acquired a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. Instead of ten plagues, there would have been six, and probably these would have been always described as "signs."

**A Change in the Character of the Plagues.** At this point, however, we seem to be passing into a new chapter in the Divine dealings. Man had come into collision with the Divine Power, and what was intended for instruction and illumination suddenly became punitive and destructive. Pharaoh had been raised up to learn God's power, and enough had been done to make him acquainted with it; but he had misused his opportunity, and turned God's goodness into an occasion of ever-hardening resistance. The result was, that instead of being a monument of mercy, of the hearing ear and the under-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xvi. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> ix. 12.

standing heart, of the docility which is prepared to learn and obey, he became a beacon and a warning, a sign to all generations that if a man will not bend he must break, and that the soul may turn to poison what God intended should be for its nourishment and enlightenment.

**Penalty for Misuse of God's Gifts.** The sun sheds its beneficent light and heat on the world, the dews distil, the rains fall, the earth is prepared to provide food meet for our food and pleasure, but if, instead of planting corn and vegetables, we cultivate the land for the poppy, we have ourselves to blame for having diverted the beneficent processes of Nature to the undoing of human health and happiness.

Let it never be forgotten that if we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and the heart of his servants, we are also told again and again that he hardened his own heart; and it is not difficult to understand how God may be described as doing what really was due to Pharaoh's resistance to a chain of providential dealings that were intended to enlighten and convert him.

**The Hail.** The explicit references to the crops affected by this visitation proves that it befell in the month of March, for the barley was in ear and the flax in blossom, though the wheat and spelt were as yet only green. Josephus says that not only had the land of Egypt never experienced such a storm, but that the like had never been known even in northern and arctic lands, more habituated to the violence of the elements. Thunder and lightning are not unknown in Egypt in spring; but a storm of this kind was unheard of. The terrific explosions of thunder, the flashing lightning, the electric fire as it ran along the ground, the violence of the hail that slew man and beast, and destroyed every tree and every herb, filled king and people with panic. Only the land of Goshen was immune.

But notwithstanding Pharaoh's confession that he had sinned, and his unconditional assurances that he would let the captive people go, so soon as, in answer to Moses' out-spread hands, the rain and hail and thunder ceased; he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

**The Locusts.** An invasion of locusts is probably the most terrible pest that a land can suffer. Their numbers darken the sun, and no green thing survives their passage. The King's advisers knew well that whatever had survived the hail would perish before these

voracious hordes. And when they heard the brothers say that this visitation would exceed anything that their fathers, or father's fathers had heard of or seen, from the earliest days of man's history, they were profoundly moved. This was the reason of their very unusual interposition and remonstrance, "Let the men go, that they may serve Jehovah their God; knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?"

**Pharaoh temporises in vain.** Pharaoh was so far affected by their representations that he sent for the two brethren, and for a second time tried to enter into an arrangement. On the former occasion he stipulated that they should not go very far away; but on this he endeavoured to limit the numbers of those who should participate in the proposed feast to the men. Their little ones should remain as hostages! "No," said Moses; "we will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord."<sup>1</sup> This so far exasperated Pharaoh that they were driven from his presence, and then the plague befell. The locusts darkened the ground with their brown bodies; they utterly destroyed every green thing; there was neither vegetable nor fruit in all the land. "Very grievous were they; before them there was no such locusts as they."

Again Pharaoh professed to repent. This time he confessed that he had sinned, not only against Jehovah, but against the two brethren. He asked them to forgive, and intercede on his behalf. But as soon as the stroke was removed he returned to his former hardness of heart.

**The Darkness.** It is supposed that this was caused by a hot desert wind, laden with vast whirlwinds of sand, that has been known to bury whole armies, leaving no trace. An Arab chronicler, about the end of the eleventh century, records a great storm, accompanied by darkness so intense that it was thought that the end of the world had arrived.<sup>2</sup> Again Pharaoh summoned the Hebrew leaders, and made one last effort at compromise. He was willing for Israel to go, both young and old, but their flocks and herds were to remain.

**Moses Refuses to Bargain with Pharaoh.** Not for a moment could the bargain be considered. "Our cattle shall go with us," said

<sup>1</sup> x. 7-11.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Dr. Geikie.

Moses, "not a hoof shall be left behind." At this the King broke out with angry threats, dismissing him from his presence, and assuring him that any further intrusion would be penalised with death.

But Moses, who, with every successive step in the conflict, had arisen to a more resolute and commanding attitude, before leaving his presence announced the doom that was about to close the conflict.

### **And Announces the Death of the Firstborn.**

"Thou hast spoken well," he said, "I will see thy face no more. But thus saith Jehovah: About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there hath been none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out."<sup>1</sup>

**The Pause before the Passover.** Then a great silence settled down upon the land, like that stillness which precedes a tropical thunder-storm. The Egyptians were full of an awful dread of the threatened judgment, which their monarch's obstinacy had incurred. Their gods were discredited; their priests and magicians had retired from the conflict; the forces of Nature seemed arrayed against them; the King's policy had only landed them deeper and deeper into domestic loss and national misfortune.

**The Discredited Egyptian Gods.** On the other hand, as the children of Israel beheld the gods of Egypt unable to defend their worshippers, but overwhelmed with eclipse and collapse, unable to save themselves or the country of which they were the tutelary deities, when they realised the immunity which the land of Goshen enjoyed for their sakes, when they remarked the power of Moses with God and man, the might of those outstretched hands and of that omnipotent faith, they cast aside the bonds of despondency and despair in which they

<sup>1</sup> x. 29; xi. 4-8.

had been held, and began to count confidently on their emancipation from their long bondage into the land which God had covenanted to give Abraham and his seed for ever.

During this pause, Moses issued his final instructions for the Feast of Passover, and the Exodus.

## XIV

### THE PASSOVER

EXODUS xi. 1-10; xii. 1-28, 43-51; xiii. 3-10

1. And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague *more* upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let *you* go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.

2. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.

3. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses *was* very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

4. And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

5. And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

6. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.

7. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

8. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.

9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.

10. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

2. This month *shall be* unto you the beginning of months: it *shall be* the first month of the year to you.

3. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth *day* of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of *their* fathers, a lamb for an house:

4. And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take *it* according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.

5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take *it* out from the sheep, or from the goats:

6. And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

8. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.

9. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast *with fire*; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.

10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

11. And thus shall ye eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: *it is* the Lord's passover.

12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: *I am* the Lord.

13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye *are*: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy *you*, when I smite the land of Egypt.

14. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

15. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

16. And in the first day *there shall be* an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save *that* which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

17. And ye shall observe *the feast of* unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt; therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.

18. In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

19. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

20. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.

21. Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover.

22. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that *is* in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

23. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite *you*.

24. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever.

25. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

26. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?

27. That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

28. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

43. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof:

44. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof.

45. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof.

46. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof.

47. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.

48. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

49. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.

50. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

51. And it came to pass the selfsame day, *that* the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.

3. And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this *place*: there shall no leavened bread be eaten.

4. This day came ye out in the month Abib.

5. And it shall be when the Lord shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month.

6. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day *shall be* a feast to the Lord.

7. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters.

8. And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, *This is done* because of that *which* the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt.

9. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt.

10. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.



## XIV

### THE PASSOVER

EXODUS xi. 1-10; xii. 1-28, 43-51; xiii. 3-10

**Unity of Idea in the Passover and the Death of our Lord.** The space given to the specification of the details of the Passover reminds us that a third of the Gospel is occupied with the narrative of the death of our Lord. Evidently it was intended that these two subjects were intended to bulk largely before the mind of coming generations; and if we go to the root of the matter, they are one. The dread anticipation with which our Lord viewed the approach of His decease, the rending rocks and veiled skies of Nature, the extraordinary results that have accrued from its proclamation to the world, attest that it was of paramount importance to mankind; and whether it was prefigured by the Passover, or commemorated by the Lord's Supper, it stands unapproached and unapproachable—a monolith on the sands of Time.

**Conflict between the Head and the Heart perpetual.** There are two organs of inquiry by which we can approach the meaning of that death, the Head and the Heart. The conflict between them is as old as the world. The head says: "I am higher, and see further"; the heart answers: "I am deeper, and know more truly by my swift intuitions." When the heart has accused the head of being unconverted, the head has retorted on the heart for being foolish. But what God has joined together, let no man put asunder. It is in the combination of these two, like the lenses of a binocular, that we shall be led to apprehend the truth.

**This Conflict and the Signification of Calvary.** It must never be forgotten, when we speak of this interaction between the intellectual and the intuitive processes of our nature, that they must combine to discover the significance of Calvary in the realm of conscience. Any solution that moves on a lower level must be dismissed at once. The Cross speaks of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment. Every interpretation, therefore, which endeavours to shift its significance from the

moral and spiritual into the mere physical sphere is to be refused. The battle that our Lord fought on the cross was not primarily in the sufferings of His body, except in so far as they reflected and registered the Divine and hidden transactions of His soul. Though, by the contemplation of the wounds of Christ, we succeeded in transferring them to our flesh, yet if we did not also apprehend and assimilate the deeper aspects of His Passion, we should miss its profoundest helpfulness.

**The Virtue of the Death of Christ.** There has been a strong endeavour to make the virtue of the death of Christ consist in the inner death, the inner crucifixion, the crushing-out of the self-principle; and who can deny that this is the teaching of Rom. vi. and Col. ii.? But there is something prior to that. The objective precedes the subjective; and if you would really benefit by all the holy influences of His death, be sure that you believe first that Christ died for our sins, "according to the Scriptures"; *that* is objective; and the subjective follows naturally, "that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness, for we were as sheep going astray, but are now returned."

Considerable light on the whole subject may be obtained by viewing it in the light of the Passover Supper—a view-point commended by the Apostle when he said, Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the Feast.<sup>1</sup> Three words will help us:

**The last Plague Really a Judgment.** "Against all the gods of Egypt will I execute judgments." Up to this moment the signs (or plagues) had been illuminative. They were intended to answer Pharaoh's question, "Who is the Lord?" and to convince Egyptians and Israelites that Jehovah was God of gods and Lord of lords. But the last plague was a stroke of awful judgment and punishment. Egypt had to be punished for its inveterate stubbornness and obstinacy by the death of the first-born. Pharaoh had hardened his heart—"he and his servants"—the whole nation was guilty, and on the whole nation, because of its essential solidarity, was inflicted the inevitable judgment which compelled it to realise and repent of its sin in the enforced slavery and hard bondage of the Hebrews.

**God had to Maintain the Moral Order of the World.** It was not that Jehovah had any personal or selfish motive in this, but because it

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

was necessary for Him to maintain the moral order of the world. In every state or commonwealth the honour of the king or judge must be protected and enforced. If the circulation of scurrilous statement and slanderous reports is not challenged, and the person of the ruler be traduced, there is but a single step to the rupture of the foundations of society and order. Society defends its head because he is the representative and embodiment of its highest sanctions; if he is set at naught, there is urgent fear lest justice and righteousness may be murdered in the daylight in the open street.

Similarly, suppose men persistently profane and refuse the claims and call of God, as Pharaoh and his people did, knowing that He is God, but flouting His edicts and demands, the ultimate dissolution of society is within view, for its order is based on morality, and morality ultimately is based on the recognition and admission of the authority of God.

When matters reach such a crisis, there is no alternative but judgment. For the sake of Egypt herself, and for the sake of mankind generally, Pharaoh and his people must undergo judgments of so distinct and startling a nature, that all the world should be compelled to give heed.

**What is Judgment?** But what is Judgment? It is admitted that a miracle is the compression into a moment's flash of natural processes that otherwise consume weeks or months. When the Lord changed the water into wine at Cana, He hurried into a moment processes that ordinarily consume the greater part of the year, during which the vines distil their juices from dews and rain. When He multiplied the bread, He compressed into a single act all the procedure of a cornfield, from the ploughing of the autumn to the ingathering of August. The healing miracles of the Gospel epitomise the remedial processes which are always at work to repair the wounds and wastage of current life.

**Various Judgments Reviewed.** *Similarly, Judgments compress into a sudden flash the inevitable results of wrong-doing.* They are like the lightning flash at night revealing the precipices yawning before the feet of the unsuspecting traveller. They are terrible and painful, but they startle and convict and impress. The judgment of Sodom revealed what must befall communities who trifle with impurity. The judgment of Babylon revealed the overthrow that must overtake empires which are as indifferent to the claims of humanity as that ruthless empire was. The judgment of Jerusalem, when it was over-

thrown by Titus, revealed the fate that follows on the divorce of religion from morality. The judgment of the Napoleonic dynasty at Sedan revealed the hollowness of any rule which is based on treachery and blood. So the judgment of the Red Sea revealed the certain dissolution of all human power which defies the will of the Supreme.

**All Egypt was Guilty.** "By men kings rule" is fundamental to the order of the world; and it was to reaffirm this, and announce its eternal validity, that the firstborn of Egypt were stricken and Pharaoh overthrown at the Red Sea. All Egypt was guilty, but all Egyptians were not slain. Only the firstborn of each household was smitten, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on the throne to the firstborn of the maid-servant, that was behind the mill, and all the firstborn of cattle, including those of the sacred beasts which Egyptians worshipped as gods. That night was to be remembered.

**The Judgment on Egypt Compared with Christ's Offering for Sin.** It was a night of judgment. The judgment Egypt deserved fell on its firstborn; and the judgment which, for many sins and much corruption, was merited by Israel fell, not on its firstborn, but on the lamb. Our Lord is both Firstborn of the Race and Lamb.

**A Light thus Thrown on the Cross.** These thoughts may throw some light on the Cross. Suppose that, for reasons dictated by His love, God resolves to forego the punishment of the world, so as not to destroy it, He must find somewhere other guarantees than those which would accrue through the execution of His verdict. If the judgment which, either gradually or suddenly, will destroy wrong-doers is not to take place, another judgment, of like or even greater awfulness, must be substituted. This is indispensable, for without it the proclamation of grace would do away with the distinctions between good and evil. But this problem was solved by the Cross of Christ, wherein God, in the person of Christ, took on Himself, and bore, the judgment due to sin.

**Calvary a Concentrated Judgment.** At Calvary, into those hours of suffering, was concentrated the judgment which is the inevitable concomitant of sin. It was the judgment of this world, as our Lord said. The veil was withdrawn, and men could see the horror, the shame, the dissolution that sin can produce. And if such sufferings were experienced in the green tree of Christ's pure nature, which only knew sin by close sympathy with the race He had assumed, what would not be the effect on the dry tree of the individual sinner!

Again, then, we reaffirm our faith that as Egypt was judged in the death of the firstborn, and as Israel's firstborn was judged and yet saved through the substitution of the lamb, so the world has been judged in the death of Christ, its Firstborn, its noblest and best, and we are saved through the Lamb of God, who has borne away the sin of the world.

**The Passover Feast.** SUBSTITUTION. "A lamb for an household." On the tenth day of Abib, which henceforth was to mark the beginning of the religious year, each family was to set apart a kid or lamb, which must be a male, without blemish and in its prime. If a household were too small to consume the whole, members of another might join, but none save a Hebrew or a proselyte to the Hebrew faith was eligible to partake. Four days later, between sunset and the appearance of the stars, the whole congregation, as by one act, killed the victims thus selected. The blood was sprinkled from a sprig of hyssop on the doorposts and lintel, as the parts most readily seen; and the household within the shelter thus provided, secure from the judgment abroad in Egypt, gave itself to the first Passover Feast.

**The Judgment Falls on the Egyptians.** Presently the judgment befell. It was midnight, the hour of silence, repose, and tranquillity. No one anticipated evil. The fears that Moses' words had aroused in Pharaoh's heart had probably been allayed by the delay. Suddenly, and without warning, death was everywhere.

**The Silence of Death in the Stillness of Night.** Probably there was no pain, no struggle, no dying groan, but the marble, the chill, the silence of death. The Angel of Death passed through the land, striking the eldest son of the palace and the slave hut, and of the domestic and sacred beasts. Only where the blood showed that the lamb had died was there deliverance. "And there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."

**The Ordinance of Unleavened Bread.** Another ordinance was combined with that of the Passover. Unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days, to remind them of having been thrust out of Egypt so suddenly that they had to take the dough before it was leavened, and to bind up their kneading-troughs with their clothes upon their shoulders. As the bitter herbs recalled the bitterness of their afflictions and the salt of their tears, so the unleavened bread, eaten for seven days after the Passover, reminded them that the hot haste of their flight hindered them from preparing their food.

These were as signs upon their hands and as frontlets between their eyes, and they were observed in their season, year by year. But the prominent note throughout was that of the substitution of the lamb for the child.

**Substitution a Human Instinct.** Why is it that substitution has fallen into discredit in these days? It is because we do not think in accordance with reality. We think of every human being as an individual by itself, and that humanity is a multitude of separate sand-grains. But a closer study of our world, of our national and political existence, and of our family-life, ought to convince us to the contrary. Ninety-nine per cent. of what we are, and think, and do, is not our own production. We share our possessions with the race, and any spontaneity or individuality that an individual may manifest will always be insignificant in comparison with what is due to the totality of the human family. Do we not all acknowledge this? Why does a father save for his children? Why does a mother rear her little ones? Why do men expend themselves for their fellows in every walk of life? They are not obliged to, but they are moved by an irresistible human instinct and impulse. What does the sense of responsibility mean, except that we are led almost instinctively to substitute our thought, our care, our suffering, to relieve another?

**Jesus Man's Substitute, because He was King, and More.** The higher we ascend in the scale of being, the deeper and intenser become our sense of responsibility and the scope of substitution. There is a difference whether Leonidas or one of his three hundred is killed, for Leonidas is the leader. There is a difference whether a beggar or King Lear wanders along the heath, for Lear is the King. When the fortunes of war rob a whole nation, the leader of the nation feels it most. The king suffers more deeply, because he knows that he is responsible for the fate of his people, and therefore his personal feelings are incomparably heavier than those of the entire nation. But Jesus was conscious of being the Head of Humanity and the King of Men. If He had not been He could not have stood for us. But because He was all that, and more, He was able to become the propitiation, not for our sins alone, but for those of the whole world.

**Jesus Pre-eminently the Sacrificial Lamb.** He also was in His prime; no moral blemish had ever defiled His pure heart or extorted a confession; He was set apart from before the foundation of the world; His sufferings were bitterness itself. Pre-eminently He was the

Lamb of God, and He was sacrificed for us. Let us reckon ourselves judged in Him. The Judgment which has befallen Him has settled the great question of sin. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.

**The Eucharist of Joy.** "Let us keep the Feast!" *That implies the Joy of Redemption.*

The anguish of Egypt must have been bitter. It was the absorption of the Egyptians in their bereavement and in the burying of their firstborn that gave Israel the opportunity of going forth "with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians."<sup>1</sup> But what a contrast was presented by the Hebrews, as they knew that the destroying angel could not enter the blood-besprinkled door!

**The Joy of Redemption.** A similar joy is experienced when we realise that our sin has been judged and put away in Christ. It has been so in the purpose and intention of God; and as soon as we accept His assurance as true, and rest upon it, our "mouth is filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." We reckon that if we have been judged in Christ, we have passed to the other side of the thunderstorm, and are living under the blue skies of God's acceptance and grace, on which the storm-clouds can never again gather. "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." If the moral law of the universe has been vindicated, if the character of God has been honoured, if His Name is hallowed by the obedience of Christ, as our Surety and Head, even unto death, there is absolute remission of sin. It is gone, as far as the East is from the West; it is buried deep as a stone in mid-ocean. The terror has passed, and we go forth into freedom and Life indeed. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, and we keep the Feast, i.e. all life becomes henceforth festal. The feast lasts as long as life lasts. The early Church called the Lord's Supper a Eucharist, so joyous were the emotions with which they celebrated their deliverance by Christ. But, in point of fact, all life may be eucharistic, full of praise and thanksgiving.

**The Joy of Satisfaction.** But there is more than the Joy of Forgiveness, there is *the Joy of Satisfaction*. The lamb or kid, the blood of which had been sprinkled without, was eaten within. It was roasted entire, the bones unbroken, and the flesh shared among all

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxxiii. 3.

the members of the household. No foreigner might partake, and no part might be applied to profane purposes. "It was holy to Jehovah." Probably it was believed that He ate with His people. It was the Lord's Passover. We also must feed in daily fellowship and communion on Christ. He that eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood after a spiritual and mystical fashion, abides in Him, and He in him. There is no other way for the nurture of the Divine life and the storage of the strength needed on life's journey.

**The Joy of Anticipation.** There is also *the Joy of Anticipation*. The Israelites stood around the table, sandals on their feet, staff in hand, and their flowing robes girt up around their loins, as those who were starting for a journey, a race or a battle. The light of an immortal hope was in their eyes, and their hearts beat high with expectation. At any moment the trumpet might ring out on the silent night, with its signal to be gone.

Not less do we rejoice at the severance wrought by the Cross between us and the old creation. The world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world; and we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.

"Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

**All Old Leaven to be Got Rid Of.** OUT OF ALL THIS COMES THE PUTTING AWAY OF THE LEAVEN. "There shall be no leaven seen with thee, in all thy borders." "Purge out the old leaven!" "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." So careful were the Jews to avoid the possible contamination of leaven, before the Passover, that the Pharisees would not enter Pilate's palace on the eve of the feast. We need to be equally scrupulous, not as to the outward rite, but the inward spirit.

For us the leaven must stand for the selfness which is characteristic of us all, through the exaggerated instinct of self-preservation and the heredity received through generations, which have been a law to themselves, serving the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We are by nature self-confident, self-indulgent, self-opinionated; we

<sup>1</sup> Pet. i. 13, 18, 19.



live with self as our goal, and around the pivot of I our whole being revolves.

**Like the Old Leaven, Self must be Abandoned.** As time passes, however, we begin to question the wisdom or safety of this policy. We find ourselves dissatisfied, and pierced with many sorrows. We resemble the natives of a volcanic island who find the coast-line trembling beneath the tremors of earthquakes; they move inland, and detect them there; they climb the mountain, and feel them there. At last they leave the island, and settle on the mainland.

Similarly we, by the grace of God, have been led to abandon the isolated life of self, and settle on the continent of God's love in Christ. We were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord. We have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into that of God's dear Son. And as the light gets brighter from the glimmer of dawn to the growing splendour of the perfect day, we become increasingly aware of the leaven of evil that still remains. We judge ourselves with increasing exactness and scrupulosity. Merciful to all others, we are merciless to every manifestation of the self-life. The Love of Christ constraineth us, for if one died for all, then all died, that they which live should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto Him.

# “A NIGHT TO BE MUCH OBSERVED”

EXODUS xii. 29-xiii. 1, 2, 11-16

29. And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that *was* in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.

30. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for *there was* not a house where *there was* not one dead.

31. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, *and* get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said.

32. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.

33. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We *be* all dead *men*.

34. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders.

35. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment:

36. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them *such things as they required*. And they spoiled the Egyptians.

37. And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot *that were* men, beside children.

38. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, *even* very much cattle.

39. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.

40. Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, *was* four hundred and thirty years.

41. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

42. It *is* a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this *is* that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.

43. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This *is* the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof:

44. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof.

45. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof.

46. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof.

47. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.

48. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

49. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.

50. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

51. And it came to pass the selfsame day, *that* the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2. Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and of beast: *it is* mine.

11. And it shall be when the Lord shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee.

12. That thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males *shall be* the Lord's.

13. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

14. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, *What is this?* that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage:

15. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

16. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt.

## XV

### “A NIGHT TO BE MUCH OBSERVED”

EXODUS xii. 29–xiii. 1, 2, 11–16

**Pharaoh Concedes the Right to Go.** *“This is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations”* (xii. 42). On this night, the processes which had been quietly working out the Divine purpose, foreshadowed to Abraham centuries before, came suddenly to a head.<sup>1</sup> It became, therefore, as the margin suggests, a “a night of watching unto the Lord.”

THAT NIGHT SAW PHARAOH CONCEDE THE DEMAND MADE IN THE NAME OF JEHOVAH. “Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.” It was afterwards intimated that they must go at least a three days’ journey into the wilderness that they might sacrifice unto Jehovah, lest their worship should be contaminated by the evil associations of Egypt, or arouse the fanaticism of the Egyptians.

**The Demand Right and Reasonable.** Viewed in the light of after-events, it has been suggested that this demand concealed the real intention of returning no more. But this would impeach the Divine veracity, and base the whole movement on falsehood. There is, however, no sufficient ground for these suggestions. The demand was eminently right and reasonable. No monarch is justified in depriving his people of their rights to worship after the dictates of their own consciences. Not only had Pharaoh ground down the Hebrew race by oppression, but he had taken from them the opportunity of observing, in a proper manner, the festivals and rites of their religion. He needed to be reminded of this, and requested to concede at least this point of fair treatment. If he had yielded this modicum of elementary justice, he would have been probably willing to consider more favourably the wider demand, which was soon afterwards proposed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. vi. 11.

**The Demand a Test-Case.** This was a test-case. To have granted this would have established new conciliatory relations between himself and the two brethren, which would have widened out until the whole question of Hebrew bondage had come under consideration, and become the subject of amicable negotiations. But in refusing this modest request, which appealed to his sense of humanity, fairness, and religion, he put himself hopelessly in the wrong.

**The Demand Met by Temporising.** Pharaoh met the demand of the Hebrew leaders first by contemptuous insult, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> and then by a series of attempts to compromise. *First*, he offered permission for them to worship Jehovah, wherever they pleased within the limits of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> A foolish offer, which might have led to riot and civil war. *Next*, he was willing to allow them to go forth to worship in the wilderness, only they must not go very far away.<sup>3</sup> *After this*, he proposed that they should go three days' journey into the wilderness, only they must leave their families behind.<sup>4</sup> He did not realise how dear children are to God, and that they were a necessary part of the nation! *Finally*, he was willing that they should go three days' journey into the wilderness, taking their families with them, if only they would leave their cattle.<sup>5</sup>

**Compromise Leads to Surrender.** Moses had no option but to reject each of these offers. Indeed, the religious man must always regard with suspicion every proposal to take less than the Divine standard presents. Compromise in religion almost invariably leads to the surrender of some particular, Divinely ordered or instituted, for the sake of some supposed advantage or convenience. It is for this reason that our Lord spoke so earnestly about breaking one of these least Commandments, and teaching men so.

**The End of Efforts to Soften Pharaoh's Heart.** All these efforts at compromise, and especially the last, lay broken and torn on the ground. Pharaoh had broken up the interview with violence, and had threatened Moses with death, and there was nothing more to be done than set him aside from the way of the execution of the Divine purposes. On this night, therefore, there was a culmination of the long struggle. One subterfuge after another was swept away, the true character of the king had become revealed, the last effort to bend him had proved abortive; there was nothing more to be done

<sup>1</sup> Exod. v. 4, etc.

<sup>2</sup> viii. 25.

<sup>3</sup> viii. 28.

<sup>4</sup> x. 8-11.

<sup>5</sup> x. 24.

than achieve through his overthrow what might have been accomplished with his co-operation. "Behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven. He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches."<sup>1</sup>

**Pharaoh's Conduct Reviewed.** THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART ALSO HAD REACHED ITS CLIMAX. The process is carefully noted, and may be set forth thus:

I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall not let the people go (iv. 21).

I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders (vii. 3).

After the rod was changed to a serpent, his heart was hardened (vii. 13; see R.V.).

It was so after the waters had been turned to blood (vii. 22).

He showed signs of yielding when the frogs came, but when there was respite, "he hardened his heart" once more (viii. 15).

When his magicians were compelled to admit the finger of God in the third plague, "his heart was hardened, and he hearkened not" (viii. 19).

When the fourth plague was removed, "he hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go" (viii. 32).

After the plague of murrain, again we are told that his heart was hardened (ix. 7).

But in the following plague, we are told definitely, *for the first time*, that the Lord hardened his heart, as He had foretold Moses would be the case (ix. 12).

**Did the Lord Harden Pharaoh's Heart?** After the visitation of hail, Pharaoh appeared to make an absolute surrender; but no sooner had it ceased than the hardening returned (ix. 35).

The Lord is said to have hardened his heart before and after the plague of locusts (x. 1; 20), and after that of the awful darkness (x. 27). The same sentence is repeated, generally, at the conclusion of the conflict (xi. 10); and thrice again in the narrative of the overthrow of Egypt in the Red Sea (xiv. 4, 8, 17).

**Impenitent Hearts Accumulate Wrath.** In this series of quotations it should be noticed that there is no statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart till after the sixth plague. The apparent exception

<sup>1</sup> Dan. iv. 13, 14.

of vii. 13 is not really so, as the R.V. clearly proves. At first we are told that Pharaoh hardened his own heart; or the fact is simply stated that his heart was hardened. The first steps in this dread process of heart-ossification take place at the instigation of the sinner himself, and it is the hardened heart that perverts to its own hurt all the goodness which would conduct it to repentance. When water turns to ice, its ice converts to thicker ice the thin film of water which is poured over it, when the last skater has left the pool. It is possible, as Paul tells us, for men so to abuse the long-suffering of God, which would lead them to repentance, as to turn to evil what God intended for good. In this way hard and impenitent hearts accumulate to themselves wrath against the day of wrath.<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult, as it seems to the present writer, to understand how in the rich Oriental speech God may be said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart,—and it must be admitted, of course, that there are necessary limitations in all human speech, which expose to criticism any statement in popular phrase of the inner operations of the soul. This book was not written for Psychologists!

**Goodness May Render Evil More Evil.** Suppose a Christian woman awakes to find that she has married a man who has no sympathy with either her religious beliefs or consistent character. She is at a loss how to treat him; but following the bent of her loving and tender nature, she sets herself to win him from his evil courses by wifely unselfishness and gentle consideration. The contrast between her goodness and his baseness seems, however, only to madden him and drive him to excesses of cruelty, which he would never have dreamt of with a wife who repaid hate with hate, and unkindness with indifference. First, he hardens himself against her gentle ways, and finally, as the result of resisting her daily influence, he deteriorates more rapidly, and becomes more utterly degraded than would have been otherwise credible. May it not be said that she hardens his heart, though her whole endeavour is to turn him from his evil courses?

**A New Testament Illustration.** Or take that striking illustration in Hebrews vi. No one will deny that the rain is one of the most necessary and beneficent gifts of God. That the moisture needed by the thirsty earth should be diffused so gently and softly is one of the incidental evidences of the design of the Creator. Beneath the soft vernal showers, the cultivated earth, “which drinketh in

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 4, 5.

the rain which cometh oft upon it," brings forth fruit for those for whose sake it is tilled. But the same rain, falling upon the common and the waste, covers them with thorns and briars, and brings upon them a curse and burning. The rain, therefore, may be said to secure these sad disasters! No! Not the rain, but the land, which turned the good gifts of the Creator into noxious growth. If we turn to death the commandment which God meant for life, to poison what God meant for health, to cursing what God meant for blessing, it may be possible, from one point of view, to credit God with the evil consequences that have accrued; but, as a matter of fact, they would not have accrued unless we had misapplied His good and perfect gifts.

**Why do Souls Differ.** The sun that melts wax hardens clay; but the difference between these two results is due, not to any variable-ness in the sun's nature, but to the trend and direction which each substance supplies. Thus contact with the same Spirit of God made Moses the meekest, and Pharaoh the proudest and strongest of men; but the difference was in the texture and quality of their respective souls.

Why souls differ thus is an enquiry which probably will never be solved in this life. That there are reasons, and that they are consistent with infinite Justice, we believe, but as yet they are not revealed, and we await the unveiling in patience. All that we can see is, that those whom God foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.<sup>1</sup>

**The Final Blow Falls.** Whatever influence it was that had brought the Pharaoh of that time to this pitch of hardihood, it is clear that nothing more could be gained by delay, and the final blow fell. "And it came to pass at midnight, that the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh . . . unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon. . . . And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; . . . for there was not a house where there was not one dead."<sup>2</sup>

**"Spoiling" the Egyptians.** THAT NIGHT LED ALSO TO THE GREAT ENRICHMENT OF ISRAEL. When the Almighty spoke first to Abraham, He said, "That nation whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."<sup>3</sup> In the original

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xii. 29, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xv. 14.



announcement of His purpose, Jehovah also told Moses that He would give the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that, when they went forth, they should not go empty; but every woman was to ask of her neighbour and of her that sojourned in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, which were to be placed upon their sons and their daughters; and the Egyptians would be spoiled.<sup>1</sup> On the eve of the Exodus, Moses was reminded of this injunction:

"Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold."<sup>2</sup>

"And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment; and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what things they asked. And they spoiled the Egyptians."<sup>3</sup>

Referring to this incident, which took place during the night of the Exodus, the Psalmist of a much later date sang:

"He brought them forth with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among his tribes."<sup>4</sup>

**A Mistranslation.** A large amount of misconception has been introduced into this incident by the mistranslation of King James' Version, which repeatedly employs the words "borrow" and "lent". "They *borrowed* of the Egyptians." "They *lent* unto them." The Revised Version substitutes "asked" for "borrowed," and "let them have" for "lent."

**Not "Spoils," but Freewill Offerings.** It is plain that these were free-will gifts, which the Egyptians proffered, and the Hebrews received, as a final wage for long years of enforced and unremunerated service. Thus good comes out of evil. Had Pharaoh yielded at the first, the Egyptians would have felt no special sympathy for the captive race. But the opposition of King and Court, the long-deferred hope, the often-repeated disappointment elicited a vast amount of sympathy for the harried race. Also "Egypt was glad" of their departure, for they were afraid of them.

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> xi. 2.

<sup>3</sup> xii. 35, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. cv. 37.

**Tabernacle Built from the Spoils.** These rich spoils were opportune, and of special value for the construction of the Tabernacle, which could never have been so gorgeously equipped with precious stones and priceless hangings, except for this spoiling of the Egyptians.

**An Epoch and an Offering.** THAT NIGHT WAS TO BE THE BEGINNING OF MONTHS.<sup>1</sup> It was the time of the "earring" of the wheat—about our April; and henceforth the month Abib—"the earing"—would open the ecclesiastical year. The Egyptian calendar began when the Nile was rising in the summer solstice; but all connection with Egypt must be broken, and the new year was to begin with the Passover, which commemorated the deliverance of their firstborn sons from the sword of the destroying Angel.

**The Passover.** On the tenth day of the month, as we have seen, each family was to set apart a kid or a lamb, which must be a male, without blemish, in its prime. If a household were too small to consume it, members of another might join, but no foreigner might partake, and no part of the sacrifice might be carried out of the house or left over for the morning meal. Four days after the selection of the lamb, between sunset and starlight, it was killed. The blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels suggested that the household were hiding behind it to escape the stroke of the destroying angel; whilst the feast within doors suggested that Jehovah had condescended to eat with His people and become their guest. Each house was a temple, each father was a priest, each firstborn son was saved by blood.

**The Hebrews Are Ready.** In the meanwhile the whole Hebrew population were ready at a moment's notice to set forth. They stood with sandalled feet, staff in hand, their loins girded, and they ate in haste. At the dread hour of midnight, the firstborn of Egypt died; and shortly after every Hebrew family was hurrying, by the light of the full moon, to the rendezvous previously appointed, where the tribes were mustering. The babes and young children, the aged and sick, were borne on asses; the man drove his cattle or sheep; the woman carried her kneading-trough and unleavened dough on her shoulder.

**The Exodus Begins.** Each village contributed its confluent streamlet to the swelling river of fugitives. As they advanced, they were joined, not only by the crowds of their own race, but by a great

<sup>1</sup> xii. 1, 2.

mixed multitude of aliens, of the disaffected, of deserters and slaves. They converged finally on Rameses, were separated into detachments or divisions, and marched forth as in battle-array, or, as the margin suggests, "by fives in a rank."<sup>1</sup> Ewald suggests that this signifies that they were marshalled in five divisions—the van, the centre, two wings, and the rearguard.

**The Number of the Israelites.** More than once we are told that there were 600,000 men able to bear arms, that is, between twenty and sixty years of age; and this would yield a total of no less than two millions of men, women, and children.

**The First-born Belong to God.** Our attention is specially drawn to the firstborn of every house, whose lives had been forfeited, except for the blood of the lamb, that bespoke salvation. From that hour the firstborn of man and beast belonged to God; and when any child in coming years asked why the firstborn of all animals, except the ass, were offered in sacrifice, he was told that it was to commemorate the slaying of the firstborn of Egypt, and the sparing of the firstborn of Israel.

**And Are to be Priests of God.** All firstborn sons were redeemed from the death that was meted out to the firstborn of the animals, by the sacrifice of a lamb, and were expected and required to act as an army of priests unto the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

In subsequent generations firstborn sons were redeemed, not by the sacrifice of a lamb, but by a money-payment of five shekels: but it must always have been a solemn thought to the boys of each successive generation, that they had been redeemed to serve, that either a lamb had died that they might live, or that money had been paid down for them in their unconscious hours of earliest infancy.<sup>3</sup>

**The Levite Made Priests.** Before the camp broke up from Sinai, the tribe of Levi was substituted for the eldest sons of the race, as priests to serve in the Tabernacle. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle, and the Levites shall be mine; I am the Lord."<sup>4</sup> What a blessing it would be in each household of God's people, if the eldest son was taught to account himself as devoted to the service of the Most High! How good it would be for every Hannah to say to her Samuel, so soon as he was able to understand, "My little son, thou art not

<sup>1</sup> xiii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> xiii. 1, 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> Num. xviii. 15, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Num. iii. 44, etc.

mine, but God's. I know not yet what work He has for thee, but He will make it clear. I have given thee to the Lord, and as long as thou livest thou must be His!" When will every family be a Missionary Society, the father and brothers working to maintain the missionary son or brother, the mother and sister living a life of prayer and intercession on his behalf, and holding the ropes of loving sympathy?

**The Birthnight of Modern History.** What crowded memories gathered around that memorable night, which Bunsen says was the birthnight of modern history, when, bearing with them the bones of Joseph, which had remained unburied, awaiting this hour, which he desired thus to share, the sacramental host of God's firstborn, the elect of our race, marched forth to become a nation, under the tutelage of their great leader!

XVI

THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS

EXODUS xiii. 17-22

17. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not *through* the way of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:

18. But God led the people about, *through* the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt.

19. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.

20. And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.

21. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

22. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, *from* before the people.

## XVI

# THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS

EXODUS xiii. 17-22

**Rameses the Scene of the Miracles.** "GOD LED THE PEOPLE ABOUT." It is supposed that Rameses, from which the Israelites started,<sup>1</sup> was the same place as Tanis or Zoan, now San. It had been rebuilt by Rameses II, was a place of great importance, and the common residence of the Court of that Period. It is probable that the miracle of Moses and his interviews with the Egyptian King took place in this city, and strong probability is given to this supposition by the statement of the Psalmist that the miracles were wrought in "the field of Zoan."

The direct road from this city to Palestine lay along the coast of the Mediterranean, through the land of the Philistines. It was by this way that Jacob "went down" to Egypt, and by which the funeral procession "went up" to lay him in the sepulchre of his fathers. The journey from Rameses to Gaza would consume about ten days. This road was easy, rapid, and safe; but it was not the route selected by Moses, under the guidance of the Lord.

**The "Desert," What it was Like.** The other route I will describe in as few words as possible. The extreme boundary of Palestine on the South is a vast, monotonous limestone plateau, about two thousand feet above sea-level, extending from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. South of this, again, is the triangle between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Akaba, in which are piled the great mountains of Sinai, of which the highest peaks reach an elevation of ten thousand feet. They compose a scene of solemn grandeur and sublimity, not paralleled probably by any other mountain range in the world. The formation is of rich red sandstone, mingled with granite and porphyry, and has excited the enthusiastic comments of all thoughtful travellers, notably of Dean Stanley. Between the limestone desert and this triangular mass of mountains is an irregular

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xii. 37; Num. xxxiii. 3.

broad-stretching plain, and this great desert valley was the path trodden at the Exodus.

**A "Wilderness" of Green Pastures.** We must dismiss from our minds, when we use the words "desert" or "wilderness," the idea of desolate wastes of sand. The Pentateuch has very few references to sand. The fact is that sand is the exception in the desert or wilderness which Israel traversed for forty years. It will be remembered that the Psalmist sings of "the pastures of the wilderness." We must, therefore, imagine a tract of country in which, though there are no cornfields or vineyards, yet there would be abundance of pasture for nomad tribes wandering with their flocks; and sometimes the broad open wastes, like our downs or commons widens out into scenes of splendid luxuriance and beauty.

**The Law of God's Dealings with Us.** It was along this path that God led His people. But is not this the law of His dealing with us all? "God led the people about." "By the way of the wilderness." These words expound the whole philosophy of human life.

**The Philistine Barrier. I. THE BARRED PATH.** "Not by the way of the Philistines." This people was highly disciplined and thoroughly equipped, a strong and martial race; and though, of course, they must have yielded before the right hand of the Most High, as they did in after centuries, yet at that time, and Israel being what they were, the Philistines effectually barred the progress of the host in that direction. The five important cities of Gaza, Ascalon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron formed an impassable barrier.

**Hindrances that Help.** But the barriers of life may be ranked among its great benedictions. To borrow a suggestion: In his poem, "The Day-Dream," Tennyson describes the spell cast on castle and maiden, till it was broken by the prince's kiss; then the fountain, which had suffered from long repression, leapt up to twice its former height. How often has this been the case! Demosthenes became the consummate orator of Time, because in early life oratory did not come easily and naturally to him—he stammered. The men who lisp in numbers do not make the greatest poets, and the sons of rich men, born with silver spoons in their mouths, are more often than not failures who need to be spoon-fed all their days. The smaller kingdoms of the world whose area has been limited, like Tyre or Greece or Great Britain, have, as the rebound from their limitations and restrictions, leapt up into superb careers of colonisation and world-power. Thomas Carlyle suffered from the pressure

of poverty in his early life, but it made his soul the stronger, and possessed his moral nature with thews of steel. It is the effort of the bee to emerge from the narrow confining cell that breaks the delicate membrane which confines its wings.

**The Barred Path not necessarily a Closed Path.** Many who read these words can recall the hard experiences of their earlier life, when obstacles, apparently insuperable, threatened to bar their progress; but in these things, as Hezekiah said, they found the life of their spirits. If you are passing through such an experience, be of good courage, the barred path is not the closed one. God will go before you, and make the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth, so that His glory may be revealed. Storms are the triumph of His art, for the training of mariners that shall dare to cross stormiest seas.

**Early Delay often Means Quick after Progress.** Suppose that the winning of this world for Christ had been a holiday-parade, and that the Cross had only to be uplifted, or the message of salvation announced, to win instant acknowledgment, where would have been the splendid patience and heroic victory of the Church? What scope for her prayers, her passion, her tears and toils? The loss to the annals of Christian character, heroism, and faith would have been incalculable. May we not suppose that the great cloud of witnesses are deriving sacred lessons, as they behold the noble patience and illustrious triumphs of the Church? God is showing them also evidences of His manifold wisdom.

**The Way of the Church.** So in the slow progress of the centuries! If the Church had been rapt away at the Fall of Jerusalem, instead of having to watch through the long night until cock-crowing and the dawn-break, she never would have realised and revealed those great qualities which have been evinced by the noble army of martyrs, the goodly company of prophets, the wonderful achievements of missionaries, reformers, and statesmen in their conflict against evil, and their efforts to build the New Jerusalem on the plains of Time. The barred path has been best.

**How Barriers Are Made.** Our Lord said significantly to His Apostle, "Thou canst not follow Me *now*." The barrier was, in fact, raised by Peter's own petulance and vehemence. Thus our barriers are often created by our follies and sins, and we have ourselves to blame for them. But the barrier was none the less salutary to that eager nature: for he is the one Apostle who speaks of the girding up



of the loins of the mind, not to do some great deed, or run in some historic race, but to set our hope perfectly for the grace to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**The Value of the Delay.** Sometimes when spring is yet young, there comes a spell of hot summer weather. As we walk through the gardens or woodlands, we can almost detect the growth of Nature. There are the building of the woody fibre of the plants, the deepening of their roots, the busy life-blood hurrying along the veins. You almost expect to-morrow to see the deep-red flower blazing on the stem. The very plant seems aware of the coming flower, and feels its fire already in its tumultuous sap. But when to-morrow dawns, the clouds veil the sky, the sun is hidden; the wind has changed to east, Nature shivers. The mistaken birds put off their marriage-plans, and all the glad movement springwards is arrested. But when summer and autumn come there will be gratitude for the very set-back which led to the greater health and wealth of the year.

**The Education of the Waiting Hour.** So in life! Granted that Philistines bar the way. They shall not do so always. One day their champion will bite the dust, and their squadrons will flee, as broken clouds before the gale. In the meanwhile, as you stand against the barriers, let your patience, your faith, your hope and love strike their roots downwards, and reach their heads higher. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. The barred way is not permanently closed.

**What Divine Guidance Means. II. THE CIRCUITOUS ROUTE.** "God led the people about." Is not this true of the human race? Carry your mind back to the opening chapters of the Bible. Do not the opening pages present a striking illustration of this very truth? On the failure of Adam and Eve, did their Almighty Friend condone their offence, retain them in Eden, and continue that fellowship which He was wont to permit at the time of the breathing of the evening breeze? No, certainly.

"Unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. . . . So he drove out the man, and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 17, 18, 24.

An even more striking illustration of God's treatment of His sons is furnished by the example of our Lord, of whom it is recorded,

"Straightway the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and he was with the wild beasts."<sup>1</sup>

All the pilgrim-host has to travel by this path, with the long stretches of monotonous stepping, and just a few soft resting-places which are meant for rest, but not for abiding.

**Spiritual Power the only Safe Guide.** But why the wilderness-route? When in Genone Wisdom dissuades the youth from accepting the tempting offer of earthly kingship, with all that this carried with it—fleets, armies, towered cities, and territory—she shows how illusory that promise is, unless combined with inward and spiritual power. We often make a similar mistake. We think that if we were to revolutionise our circumstances, we should revolutionise ourselves. But it cannot be. We may change our place, our dress, our house, our surroundings; but all will be unavailing unless we change ourselves. Power lies not without us, but within. This couplet, which sums up the advice of wisdom, deserves to be written on the heart of each young man and woman as they enter the lists of the battle:

"Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power."

But how and where are these three to be acquired save in the wilderness?

**Things Only Acquired in the Wilderness.** Therefore it was said of old time: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no."<sup>2</sup>

*Self Knowledge!* How little did Israel realise, when the ransomed hosts stood in the rapture of fresh deliverance beside the Red Sea, all the seeds of evil that lay slumbering in their hearts, and that were to flower forth at Marah, and Sinai, and Kibroth-hataavah.

*Self-Reverence!*—The first step towards self-reverence is to see God, to worship Him, to bow down before Him, to know that He

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. viii. 2.

is God alone, and then we begin to reverence the nature made in His image, which we are to hold sacred for His sake.

**Self-Control!**—This cannot be acquired in an instant. To learn to say No, and to say it instantly, almost before the evil suggestion has had time to form upon the retina of the inner sight; to persist in saying it, though, like Joseph, solicited to evil every day; to possess it because we have learned to hand it over to Jesus Christ; to be self-controlled because we are Christ-controlled—*this* does not come easily or at once. Only through long years of temptation and failure, and faith, do we come at last to learn that we are nothing, and can effect nothing, and hand over the entire control and management of the inner life to Him Who is able to keep us from falling, and present us before the throne of His glory with exceeding joy.

**The Tempter in the Wilderness.** In the wilderness the Tempter comes to us. In his first temptation, when he advises us to use for ourselves the powers entrusted us for others, we learn to control our appetites. In his second temptation, when he suggests that we should cast ourselves headlong, we learn to reverence the bodies that God has given us, and the holy laws which He has laid down for our guidance. In his third temptation he drives us to know ourselves in all our weakness, and we have no resource save to bid him get behind us, lest if he linger he should prevail.

The wilderness finds us out, humbles us, brings us down from the high pinnacle of self-sufficiency and self-glorification. Beaten, baffled, disappointed, dependent for our manna and water on His constant bounty, suffered to hunger, and then fed with Heaven's own food, athirst, and satisfied from the rocks, fighting but vanquished till the arms of faith and prayer are uplifted, we come to know God, and to know ourselves: to reverence God and reverence ourselves; and to hand over the control and keeping of our souls to a faithful Creator.

The difficulties of our lot also reveal the many-sided help of God. We discover and appropriate Christ in a new aspect.

**The Everpresent Guide.** III. THE UNERRING GUIDE. "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night." That cloud probably always hid within its folds a heart of fire; but only when night fell on the world was it apparent.

**Jesus has Become the Pillar of Cloud Fire.** *It was an emblem of*

*the presence of God.* In ancient warfare fire and smoke signals were used by the commanders to show that they were present. Similarly, whether moving majestically forward, or brooding over the Tabernacle in after days, Israel felt assured that the Lord of Hosts was with them, and that the God of Jacob was their refuge. Ages have passed since then. The glory has ceased from between the Seraphim, but Jesus fulfils for all the ages that sacred emblem. The cloud, His veiling flesh; the fire, His Godhead. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father"; and we welcome His Promise: "Lo, I am with you alway."<sup>1</sup>

**We must not Precede our Guide.** *It was an Infallible Guide.* The Book of Numbers makes very emphatic references to this, and tells us how absolutely the marches and halts of Israel were controlled. When it was taken up, they journeyed; when it settled down, they encamped. As long as it lay spread above the Tabernacle, there they stayed. No impatience, chafing at the long delay, could force the march. The camp might be pitched in a desolate place, far from Elim, and invaded by serpents, but there it must remain, whether for days or months, until the cloud gathered up its fleecy folds, and sailed magnificently forward. We have as our sufficient Guide neither pillar of cloud nor fire, but the Light of the World, who said, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness."<sup>2</sup> He guides us with His eye. Only let us not precede Him. There should always be a space between the guiding cloud and you, "about two thousand cubits by measure." And when He says by the intimation of the Spirit within, or His Providence without, "Let us go hence," let us be sure that neither the warmth of the camp-fire, nor the attractiveness of the site retain us. Oh, to be able to say with the Psalmist: "My soul followeth hard after Thee!"

**Pillar and Cloud—Sun and Shield.** *It was both Sun and Shield.* When the excessive heat made it necessary for Israel to march at night, the light of the Fiery Pillar was enough to light the way; and when in the day the scorching glare of the sun was blinding, the cloud spread itself abroad like a great umbrella, so that the women and children could travel in comparative comfort.

"The Lord God is a Sun and Shield. He will give grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

<sup>1</sup> See Neh. ix. 19; Matt. xxviii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> John viii. 12.

Yes, and at times He will be a wall of defence, as when the cloud settled down between Israel and Pharaoh's hosts, so that the one came not near the other all the night.<sup>1</sup>

**"God With Us."** May the Lord Jesus be to each one of us a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night, and over all the glory may He spread His wings as a canopy, so that His Presence may be a pavilion for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a covert from storm and rain till we reach our Father's Home, and rest in Paradise for ever!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xiv. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. iv. 5, 6.

## XVII

### THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

EXODUS xiv. 13

13. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to-day : for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

## XVII

# THE SALVATION OF THE LORD

EXODUS xiv. 13

**Judgment and Mercy.** "STAND STILL, AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD." "Behold then," cries the Apostle, "the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell severity, but towards thee, goodness." Surely the chapter before us presents a notable illustration of the truth of his words. Towards Egypt, severity indeed, but for Israel goodness, which has kept their heart singing for generations. It would ill repay us to enter into topographical details. The supreme importance of the fact remains, although the exact locality has been probably obliterated by the shift of the sand and an alteration in the configuration of the shore.

**The First Stage in the Exodus.** At first the direction of the Exodus was S.E., but suddenly the guiding-cloud took a course due S., along the western shores of the Bitter Lakes. By this route, five or six days after setting forth, the Israelites found themselves in the extreme point of a wedge. On one side the Red Sea, on the other the wilderness, and in front an insuperable barrier of mountains. There was no natural egress from that *cul de sac*, except they turned back on their course.

**A Supreme Test of Moses' Faith.** Probably it was the supreme test of Moses' Faith. He knew perfectly well what was happening, and the extreme peril into which he was leading this helpless flock of human beings; but he maintained an absolutely untroubled composure. He knew that God had pledged His word to deliver His people, and if He seemed to take them into an impossible labyrinth, there must be a solution and a way out. He knew in Whom he had believed; his heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord.

**Pharaoh's Decision.** In the meanwhile Pharaoh had recovered from his extreme alarm. No further deaths had followed on the destruction of the firstborn, and he might have thought that Jehovah had expended all His arrows, and that there was nothing more to

fear. Moreover he realised how great a loss he and his people would sustain in the exodus of so vast a body of slaves, many of whom were highly skilled in the arts of that age. When therefore he heard of the change of route, and knew that Israel was entangled in the land, he mustered all the troops available, and marched in pursuit with six hundred chariots and perhaps 100,000 footmen, all trained and disciplined soldiers, and habituated to warfare. What chance had these fugitive slaves against that seasoned host!

“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid. . . . And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you to-day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (xiv. 10, 13).

**Egypt a Type of the Cunning World.** The Salvation of Israel from Pharaoh and his hosts cannot be viewed as an isolated fact. As the Apostle says: “Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.”<sup>1</sup> Egypt is the invariable type of the cunning, thoughtless, wanton world, out of which in all ages God is calling His sons. The infant Jesus was called out of Egypt, and to every son of God a similar summons arrives: “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest.” You too are called to an Exodus. You are called to arise from your enslaving passions, your love of gain or applause, the leeks, onions, and garlicks of this enervating world, where self-gratification is the one law of life. You are summoned to come forth to the wilderness, the holy mount, the spiritual rock, the heavenly food. Be loyal to the Divine voice; strike your tents, and follow. Though the Egyptians pursue, they shall not overtake. The Lord will be your rearguard. He shall fight for you and save you; and the Egyptians whom you have seen to-day, you shall see them again no more for ever. We are justified therefore in tracing a close analogy between the deliverance and salvation of the chosen people and our own.

**The Pursuit.** I. THEY WERE SAVED BY A DIVINE WORK. There were four stages in it.

(1) *The Movement of the Cloud.* It was sundown when the Egyptians, after a long and hasty march, arrived on the ridges of the desert hills overlooking the Israelite camp below them on

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 11.



the seashore. They could watch every movement, hear every sound, and were truculently sure of their quarry. But suddenly the cloud removed from the head of the Israelite column and settled as a wall behind and around them. This movement altered the entire aspect, because it spread a thick darkness over the Egyptian lines, and presented an apparently impenetrable barrier to their advance; Israel, on the contrary, enjoyed a brilliant glow of light, which turned the darkness of the midnight into broad day. "It was a cloud of darkness to the one, while it gave light by night to the other."

(2) *The Strong East Wind.* Probably it contained a large ingredient of south as well as east, which drove back towards the land the upper waters of the shallow bay, now silted up, whilst at the same time a strong ebb-tide may have drawn the lower waters southwards, so that a pathway a mile or more in length was cleft across the sands. "With the blast of thy nostrils, the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap; and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea."

(3) *The Storm.* When the Egyptians saw the wall of cloud slowly moving forward, and realised that Israel was escaping, that their camping-ground was being vacated and the sea-bed entered, their rage knew no bounds; and they hurled themselves in pursuit. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them."

**The Host Overthrown.** So they pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass that in the morning watch the Lord troubled the host of the Egyptians. Josephus explains that showers of rain began to descend, with thunder and lightning and flashes of fire, "nor was there anything wont to be sent by God as indicating His wrath, which did not happen to them on this occasion." The Psalmist thus describes the situation: "The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound. Thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven; the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook."<sup>1</sup> Then as the Egyptians, stricken with panic, turned to flee, their chariot wheels sank deep in the soft ooze of the sea-bed, so that rapid movement and therefore escape became impossible.

(4) *The Returning Tide.* When Moses stretched out his hand

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 17-18.

over the sea the second time, the wind lulled and the waters which it had upheld towards the land fell and rushed back, while from the south the tide turned and raced furiously forward. Those who know anything of the treacherous sands of the Wash, where King John lost his treasure, or of the Solway Firth or Morecambe Bay, will be able to form a fairly true conception of the situation. The parted waves leapt together, and, encumbered by their heavy armour, the Egyptians "sank as lead in the mighty waters."

**An Act of God.** Explain it as you will, there can be no reasonable doubt that the deliverance of Israel from the clutches of their foes was a conspicuous act of Divine power in answer to the faith and prayer of Moses, and through the operation of natural law.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."

"Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. In the greatness of thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee; Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. . . . Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"<sup>1</sup>

—**Prefiguring the Soul's Salvation.** But no less Divine is the salvation of every soul of man. It is from beginning to end of God. The grace that prompts to redeem, the work of the Cross by which our redemption was effected, the tender wooings and strivings of the Holy Spirit which first suggested that we should wish to be redeemed, the patience which has never surrendered the conflict with the evil of our nature—all are of God.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."<sup>3</sup>

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."<sup>4</sup>

**Only God Can Work This.** Unless your salvation depends on a Divine work, it may well be said to rest on a basis of sand. Unless your righteousness is God's righteousness, it can never stand the searching scrutiny of the white light of the Throne. Unless your robe has been woven on the Divine loom, it will never bear the

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 29; Exod. xv. 6, 7, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Titus iii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. i. 16.

inspection of the King when He comes in to see His guests. Shut in there, between your heredity on the one hand and your temptations on the other, with your old taskmaster-sins blocking your retreat, what hope is there, unless your soul can stand still, and see your salvation achieved *for* you on the Cross by the Son of God, and accomplished *in* you by the efficiency of the Holy Spirit? Stand still in Gethsemane with its shadowing olives, on Calvary amid its apparent desertion, and in the garden-sepulchre amid the rending rocks of Eastermorn, and see the salvation of God. "Behold God is my salvation. I will trust, and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and song."

**Sacrifice the Basis of that Work.** *That Divine Work was based on Sacrifice.* "Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Take you a lamb according to your families and kill the Passover. . . . And it shall come to pass that when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses."

**An Unexplained Mystery.** Was not a Lamb slain for us also? Verily. We worship Him Who by His own blood entered in once into the Holy Place and obtained eternal redemption. Behold the Lamb of God, Who was brought as a Lamb to the slaughter. There is no other hope against the day of days. Not that we have been moral and blameless in the eyes of our fellows, not that we have met the requirements and standards around us, but that the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. We cannot explain this mystery. And if we elect to stay outside the Holy of Holies until we understand, we shall never enter. But the contrite, penitent, and obedient heart, that has no words of excuse or palliation, will understand and live on the precious words which assure it that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. Remember that He said Himself, in the most solemn hour of His life: "This is the cup of the Covenant in My Blood, shed for many unto the remission of sins."

**The Blood the Greatest Gift Possible.** It is enough. We know that blood is the life, and represents the love, the heart, the innermost element of human existence. This has been shed for us, and represents the uttermost self-giving of the Son of God. By His stripes we are healed. We do not attempt to bar the window or lock the iron door between us and the menacing blow, we shelter beneath the Cross.

“ Not all the blood of beasts,  
On Jewish altars slain,  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain :  
“ But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,  
Takes all our sins away,  
A sacrifice of noble name,  
And richer blood than they.”

**Final Parting of Hebrew and Egyptian.** *God's salvation is also characterised by Finality.* “The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.” The hostility of Hebrew and Egyptian had lasted for centuries. Again and again the Hebrews may have rebelled against their intolerable sufferings; but even if they were successful for a time, the old tyranny closed in upon them, like manacles clasped again on the hand of the escaped but recaptured slave. Now, at last, the Egyptians, who had made their lives bitter, lay dead on the seashore. They looked for the last time on those hard, cold, stony faces, and then took their journey into a land wherein the Egyptian would have no part. They might have to encounter Midianites and Moabites; but Egyptians—*never*.

**The Dead Egyptians.** It has been truly remarked that the sands of time are strewn with dead Egyptians, who once held the hearts and minds of men in thrall. The dominion of the priest over the human conscience, the ownership of man by man, the use of torture to extort the needed lie, the praise of ignorance as the safeguard of order, the habitual degradation of womanhood, the massacre of child-life. But they have lost their power. They are dead Egyptians. It is even difficult for us to imagine a world in which they were once supreme.

There are a few Egyptians left! War, vast armaments born of fear and hate, greedy money-competition, impurity, the slavery of the Congo basin, the opium traffic, which Great Britain forced on the reluctant Chinese, the nefarious sale of British spirits to the natives of Nigeria. But the conviction is gaining ground that these also shall perish, as other great evils have perished before them, and we shall be permitted to see these also dead upon the seashore of Time.

**What is your Egyptian?** Some besetting sin that has been your taskmaster for years. Long ago it made you its slave, or perhaps it enslaved your father before you. In former days you struggled valiantly for freedom; but all your efforts were in vain. Of late you have renounced the conflict, and have allowed yourself to yield

at your tyrants' imperious behests. Perhaps you cherish the hope that some day the ebbing forces of your life, or even satiety, will emancipate you from your servitude. But it is a weary prospect. Not for you the perfect peace, the erect head, the cheery tone, the victor's shout, "Thanks be to God, who giveth the victory!"

Now, from this hour, will you not begin to cherish the anticipation of complete deliverance, not hereafter, in old age and in heaven, but now and here? Not because of your resolutions, or strivings, or agonies, but because you will stand still and see the salvation of God, because the Lord shall fight for you, and you will hold your peace.

**Sin and its Dominion.** (1) *Sin is not an inevitable part of our nature.* It is not indigenous, but an alien and intruder. What smallpox and measles are to the fair flesh of a little child, that sin is to our nature. The Scripture says that it was not present in our first parents. Certainly it was not in Christ, who was perfect man, and it will not be in the perfected humanity of the future. There is no necessity that sin should have dominion over you, any more than that Israel should serve Egypt. Dare to believe that the enemy may die; that the jealousy, envy, passion, greed may absolutely pass out of your experience; and that you shall be able to say with Paul, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

**Sin is an Intruder.** The great message of Christianity is that sin has no business in human hearts. It is an intruder who is to be expelled, and can be expelled. Not that man can be sinless in this mortal life, because even if we are delivered from positive trespass, we shall always be coming short of the glory of God; but that there need be no perpetual conscious self-condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; because God has sent forth His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, and has neutralised sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.

**Our Red Sea.** (2) *It was on the far shores of the Red Sea* that the Israelites saw the dead bodies of their ancient foes. This also suggests the lesson that it is on the other side of the Cross and the grave, in which we have been crucified and buried with Christ, that we really find entire deliverance. Do not be content to confine your Christian experience to the belief that the Saviour's Cross is only for your beholding; it must also be for your participation. You must be crucified with Him, lie in the grave with Him, and rise with Him,

from the dead; and then, standing on the other, the Easter, side of death, you will know that the old Egyptian taskmaster has no longer control.

Set about a new life. Believe that old things are passed away, and that all things are become new. Do despite to yourself! Not only avoid selfishness, but act unselfishly. Not only fight pride, but assume the girded towel of humility. Not only repress words of criticism and hate, but fill your life with pure love and charitable constructions. Not only put off the old man, but put on the new. The easiest way to do the former is by all means to do the latter. You will put off the old best when putting on the new, as the sap of spring, pulsing through the branches of evergreens, pushes off the faded leaves of the previous summer.

**Dare to Believe.** First, dare to believe that you were never meant to be the man that you have been so long; and next, step out of your grave under the blue sky and on the fresh soil, and live there as one alive from the dead, yielding your members unto God for ministry to man in His dear Name and in His power.

Two closing words. First: Remember Moses' repeated injunction that the people should borrow (the word in the Hebrew suggests *asking*, with no thought of return) of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold. It was only befitting and right that there should be some remuneration for their long toils. The dead Egyptian not only provided armour and weapons for their subsequent fight against other foes, whom they must surely meet, but enriched them, so that the very Tabernacle glittered with the flashing splendour of those jewels. Similarly, your whole life hereafter may be enriched by your present experiences. The patience, faith, love, purity, which will shine so radiantly in your character presently, will be the inalienable inheritance of this glad hour.

**The once Bondman becomes Deliverer.** Secondly: remember that you were once a bondman. Even if you are now delivered, Egypt still exists, and your brethren and sisters are there enslaved. Do not vaunt yourself over them, but in all humility and tenderness help the captive to freedom and the prisoner to breathe the air of liberty. Bear ye one another's burdens: and restore the fallen in a spirit of meekness, considering yourselves.

## XVIII

### THE TWOFOLD SONG

REVELATION XV. 1-8

1. And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

2. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

3. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints.

4. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou* only *art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

5. And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

6. And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

7. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

## XVIII

# THE TWOFOLD SONG

### REVELATION XV. 1-8

**The Revelation and its Readers.** Turn from Exodus to the Revelation. The Book is variously interpreted. For certain minds there is a perfect fascination in the attempt to fasten some particular interpretation on this or the other mysterious symbol. One questions sometimes whether the Book is not like the mysterious writing of the Hittites—a vanished race—for which we are only now finding the clue,<sup>1</sup> which was certainly known to the Christians of the first era. The very diversity of the interpretation, whether praeterist, presentist, or futurist, seems to establish this beyond doubt. Probably the visions do include what these eager and ingenious minds see in them, but certainly they include a great deal more, and touch all those events beneath which the same great principles lie. The special examples which are so frequently quoted are but part of the universal movement of Divine Providence.

But though we cannot read the Book of the Revelation as others do, in the light of accomplished fact, it does not follow that it is devoid of meaning and use. To adopt the words of another: The highest value of anything is its moral and spiritual value; and we do well to penetrate beneath the symbolism, however magnificent, in order to reach that which is of eternal significance and comfort. It is certainly so with the passage before us. Let us consider then the position of the singers, their history, and their song.

**This Vision: The Singers.** *The Position of these Singers.* "They stood beside the sea of glass." I saw, says the Seer, a sea of glass mingled with fire, and they that had gotten the victory stood on its shores. It is impossible not to trace the direction of the Apostle's thought. When the morning broke after the Exodus the redeemed hosts stood on the eastern shores of the Red Sea. The sky was bathed in the glow of the crimson-dawn, and the sea had returned to

<sup>1</sup> See Sayce's *Hittites* (R.T.S.).



its strength. Its calm, placid, glassy expanse gave no sign of the agony of the previous midnight. Around its shores were strewn the mailed bodies of the Egyptian chivalry. But its very texture seemed bathed in fire, the fire of the dawn that dyed its waters. Lying there in its big, broad basin, it was a veritable sea of glass mingled with fire. So, as the saints of God review the way by which they have passed, and the great tribulation out of which they have come, it will seem to them as if it were a sea of glass mingled with fire.

**The Mystery of God's Wisdom.** It stands for three things: (1) *Illumined Mystery*. The sea to the Jew was always the emblem of mystery. "Thy judgments are a mighty deep." "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." And the comparison is not unnatural. What lies beyond the rim of that horizon, where the white sails come up? what is covered by those mighty waters, which swallow up our treasures and give no account? But here the dark abysses are lit up with flame. Who is not conscious of an even deeper mystery in each human life? Some of these mysteries have been caused by the limitation of our faculties, and others by the incompleteness of the revelation given us. There are knots we cannot untie, questions we cannot answer, riddles we cannot solve. But some day the sea will be mingled with fire. Those sunless depths will be illuminated. Those subterranean caves will be radiant. We shall know as we are known, and see face to face.

**The "Sea of Glass" a Type of Peace and Strength.** (2) *Peace through Trial*. The sea of glass without a ripple dimpling it is the type of repose, of rest, of peace. And fire, which tests, purges, and purifies, is always and everywhere the emblem of sharp trial. The sea of glass, then, mingled with fire, must stand for the Peace and Strength which are ours, as the result of the testing flame. Take the peace on the face of a child, where there is no freckle or wrinkle, and contrast it with that on the face of a man who has fought his way through doubt, and disputation, and conflict. The one is the sea of glass, the other is the sea of glass mingled with fire. Take the passiveness of some mean character which has no energy to combat evil, and contrast it with the patience of one who has learnt it through awful experiences which have tested him to the quick. The one is the sea of glass, the other is the sea of glass mingled with

fire. Contrast Samuel, the innocent boy, running to old Eli and asking for his blessing, with the old prophet before he surrendered his weary burden. The one is the sea of glass, the other is the sea of glass mingled with fire. We know not what we shall be when truth and love have become the very atmosphere and home of our souls, but probably we shall always remember the ordeal through which we have passed. Even in heaven we shall remember from what we were saved by the grace of God. Though our peace shall be as a sea of glass, our very peace will be dyed with the fire of pain and anguish and sorrow.

**First Morning of Israelite History.** (3) *The Everlasting Morning.* "The sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared." Ah, what a morning was that! The first morning in Asia, the first morning of freedom, the first morning of Israelite history. The flush of that glory on the crystal sea was the reflection of the herald beams of the greatest day that had ever broken on their race. Not the day when Abram left Ur of the Chaldees, nor the day when Joseph was raised from the prison to the palace, nor the day when Moses was found by the king's daughter, had been as momentous as this. But the day which we anticipate is more radiant far, since it will usher in the timeless glory of eternity. We shall see it some day. The nights will have passed with their weeping and loneliness, and the redeemed of the Lord shall return with singing unto Zion. Everlasting joy shall be unto them. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

"The morning shall awaken,  
The shadows shall decay,  
And each true-hearted servant  
Shall shine as doth the day."

**The Mystic Number of "the Beast."** *The Singers.* "They had gotten the victory over the Beast." We cannot state in full what is included in the term "The Beast." One large school says that it means the Church of Rome, and another used to make it stand for Napoleon the Third, and compelled the mystic number 666 to spell out his name. But may we not say that it stands for the blind passion of instinct, unrestrained and unregulated by the high intention and rule of our moral and spiritual nature?

**What "the Beast" Stands For.** The Beast stands for all that is low and degrading, for whatever endeavours to pull us down from our standing in Christ Jesus, for whatever is inconsistent with our

high calling as sons of God. He opens his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. He makes war with the saints, and overcomes them. He rules over all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

**The Beast Within Us.** The Beast is in ourselves, in us all; and only as you learn to overcome it can you hope to stand upon that sea of glass, having one of the harps of God. We must fight and overcome all that is of the beast, with an unrelenting hatred. We must mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts. We must return good for evil, love for hatred, mercy for ill-deeds. We must put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. We must not content ourselves with repelling the attacks of evil upon us. It is never safe to remain only on the defensive, we must sally forth and do despite to our worst selves. With Divine courage and unflinching faith we must make inroads upon the ranks of evil, and break them to pieces in the name of the Lord.

**The Beast Around Us.** The Beast is around and without, in society. In the cruelty and hatred, in the jealousy and malice, in the scenes that fill our streets with riot on Saturday night, in the awful revelations of the police courts, and in the evil literature that brings a pile of gold into the tills of the purveyor, at the cost of the letting loose of the vilest passions and the blighting of whole gardens of innocence and modesty, we have abundant evidence of the presence of the Beast.

**The Fight against the Beast.** We must fight against these beast-like evils. Against the wolf of cruelty, and the Satyr of foul impurity, and the Fox of cunning, and the Vulture which delights in blood. Let us resolve that life shall be one determined struggle in the effort to free others from the dominion of these lower propensities and passions by which Earth's Edens are too often turned into very shambles of blood. And in proportion as we do this we shall find ourselves dwelling beside that sea of glass bathed with fire, and having in our hands the harps of God, i.e. harps which God has prepared and attuned. Do you want its peace? Carry peace into the warring strifes and tumults of the world! Do you want its touch of fire? Go and love men with the love of God! Do you want its harp and song? Then do your best to kindle hope and joy in other breasts than those of your own loved ones!

**Only One Way of Victory.** There is only one way of victory.

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony."<sup>1</sup>

The Blood of the Lamb is the supreme gift of God. It is self-giving in sacrifice, and it is impossible to follow in the footprints of the supreme sacrifice of Calvary without sharing finally the bliss of association with Him in His Victory and Glory. And as to the word of your testimony—never be ashamed of testifying to your own deliverance. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has brought out from under the hands of the oppressor, and made them free with the freedom of the sons of God. It is the loyal confession of your King that will help you and others to escape from the enemy and destroyer, as it was Moses' perpetual affirmation of God that broke down the power of Pharaoh.

These, then, are the singers. They were redeemed from among men. Their names are written in the Book of life of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. They love not their lives unto the death. They follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. They overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.

**The Song and its Burden.** "It is the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

**Music the Highest Language.** The life of the redeemed is represented as a Song. This is very suggestive. Order and Beauty naturally express themselves in music. Human language cannot express all the thoughts and hopes and affections of the heart, but music can. Music is the highest language with which we are acquainted. Words fail, even looks fail, and gestures and tears, but not music. When, therefore, we are told that in the next life they sing, we realise that they are superlatively happy.

**The Law of Human Life.** But when in addition we find that allusion to the harps of God, we are driven to the further conclusion that in the other life we shall be in perfect accord with God as our environment. To be in tune with the Infinite is the real goal of all human aspirings. It is not so now. Unfulfilled desire for God is the law of human life. In our best moments we want to attain to that ineffable Being Who is so near and yet so far, so intimate and yet so transcendent, so humble and loving and yet so awful.

" Like tides on a desert sea-beach,  
When the moon is low and thin,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xii. 11.

Into our hearts high yearnings  
Come welling and swelling in."

We want to get out of ourselves into God, to lose ourselves in Him. Men and women fly to money, or art, or human love for satisfaction, but in vain. But we shall never rest until we reach the crystal sea which lies spread out at the foot of the Throne of God: and there we shall burst out into song, as the child does who is thoroughly happy.

**Song Denotes Perfect Union.** But song also denotes perfect union. The battle song, martial music, the wild notes of the pibroch, have a marvellous effect in unifying vast masses of men. This was probably John's conception. He conceived of a vast society gathered from all ages, all dispensations, and from all lands, filled with one purpose, animated by love to God and to one another. In that one perfect society he saw the fulfilment of the hopes of the saints of the Old Testament and of the New, of those who trembled under Sinai, as of those who had rejoiced beneath the touch of Pentecost.

**The Song of Moses.** *Let us consider the Song of Moses.* It is contained in Exodus, ch. xv.: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."

**A Song of Deliverance.** From beginning to end, *it was praise of God.* There is no mention of Moses, though so much was due to his faith and courage, his wise foresight, and peerless leadership. The whole strain of the song was an ascription of praise to Jehovah. *It celebrated the entire overthrow of the enemy.* "The waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left."<sup>1</sup> How those words must have sounded when afterwards sung by the Levitical choirs! The soloist would utter the air, "Not one of them left." It might be sung as a duet, "Not one of them left." It would be tossed to and fro in the chorus. "Not one of them left."

**—Of Victory.** *It commemorated the ease of victory.* "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them. They sank as lead." If man had gone to work to destroy the hosts of Egypt, what a multitude of deadly engines he would have required! But God had only to breathe with His lips.

**—Of Confidence.** *It anticipated the future.* God would not be

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cvi. 11.

content with bringing the people out. He would also bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of His inheritance, where He would reign over them for ever and ever.

Each of these ingredients will be found in the life of heaven. There, too, we shall have no note save of praise to God: unto Him that loved us! There, too, we shall celebrate the total overthrow of all that exalted itself in opposition: He shall put down all authority and power. There we shall commemorate the ease of the Victory, and anticipate the eternal reign of love.

**The Song of the Lamb.** *Let us consider the Song of the Lamb.* It is written in Rev. v.: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests."

**The Blended Words.** *Let us consider the blending of these two in the words before us.* "Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages." When we look back on the history of the world, with the overthrow of its Pharaohs; when we consider the entire plan of God's dealings with men, as it will appear in all its integrity and beauty; when we review the story of our own lives, that now seem so tangled and incomprehensible, we shall not only agree that God's works were great and marvellous, but that His ways were right and true. The righteousness, or rightness, of His acts will then be made manifest. It is not always manifest now. Many stumble at God's dealings with them, and accuse Him of injustice and inequality. But one day His righteous acts will be made manifest.

**Mourning Turned to Music.** Think of it, the very things that now weigh thee down and oppress thee will one day be set to music. Thou art setting up the type from which the songs of eternity are to be printed off. The dark lines of thy spectrum will be shown to be incandescent metal. Thy weights, thy wings. Thy miseries, thy magnificats. Thy dark sorrows, the pearls of light and glory. Keep vigil in perfect faith through the long dark night. He will give thee songs at break of day.

## XIX

### THE WELLS OF BITTERNESS

EXODUS xv. 23-26

23. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

24. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

25. And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them,

26. And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I *am* the Lord that healeth thee.

## XIX

### THE WELLS OF BITTERNESS

EXODUS xv. 23-26

**A Wilderness Episode.** In the same chapter that records Israel's triumphant ode we have the story of their experience at the Bitter Wells. Of course it is only a coincidence, and yet how true to human life! We sing our songs of triumph one day, and within three days we have touched the bottom of disappointment and despair.

*Three Days into the Wilderness.* "Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur."

**Character of the Wilderness.** We must repeat what has been said already that the word wilderness does not imply a waste of sand, but a broad open expanse, which affords pasture enough for a nomad tribe wandering with their flocks. Waste and desolate so far as human habitations are concerned, the traveller will only encounter a few Bedouins. But everywhere the earth is clothed with a thin vegetation, scorched in summer drought, but brightening up, as at the kiss of the Creator, into fair and beautiful pastures, at the rainy season and in the neighbourhood of a spring.

It is quite true that it was no Eden, and the soil yielded no such profusion of vegetable life as made the valley of the Nile a riband of green. But it was at least the land of freedom, besides being the vestibule of the Land of Promise. Moreover, it was the school for the necessary discipline of the sons of God.

**The First Day's March.** We can almost picture the march of *the first day*. When they had sung their great song of Liberty, they saw the majestic cloud gathering itself up and moving slowly forward and the vast host began its march, with one last look on the faces of their dead masters. At the first sense of freedom, the greatness of their deliverance, the consciousness of God's guiding presence sustained and cheered them. On their right lay the deep waters of the Red Sea, on their left the mountains which support the great inland central plateau of the desert. It is quite likely that Moses and



the leaders, with the armed men, would keep together, whilst the remainder of the great host of two million souls would spread themselves far and near, moving slowly, the women and children and aged perched on asses, whilst the able-bodied would talk together of the achievements of the past night, or break into snatches of their ode of victory.

**The Second Day.** *The second day*, judging from the reports of travellers, must have tried them greatly. They turned away from the sea into a labyrinth of mountains. The way lay over a white limestone plain, the dust of which had become caked into a hard surface, hot to the feet and dazzling to the eye. Treeless, waterless, shadowless! After Marah, we are told that there is hardly a single day's march that does not bring the traveller to some green oasis, or some tiny thread of watercourse; but there was nothing of this sort in that dusty waste. At last the evening drew its shadows over the blazing sky, the stars shone brilliantly above them, the night breeze refreshed them; they still had water in their water-skins, which they had filled at the Wells of Moses, and had provision enough for their hunger, so they slept and hoped for better things on the morrow.

**The Third Day.** *But the third day* was as monotonous and tiresome as the preceding. All the morning and afternoon they toiled on, not without many hard expressions and harder thoughts of Moses, whose noble service they were inclined to forget in the toilsomeness of the way. Benefactors must not count on gratitude. The mob broke the windows of Apsley House, the residence of the Duke of Wellington, though he had won Waterloo for them.

**Disenchanted and Grumbling.** This again is human life. The young lad who leaves school at sixteen or seventeen congratulates himself that he is free of restraint and lessons and the sense of inferiority. He is to go to business, to be apprenticed, or articulated, to prepare for medicine or the bar. He sings his song of emancipation; but within three weeks or months he finds that the way of the new life blisters his feet and hems him in with restraint and compulsion. So rough is the wilderness that he is half-inclined to wish himself back at school.

**Our Wilderness Experiences.** A young man who has won the confidence of his employer, is one day suddenly commissioned to start within a few days for Shanghai or Tokio, as superintendent or manager of the business there. He is filled with a perfect ecstasy of joy. Here is his chance. At first the sense of freedom, the voyage,

the interest of novel surroundings, lift him into a new world; but as he becomes familiar with the severe difficulties of the situation—the cunning native, the trying climate, the letters from the firm whose demands he cannot satisfy—he looks wistfully back to the evenings when the desk was closed till the morrow, and he went forth with absolutely no care upon his soul. All through life we have the wilderness experience.

—**In the Christian Life.** Is it not so in Christian life? We have known what it was to pass through a memorable experience of the love and power of Christ. From the vantage-ground of a Transfiguration mountain we have seen the open door of Paradise. We have learned how to pray: have acquired the secret of victory; have become energised by the Holy Spirit. Emotion has risen to flood-tide. It has seemed as though we could never fail Christ again. Henceforth we should have hinds' feet, and walk on our high places. But after a while we become aware that the light is dying off the landscape. There is hardly enough left to guide our steps. The roughness of the path hurts our feet, its difficulty appals us. We have to live in our will. We are led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. We have such revelations of our own evil heart that we are tempted to despair. We cry out with the prophet, as we learn to know ourselves, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" and with the apostle, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" All this is the way of the wilderness.

**Marah.** *The Wells of Bitterness.* Towards the afternoon of the third day, on the sky-line there appeared a sign of verdure, which inspired new hope. It was like the white sail of a ship to the castaway on a lonely island in mid-ocean, or the flag of a relieving squadron to a beleaguered fortress. The inspiration of hope flashed in every eye, and quickened every step. Men said to one another, "Moses was right after all." Women told their children that Jehovah had been mindful of them. The very beasts seemed to forget their languor and their loads. They pressed to the wells, and cast themselves down beside them for long refreshing draughts. "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?"

**The "Marahs" of Ordinary Life.** They were disheartened and disappointed. For three days when no wells were in sight they had kept up bravely. But when a well appeared to be within reach, but

proved a failure, they were maddened with the sudden set-back to their hopes. A man may brace himself to live without human love; but when it comes almost within his reach, and then eludes him, he becomes broken with perpetual heartache, that darkens every subsequent day. Another may be perfectly content with a modest income and his pretty home, till he learns that he is the possible heir of an immense fortune. Only at the last moment is he suddenly deprived of his expectations, by the appearance of another heir, more closely akin to the testator. But from that moment the old zest in his more meagre lot is gone.

Or yet again, we may in our journey have reached the pools that promised us satisfaction, only to find them brackish. That marriage, that friendship, that new home, that partnership, that fresh avenue of pleasure, which promised so well turns out to be absolutely disappointing. Who has not muttered "Marah" over some desert well which he strained every nerve to reach, but when reached, it disappointed him!

Wordsworth tells us of the disheartenment and disappointment which befell him after the French Revolution. He had counted on the great issues of that stormy time. He had hoped for the birth of brotherhood and freedom. He thought that the race would slough off its evil past and rise to the dignity of man. But when instead of all these the tumbrel carried its daily contingent to the guillotine, and the streets of Paris for months ran blood, he says:

"I lost  
All feeling of conviction, and in fine  
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,  
Yielded up moral questions in despair."

**Are you there to-day?** Are you at Marah to-day? At least suspend your judgment. Don't murmur against Moses, and don't judge God. This is no time for a well-balanced verdict upon the way that you are being brought. Strike out if you will, but don't sum up. Remember, also, that others are probably suffering as heavily as you are, and more so. You are only one and by yourself, that man has a wife and children. Is his lot not worse than yours? In the theatre of ancient Greece, the actors depicted the great sorrows of their greatest heroes, and those who saw them, feeling that their heaviest griefs were inferior, returned to their homes to bear them nobly. The best thing to do, when you are despondent and sad, is to go forth and brighten the lot of some one else.

**The Tree not a Special Creation.** *The Tree.* And Moses "cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." We are not to suppose from these words that a tree had been created for this purpose. The answer to Moses' prayer came not in creating but showing the tree.

Travellers tell us that several trees are used by the Arabs for this very purpose. There is especially the bark of a certain tree, which has power to precipitate the mineral particles which embitter the waters, so that they become sweet and clear. It is a beautiful provision of Nature, an illustration of that wonderful law of compensation which is always cropping up from the divine foundations of the world.

**The Antidote always near at Hand.** In Nature the antidote grows near the poison, the dock-leaf beside the nettle. No need to travel far for healing. And for every sorrow to which we are subject there is a swift and sufficient cure. The tree grows near the Marah pool. For every sin there is a ready salvation. The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart. There is no need to ascend into the heavens, or descend into the depths. The Lord is always at hand, a very present help in time of trouble.

**The Purpose of Miracles.** But we need to be shown! "The Lord *showed* him the tree." When Hagar, in the dire need of her dying child, cast him under a shrub, and went and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot, God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, from which she filled her empty bottle-skin with water. It had been there all the while, but she was too blinded with grief to behold it. We need, similarly, to receive not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. All around us there are deliverances waiting for our appropriations and comfort. Cry to God; in the cry there is relief, and in answer to it He will show thee the balm in Gilead, the healing for thy wound, the fountain for thy thirst. This is probably the design of miracles, to point the way, and reveal what we had been otherwise too stupid to discern.

But surely to us the tree is that on which Jesus died. In evident allusion to the ancient word, "Cursed is he that hangeth on a tree," the apostle says, "His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree."<sup>1</sup> How little did the tree of which the Cross was made realise the high honour for which it was intended as it grew in some

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter ii. 24.

deep forest-glade! But probably before His birth our Lord had seen it planted, and had watered it with His rain and nurtured it with His sun. This is the tree which, cast into the fountains of the world's bitterness, makes them sweet.

“Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,  
By the Cross are sanctified;  
Peace is there that knows no measure,  
Joys that through all time abide.”

**Christ the Tree that sweetens all Bitterness.** Look to the Cross, disappointed soul. Did not Jesus suffer more than ever thou hast done? Look unto Him, the Author and Finisher of Faith, who instead of the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame. Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest thou be wearied and faint in thy mind. Besides, the Cross stands for self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-giving. Learn so to renounce and give thyself, that the hard lessons acquired in the school of sorrow may pass into action, and so into the experience of others. In addition, the Cross was the way to the Father's bosom. When the cup had been drained to the dregs, and the perfect obedience finished, the Father bade the Crucified sit with Him by His side.

**Joy in the Looking Forward.** In the light of that heaven of bliss, how small become the aches and pains of Time! Be of good cheer, then! If you have shared His griefs, you shall share His joys. If you have been crucified you shall reign. The sorrows of the present are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Your Marah shall never be named or brought to mind, when you find yourself beside the river of water of life that proceeds out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb. There you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not light on you, nor any heat; for the Lamb Who is in the midst of the Throne shall feed you, and shall lead you to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.

*It is remarkable that at Marah God took to Himself a new name. “I am the Lord that healeth thee.”*

**God gives Himself a New Name at Marah.** We do not find Him giving Himself a new name at Elim, but at Marah. The happy experiences of life fail to reveal all the new truth and blessing that

await us in God. It was after the pursuit of Chedorlaomer and the kings, and when there was fear of reprisals, that Jehovah's word came to His servant, saying, "I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward." It was in the agony of the conflict with Amalek that Israel knew Jehovah as Jehovah-Nissi—i.e. The Lord my banner.

**Come to the Lord for Healing.** It was as though He said: The tree has healed the waters, but its virtue was in Me. God has implanted healing properties in drugs and balsams and waters, that we might look through them all to Himself. Whether in physical, mental, or spiritual maladies, let us climb past the channel to the source, away from the ritual, the ministry, even the Cross, to Him who forgives all our iniquities, heals all our diseases, redeems life from the daily destructions that threaten it, and crowns us with loving kindness and tender mercy.

Let us come to our Lord for healing, with whatever disease we have in this complex nature of ours. When once the spirit receives the inbreathing of His perfect health, it spreads to the soul, and even the body experiences quickening through His Spirit that dwelleth in us.

**The Arrival at Elim.** *After Marah, Elim.* "And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees: and they encamped there by the waters."

They say that Elim must have been the Wady Ghurundel, where a considerable spring wells out at the foot of a sandstone rock, forming a pool of clear water, around which quite a considerable amount of vegetation clusters. This forms a welcome contrast to the wilderness. We can easily realise the satisfaction with which the weary host flung themselves on the grass, beneath the shadow of the palm-trees, and drank refreshing draughts to the full.

**The Elims follow the Marahs.** There are many Elims in life's pilgrimage. The Home, the Weekly Rest-Day, the House of God, the quiet beauty of the countryside, the interspace of rest that comes to most of us amid the stress of our life-work. And those hours of fellowship with our Saviour, when we are fed on the hidden manna, and drink of the spiritual rock, and are healed by the leaves of the tree of life—these again are green oases. But remember the Elims follow the Marahs, because Christ's soldiers must be taught that life is stern and real, and that the intervals of rest are not the goal, but the harbour on Hill Difficulty, where we stay for a brief interval, ere we again brace ourselves for the climb.

## XX

### THE FOOD FROM HEAVEN

#### EXODUS xvi. 1

1. And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which *is* between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

## XX

# THE FOOD FROM HEAVEN

### EXODUS xvi. 1

**The Rest at Elim.** Elim with its twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees had been a welcome resting-place after the three days' journey into the wilderness; but it could be nothing more. That small pool of clear water, with its grassy margin, its tamarisk and dwarf palm trees and other shrubs, which is still pointed out as the Elim, must have been very attractive to thirsty lips and weary feet, but it could not be for long the abiding-place of the heirs of promise.

**Our Elims.** It has been truly said that God does not multiply our Elims, for He cannot trust us there. He gems the earth with them, to teach us that it is not all blasted, and that we are not a cursed race in a cursed world. He sets them before our eyes as witnesses that there are worlds where there is no bitterness in the fountains of life. He causes us to lie down in them, only that we may be better able to tread in the paths of righteousness in which He leads us. He suffers us not to linger there, but summons us forth, that privation and toil may brace our moral muscles, and make us fit to join the pilgrim race. Rest in Elim, but never ungird. Drink, but like Gideon's men, who lapped in haste. Slumber if you will, but let your lamps be trimmed and your staff ready to your hand, that at the first movement of the cloud by night or day you may start again on the wilderness-march.

**In the Wilderness of Sin.** On leaving Elim, the way lay at first through a labyrinth of rich sandstone, like the outer avenues of some great temple; and indeed they were on the outskirts of a Temple not made with hands, where they were to meet God. There is much wonderful scenery between Elim and the wilderness of Sin, notably at that spot alluded to in the itinerary recorded in Numbers<sup>1</sup>: "They removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red Sea." It was there, as Dean Stanley reminds us, that they had their final glimpse

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxxiii. 10, etc.



of Egypt on the farther shores of the bright sea that formed the base of the view.

**The Threatened Famine.** "And they removed from the Red Sea, and pitched in the wilderness of Sin." It was a toilsome journey, in part along the strand, and then through scorching valleys; but the general distress was greatly augmented by the failure of their stores of food. Famine threatened the host. Moses and Aaron were assailed with angry murmurs; and regrets were freely expressed that they had not remained in the slavery of Egypt, where at least they had flesh-pots and bread to the full. It was under such circumstances that the Lord said to Moses, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you."

**The Manna. THE MIRACLE OF THE MANNA.** *It was a distinct act of God.* He spread the table for them in the wilderness, which they had deemed to be impossible. They had spoken against Him, saying, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?"<sup>1</sup> But He did more, He gave them to partake of the corn of heaven, and man did eat angels' food. He thus gave evidence of His inexhaustible resources, and showed Himself willing and able to supply all their physical need, whilst they learned His great lessons.

**What was Manna?** Many theories have been advanced to account for this great miracle. Some have ascribed it to the honey dew which falls in the desert, and refreshes the exhausted traveller; others to the tree-manna which exudes from the tamarisk tree; others again have made much of an edible lichen which grows in the desert; but none of these hypotheses meet the conditions of the case. For instance, how can these theories account for the abundance of the manna, its cessation on the seventh day, its perennial provision for forty years, or its sufficiency as the staple of human life? We are quite prepared to admit that there was a substratum of Nature beneath the miracle, as there was in the gift of quails, in the feeding of the five thousand, and in all the miracles; but in the last resort there can be no doubt that it was the act of God, calling into operation, as He invariably does, some far-reaching natural laws and processes.

**The Feeding an Act of Grace.** *But it was a supreme act of Grace.* It is an astonishing fact that there was not, on God's part, a single severe word in reproof of the people's murmurings, far less any punishment. At a later period, when they had been longer under

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 19.

His training, they were severely punished when they gave way to a similar outburst of complaint.<sup>1</sup> "Some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer,<sup>1</sup> but in this preliminary stage of their education God made allowances for them, large and merciful in extent. Both here and at Rephidim, when they tempted and proved Him, He did not chide, but bore with them as a father with his querulous child. Surely He knew their frame, and remembered they were but dust. He put the gentlest construction on their wild speeches, on their forgetfulness of the great benefits they had received, on their ingratitude, on their accusations and reproaches to His servants, on their exaggerated estimate of Egypt, on their distrust and unbelief of Himself. In the touching words of the Psalmist: "He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again."<sup>2</sup> He wrought for His Holy Name's sake.

—As well as a Test. *The daily gift was intended as a test.* "The people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My Law, or no."

The gift of manna during forty years, many of which were stained by sinful murmuring and disobedience, was a perpetual exhibition of God's patience, long-suffering, and fidelity to His promise. But the rules prescribed for the gathering of the manna were a prolonged test of their obedience. They were also trained to dependence, and self-control, and care for one another, as they stooped daily over the desert-floor.

—And a Divine Revelation. *The gift of manna was connected with a Divine Theophany.* "And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the Lord: for He hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of Jehovah appeared in the cloud."

Aaron took the initiative, probably because Moses was withdrawn in the secret chamber of prayer. But how remarkable that revelation of God's glory appears, when we compare it with the theophany that closes the Book of Job, or the look that our Lord cast on Peter as He left the council-chamber! There are times in all religious experiences, when the thought that God is, that God is near, that God can, that God will, and that God does, is enough to silence

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxi. 6; 1 Cor. x. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 39.

every murmur and hush every fear. God is here in this wilderness with me, and I dare not renounce hope or utter a word of complaint.

**The Abundance of Quails.** *He did more than supply the necessary support of life.* "He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations."<sup>1</sup>

Quails still pass over the Sinaitic Peninsula in vast migratory flocks on their way from the interior of Africa. They can easily be secured, because, exhausted with their journey, they fly near the ground, on which they often fall through sheer weariness. Tristram tells us that in Algeria also he has found the ground covered with them over many acres, and they were so fatigued that they scarcely moved until almost trodden upon. The miracle, therefore, lay in the timeliness of their advent. God always uses existing Nature as His basis, modifying and altering as slightly as possible, augmenting the quantity, but not exerting more supernatural power than needful, or departing further from the established course of Nature than required. How suggestive it is that He did not confine Himself to the gift of the necessary manna, but added the luxury of quails! We are reminded of the preparation by our Lord of fish as well as bread at that memorable morning meal beside the calm waters of the lake.

**God responsible for His Followers.** This God is ours to-day. When He is directly responsible for our circumstances, we shall find him faithful. Is not this a particular instance of that great law? If the people had gone wantonly and wilfully into the desert, there would have been no obligation on God to supply their need. But God had led them there. His moving cloud was directing every step. Even Moses was not responsible for the route. Obviously, then, He could not leave them to starve in the wilderness. When once we have started forth at His command, and have gone on His providentially-indicated way, we may say it reverently that God cannot refrain from assisting us, save at the loss of His dearest attributes. It is quite true that we have to obey His laws. We must go out and gather: we must observe the laws of rest: we must not gather more than we need: we must care for our families and homes. But these observances do not touch the primal and gracious faithfulness of the Father of lights, in whom is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning.

**But Obedience Necessary.** Trust Him absolutely. After all, every meal comes from above. Our Father in Heaven gives us our daily

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 27, 28.

bread. Every day we are sitting at His table. Though our bread comes through the sweat of our brow, we only gather what He has provided. Come to His table every morning, and sit there till He spread it. He may keep thee waiting for a little, but watch and wait. "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

**The Cry of Humanity.** THE MYSTICAL APPLICATION OF THE MIRACLE. We learn from John vi. that the manna was a type of the Son of Man, and that He was "the true bread from heaven." *If this be so, we must infer that the whole race for which He stands must be stricken with hopeless hunger.* The cry of the prodigal in the far country, which may have been Alexandria, Ephesus, or Rome, is the cry of humanity,—*"I perish with hunger."* The insatiable passion for pleasure and money, the restlessness of modern life, with its incessant cry for something new, the weary look on so many faces in the fine carriages of the parks or the crowds in the streets, tell the same tale of those who would fain appease the cravings of their appetite with husks fit for swine, but still are perishing with hunger. Is not this a fact in the heart-life of every individual, who is thoughtful and experienced enough to diagnose his true condition? And it is because of this hunger, as an indispensable element in the life of man, that we have absolute confidence in a great future for the religious life of mankind.

**Indifference to Religion only Temporary.** We have been told lately that the whole of our civilisation is slipping away from the religion out of which it sprang. Men are forsaking the churches where their fathers worshipped, are ceasing to pray, are shutting out God from all their thoughts. We have not yet gone the length of the French Revolutionists, who sought to blot out the name of God from literature, and to alter every name of day and street that referred to ancient religious observances. Practically, however, tens of thousands are doing what amounts to the same thing. But this is only a temporary phase. Ultimately our race will be tired of the husks, tired of spending money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not. Again these places of worship will be filled with teeming crowds.

"Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee. . . . For thy waste and thy desolate

places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away."<sup>1</sup>

**Man Really Hungers for God.** But let us be quite sure as to what it is that men hunger for. It is not for mere formularies, even though these may express truths. It is not for theories concerning inspiration or eternal punishment. It is not for this or that ecclesiastical system. No; the heart of man, made for God, hungers for God. It will accept a false religion rather than none, if it presents but a modicum of the knowledge of God. But with how certain an appetite and avidity will the heart of man accept the Gospel of Christ, when it is freed from adventitious circumstances, and presented in all its native beauty, not only to the mind, but to the heart!

**Truth Alone not Enough.** Beyond this, however, it must be said that Truth alone is not enough to satisfy the heart of humanity. We crave the concrete. We desire that the Absolute should clothe itself in tangible flesh and blood. And has not this natural yearning been met abundantly in Christ, Who is Himself the Truth?

**True Religion Known by its Fruits.** This is the ultimate evidence of the Divine origin of Christianity. "The bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." Show us that which is capable of giving life unto the world. Not to an individual here or there, or to this or that community, but *to the world*. Show us a religion which gives life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins; and that does this irrespective of national and racial distinctions; and you have produced a religion which must have come down from heaven.

The effect of all our fellowship with Christ should be "more life and fuller." We do not need the emotional or intellectual, but the building up of spiritual force, so that we shall be strong to suffer or to wait, strong to do or dare, strong to minister to the sorrows and sins of men. These fruits are the inevitable criterion of right feeding. Where they are absent, nothing will convince us that you are feeding on Christ; whereas if you feed on Him there will be no "impossible" in your vocabulary, no "peradventure" in your outlook.

**Jesus Satisfied the Apostles.** LET US TAKE A PARTICULAR INSTANCE OF THE FEEDING OF THE HUNGER OF THE HEART. The Apostles furnish

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlix. 17, 19.

a precise illustration of the way in which Jesus satisfies the soul. As young men they hungered for the Bread of God. For this they left their native haunts beside the Lake of Galilee, and came down the Jordan valley to the spot where John was baptising. He had caught a glimpse of the coming Christ, which he passed on in burning speech. But this failed to satisfy those eager souls, and when the Lord was manifested they turned to Him, and fed on His every word. His words were found, and they did eat them, and they became the joy and rejoicing of their hearts all through those happy months of fellowship.

**A Keener Spiritual Hunger.** But as they knew Him better they became hungry with a more refined appetite, hardly knowing what they wanted. Therefore they plied Him with questions: Whither goest Thou? Show us the Father! How wilt Thou manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world? All these were suggestive of a deeper and more passionate hunger than would be satisfied by a physical presence, however beloved and fair. And this also was met when He tarried with them, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Though they had known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth they knew Him so no more. They had become joined to the Lord by a spiritual affinity, and ate of the spiritual manna, and drank of the spiritual Rock.

But even that was not enough. When they beheld Him return to the Father, leaving them alone in the midst of the world, and when a full realisation of the need of the world broke on them, they began to hunger after a fresh fashion. Their soul followed hard after Him. They longed to be endued with His power, to go forth to continue and consummate His work, and to win the world for His sceptre.

**Hunger and Thirst in Heaven.** It is said that in heaven they neither hunger nor thirst. Every longing heart shall be satisfied. And yet even there the Beatitude must hold good, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Oh blessed hunger! Always perfectly met and satisfied, and yet always breaking out with new appetite and desire for things not seen as yet!

**An Application to Ourselves.** THERE IS A PARTICULAR AND PERSONAL APPLICATION OF ALL THIS FOR US ALL. Has not God humbled us, and suffered us to hunger, and fed us with manna, that He might make us know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word

that proceedeth out of the mouth of God? Are you feeding on that Bread? You have been laying up for yourselves treasures which moth and rust corrupt: you have been building big barns, and saying to your soul, Soul, thou hast much goods stored up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry. But how vain it all is! "Labour not," saith the Master, "for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."<sup>1</sup>

**The Manna an Emblem.** Was the manna needful for the body? Even more urgently is Christ needed for the soul. Alas, that our spiritual health is so impaired that we have lost our appetite!

Was the manna given freely for all the camp of Israel? Even so is Christ given for all. He is the bread of life for the world. Every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have eternal life.

Was the manna so accessible that the people had only to stretch forth the hand to take it? The word of eternal life is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart. There is no need, therefore, to climb into heaven or descend into the depth.

Was the manna white in colour, and sweet to the taste? A master-mind in our days has made his hero, a well-disposed heathen, see in Christ, even before he could believe in Him, "the *White Christ*."

Did the manna distil noiselessly in the night? So Christ cometh not with observation—not in the wind, the fire, the earthquake, but when other voices are hushed.

**Our Own Part.** Was it needful to gather the manna? So Christ calls Himself bread, to bring this point out strongly, not only what He is, but what we must do with Him. He must be received, fed upon, inwardly appropriated. As the mouth receives, and the digestive organs assimilate and transform our food into vital force, so we must feed spiritually upon our Lord, until He be formed in us.

Except ye eat and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you. But if you come to Him you shall never hunger; if you believe in Him you shall never thirst. Take thy fill, then, eat the fat and drink the sweet. The Body of the Lord Jesus, given for thee, shall preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting Life. Take then and eat, to thy great comfort, strength, and encouragement!

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 27.

## XXI

### REPHIDIM

EXODUS xvii. 1-15

1. And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and *there was* no water for the people to drink.

2. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?

3. And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore *is* this *that* thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

4. And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.

5. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

6. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

7. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?

8. Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

9. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

10. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12. But Moses' hands *were* heavy; and they took a stone, and put *it* under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

14. And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this *for* a memorial in a book, and rehearse *it* in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

15. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi:



## XXI

### REPHIDIM

EXODUS xvii. 1-15

**The Approach to Sinai.** On leaving the seashore the march had turned eastwards towards the great mass of mountains known generally as Sinai. The route is described as inexpressibly grand. On each side of the narrow passes rise peaks and precipices of every form and colour. Grey, red, brown, green, chalk-white, and raven-black are the hues of those entrance-gates of the most august temple of the world. Here, from before Abram left Haran, the Egyptian Government had worked mines of copper and turquoise by convict labour. It is not improbable that there were many Hebrews amongst these wretched beings, and if so, the host may have been led by this route in order to have the opportunity of freeing them from a slavery, compared with which I should suppose and hope that there is nothing in the world of to-day so bad.

**The Israelites Disappointed and Thirsty.** Up to this point the sufferings of the pilgrim-host, though trying, had not been insupportable; but on leaving Dophkah<sup>1</sup> and entering the Wady Feiran, the whole camp, man and beast, became severely pressed. The oases which had varied the monotony of the desert failed them; the granite walls on either hand reflected an intolerable glare and heat, and the failure of the supply of water threatened to drive the whole camp to frenzy. At Marah the water had been unpalatable; here there was no water at all. The brook which at times waters the valley was dry, as it often becomes still; and perhaps the presence of vegetation along the empty water-course made the disappointment more tantalising. The word Rephidim signifies "resting-places," and everyone had been buoyed up during the stiff experiences of the last two days with the happy expectations which that name suggested. Obviously, therefore, the contrast between hope and reality was the more exasperating.

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxxiii. 12.

"And the people thirsted there for water." Hunger is bad enough to bear, but it affects only one organ of the body, whereas thirst sets the whole being on fire. It mounts to the brain and burns like fever in the blood. The little children were drooping like flowers; the cattle were on the verge of exhaustion, and lay panting on the ground. The scouts searched everywhere for water in vain, and came back with but one report—that there was no water anywhere to be found.

**Discontent and Rebellion.** THE TEMPTING OF MASSAH. At first the people chode, or strove, with Moses, wilfully ignoring the fact that their route was determined by the cloud; then their murmurings became so threatening that Moses really feared for his life; and finally they began to question whether the Lord were among them or not. "They tempted the Lord," i.e. they doubted Him, questioned His love and care, impeached His righteousness, and finally suggested that He had deserted them, and all because He did not act in the way they expected. Ignoring the lessons of the plagues, the marvels of the Exodus, the triumphal passage of the Red Sea, they actually questioned whether God were with them at all. In the Gospels the same spirit was always challenging Christ for signs. Not content with His spotless holiness, His words and deeds, His fulfilment of ancient prediction, they were always asking for the outward and sensible evidence of God's presence and power.

**Modern Questionings.** In our own time the same demand is made, the same challenge repeated. Men are not satisfied with the moral evidences of the Being and providence of God, they point to the physical evils around, the hunger and thirst, the poverty and misery, the pollution and self-will of our times, crying—If there be a God, why does He permit these things? Why does He allow suffering and sorrow? Why does He not interpose? And then, when the heavens are still silent, they infer that there is no God, that the sky is an empty eye-socket, and that there is nothing better than to eat and drink, because death is an eternal sleep.

**Our Rephidim.** Has not something of that spirit infected our own peace? We have served Him from our youth, have even kept His Glory and Kingdom before our eyes, have denied ourselves for His sake, have had many an answer to prayer, have reckoned that there was a very special alliance and friendship between Him and us. Then suddenly we have been brought to our Rephidim, in which there has been no drop of water. We have come into some bitter

situation of personal or relative suffering, we have cried out for help, but the heavens have seemed as brass, and we have been inclined to doubt whether our religious life has not been one long deception.

**When Faith is Relaxed.** Does God care for me? Does He hear prayer? Is He with me, as I thought? Instead of saying, God is with me, He is steering the boat, He is leading the pilgrimage, He is adequate for this emergency. He has borne me on eagles' wings from Egypt, and cannot desert me now—we say, Is He among us or not? It becomes then a debatable question, Aye or Nay; and when once faith has relaxed its unswerving affirmation, we are on an ocean without chart or compass, or trying to cross a quaking quagmire.

**Life's Difficult Hours.** Life is full of these difficult hours, when we are tempted to forget all the past, and question everything that we had once most steadfastly believed. Instead of doing that, we ought to fall back on all that God had been to us, and insist that He is still all that He was. The incident which confronts us may be difficult, but it shall not rob us of our faith. We will still trust, and not be afraid.

“ His love in time past forbids me to think,  
He'll leave me at last, in trouble to sink,  
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,  
Confirms His good pleasure to help me right through.”

**Gathering Wealth for Experience.** Suppose you are descending a mountain after a long day in its heights, and are following a stream which has been increasing with every hundred yards. Finally you emerge from the woods, and begin to pass the farms which, one below another, climb down to the valley. To you as you pass them in their snug enclosures of green vegetation, they seem to be utterly and absolutely distinct. But they are not. The stream runs through them, and more; the rains are always washing down the alluvial soil of the upper to the under. Melting snows, spring rains, the very attritus of the ground, makes each of them richer and richer still, and the bees flying from one to another mix their products. So it is with life. Some men pass from one experience to another, as though there was no connection between them; but others are always gathering wealth and richness from the earlier experiences to help them in the later. They say, “God was with me in my boyhood, He will not desert me in my age: He was with

me in six troubles, and will not leave me in the seventh: He that spared not His own Son, will in His own good time and way, with Him freely give all else." Such never say, Is God? but God is. They that come to God believe that God is. Such is the new order of them that diligently seek Him.

**The Purpose of Suffering.** STILL THE QUESTION RETURNS ON US, WHY DID GOD ALLOW HIS PEOPLE TO SUFFER? Without doubt, one reason is that suggested afterwards, He wished to reveal them to themselves, that they might know the evil of their hearts. "Know therefore," was the incontestable reproof of their leader in after days, "that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people. Remember, forget thou not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou wentest forth out of the land of Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

**Intentional Discipline.** This stern discipline was also intended to make them rely on God, rather than on Moses or circumstances. He suffered them to thirst, that He might make them know that man doth not live by rains and rivers only, but by God's provision, however it may come. Take, for instance, the child of some rich inheritance, whose estates, stocks, shares, and bank-balance, are a fourfold wall against the intrusion of want. For that child, the Providence which gives our daily bread is a nonentity. It is when all these have passed out of his life, and he is compelled to hang hour after hour on the care of God, with no obvious means of support, that he offers the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer with absolute sincerity.

**Inhabitants of the Sinaitic Region.** But there was a deeper reason than these. At the time of the Exodus the Sinaitic peninsula was mainly peopled by two tribes of Bedouin. The Kenites, chiefly pastoral and inoffensive, claimed descent from Abraham, and were closely connected with Israel through Moses' marriage with the daughter of one of their chiefs.

**The Amalekites.** The Amalekites were one of the great nations of antiquity. Balaam said, "Amalek was the first of the nations."<sup>2</sup> Their traditions assert that their earliest home was the neighbourhood of the Persian Gulf, from which they were driven always southwards by the advancing power of Assyria. At this time they covered the country with their extensive flocks.

<sup>1</sup> Deut. ix. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Num. xxiv. 20.

They did not challenge the hosts of Israel on their emergence from the Red Sea, either because they understood their destination to be Canaan, the route to which would soon take them out of their territories, or because they had left the seaboard for the mountain pastures, clothed at that period in their most attractive and abundant dress. But when Israel, as we have seen, marched southwards, their progress was eyed with the utmost jealousy and suspicion. It was extremely distasteful to the Amalekite chiefs to learn that these aliens were enjoying the abundant pastures and palm-groves of an oasis like Elim. Probably a council of war was held, at which it was unanimously agreed that measures must be concerted for the arrest and turning back of the march.

**Cutting Off the Stragglers.** After the manner of the East, messengers had been sent out far and wide, to summon all the available forces of the peninsula to the conflict: and until they were assembled, orders were issued that light-armed troops, on swift camels, should hang on the rear of the Israelite host, cutting off its stragglers, pillaging its baggage, and doing as much damage as possible.

“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.”<sup>1</sup>

**Preparing for the First Battle.** As God looked down on the land through which the people were slowly making their way He beheld these gathering hosts. He saw them mustering from the rock-dwellings of Petra, from the rich pasture-lands of Kadesh, from the rolling downs in which the mighty Lebanon range sinks into the sand-wastes of the desert. It may be that at the very hour when this murmuring outbreak occurred these marshalled hosts were within an hour's march of the camp of Israel. He knew it all, and suffered them to thirst, that on the background of their pain He might work a supreme miracle of power, which would be their fortress and stronghold in the day of Amalek's attack.

The composure with which Moses prepared to resist Amalek; the absolute confidence with which Israel fell in with his measures of resistance; and the courage with which these undisciplined troops fought their first fight, would be absolutely inexplicable, unless we had the record of the slaking of their thirst by the smiting of the Rock.

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxv. 17, 18.

**Moses Composed.** *Consider the composure of Moses.* Hitherto in his difficulties he has cried unto the Lord, not of course in despair, but as urgently needing Divine help. Here, however, he does not hesitate a moment, but bids Joshua select the most promising of the armed men for the fight, and announces that he will stand on an adjoining hill with the rod of God in his hand.

**The Ground of His Courage.** He betrayed no sign of discomposure! Why? Because yonder across the valley was the Rock which like a cistern had yielded streams of water; because he had seen God standing there before him on the Rock; and because at that moment he could hear the gurgle of the streams as they poured down those water-courses, as though from the melting snows of Lebanon. Could he doubt that the Lord of Hosts was with them, and that the God of Jacob was their refuge? Though an host should encamp against him, his heart would not fear; though war should rise against him, in this he would be confident!

**The Miracle that Banished Mistrust.** *Consider the confidence of the people in his leadership.* Suppose that Amalek had come out against them in an earlier part of the march, and before these miracles of power had been wrought, through the instrumentality of Moses and his wonderful rod, might there not have been a good deal of questioning, whether it was well to leave him in uncontrolled command? There might have been an attempt to substitute a council of war, and to wrest from his aged hands the direction of the battle. But after what they had witnessed of his fellowship with Jehovah and of Jehovah's answer to his appeal, they had neither the will nor the opportunity to dispute his authority. He had deserved well of them: he stood right with God: his rod was the symbol of victory. Had it not smitten the flinty rock, so that the rock had been turned into a pool of water and the flint into a spring?<sup>1</sup> They too saw that stream, and heard the music of those waters, and even their murmurings were silenced and their mistrust banished.

**The Courage of the Hebrew Warriors.** *Consider also the courage of these chosen warriors.* Yesterday they were complaining that Moses had brought them into the wilderness; now they are actually adventuring their lives against a highly equipped and disciplined foe. They were strong in a confidence of which Amalek could form no conjecture. These ancient masters of the peninsula had said among themselves, "We shall easily prevail over this rabble of escaped slaves.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxiv. 8.

They have no water, do not understand the country, and possess few arms. They are harried, discouraged, and will easily fall our prey." Little did they know that God's people were nourished from secret springs, not of water alone, but of courage and faith. All these traits were directly due and traceable to the anguish out of which Israel had been so recently delivered by the Almighty.

But is that not the key to much of the experience that falls to our lot? Does not God lead us into sore straits, and deliver us, that we may be prepared for greater troubles which He sees ahead? He smites rocks of granite, to touch which blisters our hands, and makes even these yield supplies, that when presently we descry the troops of Amalek drawn up to dispute and arrest our progress, we may be of good courage, and know that the Lord will fight for and deliver us.

**The Uplifted Rod of Prayer.** THE LESSON OF THE UPLIFTED ROD. We are told that "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword"; but the edge of the sword would have been unavailing, had it not been for that uplifted rod.

At the opening of the battle, the great leader was seen by the troops ascending a spur of rock, well within view, first standing and then sitting, with the rod of God in his hand. Hour after hour, he remained there with the rod uplifted; and as the afternoon advanced in that long hard-fought day, it was noticed that on either side a venerable man upbore his wearied arms. "Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other, until the going down of the sun."

**Prayer is Labour.** That attitude has always been interpreted as significant of intercessory prayer. There are many among us who cannot go down into the battle, but can sit on their chair or lie on their couch and pray. Prayer is labour! We are told of Epaphras, when far from his people, that he laboured in prayer for the Colossian Church. Without doubt, prayer of the right kind means strenuous and exhausting labour. It is the most exhausting exercise that the soul can possibly sustain. But prayer makes all the difference in our fight against principalities and powers. When the arms of the Church are uplifted, her troops prevail, and when let down, they are defeated. Amalek could not connect the two, but Israel connected them. The outside world cannot understand why, just now, the Church is losing her hold on the masses, and so few additional adherents swell her ranks; but we know—her arms are sunken to the ground. If only they were uplifted, the legions of the Cross would advance

with their ancient prowess, and victory would attend their arms. Why do you fail in your Christian life? Because you have ceased to pray! Why does that young Christian prevail? Ah, in the first place, he prays for himself; but also, there are those in distant places, mothers, sisters, grandparents, who would think that they sinned, if they ceased to pray for him, and they will not fail to lift up their hands for him until the going down of the sun of their lives!

**A Symbol of God's Presence.** But though that is all true, it is not all the truth. There is no word about prayer in the narrative, and sitting is not precisely the attitude of prayer. Were not that uplifted hand and rod rather the symbols of the presence and help of God? Moses not only prayed that God would help them, but affirmed that He was helping, that He was in the field, that Amalek was being driven before the Lord and before His host. Faith, says Coleridge, is an affirmation and act, that makes eternal Truth be fact.

**Jehovah-Nissi.** This interpretation is confirmed by the subsequent action of Moses in building an altar, and calling it Jehovah-Nissi, "the Lord is my Banner." When we speak of a banner, we think of a flag, the piece of drapery which is attached to the banner-pole. But the ancients had only a pole with a bright metal ornament at the top. Moses' rod, then, was a banner in the Oriental use of the term. But a banner for what? For the host of Israel? No, but for that other host, the host of God's unseen embattled warriors that were riding to the fray. It was at that moment that Joshua must have received the first inkling of the great truth, which broke on him on the plains of Jericho, when the Angel of the Covenant said, "I am come as captain of another, a *third* host, of the Lord's host."

**The Key of Victory.** This is the key of victory. You may be peevish and petulant to-day, because you look only to Moses, i.e. to human strength and help; but directly you look beyond Moses to God, you become strong and glad, and in that very spot of Rephidim, the name of which you had changed into Meribah and Massah, you shall gain the victory of your life.

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour  
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make,  
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,  
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!  
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;  
We rise, and all the distant and the near,  
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;  
We kneel—how weak! We rise—how full of power."



THERE IS A MYSTICAL SIDE TO ALL THIS. (1) Israel represents the Church in her warfare against the religions of darkness, the wicked spirits that rule in the Heavenlies. She, with her Lord, is engaged in putting down all rule, authority, and power till God is all in all. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers."

**Symbolism of the Smitten Rock.** (2) The Smitten Rock is surely our Lord Jesus, smitten for us. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."<sup>1</sup> He was smitten for our offences, bruised for our iniquities! One of the soldiers pierced His side, and there came out blood and water! "Rock of Ages, cleft for me!"

(3) The Church must drink of that Rock-water, flowing clear as the Holy Spirit of Pentecost; so only will she be able to cope with her spiritual foes. Drink, ye thirsty souls, drink, yea, drink abundantly and deeply, for Amalek will be upon you to-morrow; but he will have no power at all against those who have cleansed themselves in the healing streams of the blood and have learned to drink of the living water.

"Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save me from its wrath and power."

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 4.

## THE ECONOMY OF FORCE

EXODUS xviii. 1-27

1. When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, *and* that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt;

2. Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back,

3. And her two sons; of which the name of the one *was* Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land:

4. And the name of the other *was* Eliezer; for the God of my father, *said he*, *was* mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:

5. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God:

6. And he said unto Moses, I thy father-in-law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her.

7. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of *their* welfare; and they came into the tent.

8. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, *and* all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and *how* the Lord delivered them.

9. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians.

10. And Jethro said, Blessed *be* the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

11. Now I know that the Lord *is* greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly *he was* above them.

12. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

13. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.

14. And when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What *is* this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?

15. And Moses said unto his father-in-law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God:

16. When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make *them* know the statutes of God, and his laws.

17. And Moses' father-in-law said unto him, The thing that thou doest *is* not good.

18. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that *is* with thee: for this thing *is* too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

19. Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God:

20. And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.

21. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:

22. And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, *that* every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee.

23. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee *so*, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.

24. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said,

25. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

26. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

27. And Moses let his father-in-law depart; and he went his way into his own land.

## XXII

# THE ECONOMY OF FORCE

EXODUS xviii. 1-27

**Jethro's Suggestion.** There is a noteworthy parallel between the circumstances narrated in this chapter and those of which we are informed in Acts vi. Here the Hebrew people, emerging from centuries of slavery and oppression, which had almost obliterated the spirit of nationality, suddenly assumes a highly organised condition. Out of Jethro's suggestion sprang an organisation which laid the foundations of the national polity, and has existed with more or less permanence amid all the other changes that have swept over that remarkable race. In Acts vi a similar movement was necessitated by the immense increase of converts.

"In these days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews. . . . And the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve Tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."<sup>1</sup>

In each case the increased organisation was a sign of vitality, and led to the immediate strengthening and increase of the entire movement. It is a great forward step in evolution, when the bony case which had been exterior, as in the crab, becomes interior, as in the mammal. Life always tends towards increased complexity in organisation.

**Jethro's Arrival.** *There is little to detain us in the circumstances which led up to this great step of advance.* Whether Jethro was the father-in-law or brother-in-law of Moses is still undecided by the experts, and does not greatly concern us. The Hebrew word may mean either. He had given shelter to Zipporah and her two sons until he heard of the Exodus; and then crossed the peninsula from

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi. 1-3.

the extreme east to the Mount of God, somewhere in the near neighbourhood of Horeb. First, he desired to renew the friendly relations which had subsisted during the forty years of companionship in pastoral and tribal interests; and secondly, he desired to restore the wife and boys whom he had received as a sacred trust.

**His Meeting with Moses.** The meeting was thoroughly Oriental. On the announcement of his approach, Moses went out to meet him, knelt down and touched the ground with his forehead, then kissing his relative's hand, he rose and kissed him on both cheeks. Each asked the other of his welfare with the minuteness and prolixity still characteristic of the sons of the desert, with whom time is a less precious commodity than with ourselves. The greetings of husband and wife, of father and children, would probably be reserved for the privacy of the tent.

As Moses told of the marvellous dealings of God with Israel, not only in delivering them from Pharaoh, but during all the travail of their journey, Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which Jehovah had shown, and burst out into an ascription of adoration and praise.

**Declaration of the Supremacy of God.** Perhaps, up to that hour, like the generality of the heathen, he had believed in a plurality of gods, and regarded the God of Israel as only one among many equals. But under the marvellous recital given by Moses, he renounced that creed, and declared his belief that Jehovah was supreme over all gods. How much might be done, if only religious men to-day would recount their experiences! Many a wavering scale would be turned in favour of true religion, if only you would begin to tell of God's dealings with your own life. "Go home to thy friends," said our Lord, to the man from whom He had cast a legion of demons, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."

**Orders of Religious Life.** It is remarkable that Jethro appears to have acted as priest in the sacrifice which followed. We have already been told that the sheikh was also the priest of Midian.<sup>1</sup> Like Melchizedek he was the priest of the Most High God. The fact of Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel participating in the sacred feast which followed shows that they recognised orders of religious life and priestly administration outside the limits of their own race: and this confirms us in the view, which surely needs no arguing, and which Malachi so clearly teaches: For from the rising

<sup>1</sup> iii. 1.

of the sun even unto the going down of the same, God's name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered in His name, and a pure offering.<sup>1</sup>

**A Striking Spectacle.** The spectacle he witnessed on the following day was remarkable. From morning till evening he beheld Moses sitting in the midst of a great throng of people, slowly ploughing his way through an immense number of causes, which were submitted to his adjudication. Even if we pare down the numbers of the Exodus to half, or a quarter, of a million of people, it is easy to see what an overwhelming task lay on the Lawgiver, who was called upon in his single person to combine the legislative and judicial functions.

**The Hebrew Character.** The difficulty lay, not only in the quantity but the quality of the people. The Hebrew character has always been stiff-necked and intractable. But, in addition, they had just emerged from generations of slavery, with all its debasing and demoralising effects. There were as yet no Decalogue nor code of laws. The very effect of their recent emancipation was to induce the idea that they were free to do as they chose. The first experiences of the French Revolution were bewildering and disappointing to all thoughtful souls. How Wordsworth laments it! It seemed as if all hope of Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood was to be drowned in a deluge of sensuality and bloodshed. So with Israel, they were no longer under the despotic rule of Pharaoh and his myrmidons. Their knowledge of Jehovah was extremely vague. There was no general standard of appeal. The very rebound from centuries of oppression was in the direction of self-assertion and lawlessness. In addition the recent rout of Amalek may have left in the possession of the victors an immense amount of costly property, as in the experience of Gideon afterwards.<sup>2</sup> Disputes about the proper division of these may have greatly added to the weight of that day's business.

**Weight of Responsibility Too Great.** In any case, at the end of the day, Moses was absolutely worn out, and even then the people were not satisfied. There was therefore justice in Jethro's remark: "Wasting thou wilt waste away, both thou and this people that is with thee."

**Jethro's Plan Adopted by Moses.** Jethro therefore suggested a division of labour, founded on the system still in vogue among the

<sup>1</sup> Mal. i. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Judges viii. 25, etc.

Arabs. Causes were in the first instance to be judged by rulers of tens,—which recalls our own tythings,—from which there was an appeal to the rulers of fifties, from them to the rulers of hundreds, and finally to the rulers of thousands. Difficult causes, which the rulers of thousands felt themselves incompetent to decide, were reserved for the judgment of Moses. After referring this to God, as was his wont, Moses adopted this good advice, and by this arrangement the whole nation profited immensely.

**Its Advantages.** *The advantages were obvious.* Moses was henceforth able to concentrate himself on the higher branches of his great calling. He was for the people *God-ward*, as mediator, looking into the bosom of God, where, as Hooker says, “Law hath her seat.” He had also time to bring the difficult causes to God. Then, turning to the people, he taught them the statutes and the laws, and showed them the way wherein they should walk and the work they should do.

**Calling Out Latent Talent.** Next, it immediately developed a large number of men whose very existence had, up to that moment, been hardly realised. In every community there is an untold wealth of latent talent; to every man grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. The King gives each of his servants the charge of talents, and none is absolutely destitute. It must have been rather surprising, however, to Moses to discover that there was a complete equipment for all the offices that had to be filled. “He chose able men out of all Israel.” These men might have developed into critics and schemers; but from the moment that they were entrusted with responsibility, they became staunch and useful allies. Not only were their talents saved from wastage and developed in useful directions, but the men themselves were redeemed and purified, their noblest qualities were evoked, and their characters saved from that prostitution of the best which always becomes the worst.

**Advantage to the Congregation.** The congregation also profited greatly by the swiftness with which disputes and quarrels were dealt with. Nothing is more hurtful to the individual or community than to leave a sore open. The longer a controversy lasts, the worse the tangle becomes, the more hot words are spoken, the more bystanders become involved. “Agree,” said our Lord, “with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him.”

There are three directions in which we may apply this subject: Church Administration; Christian Service; and Missionary Organisation.

**A Lesson for the Churches. I. CHURCH ADMINISTRATION.** It is a mistake for any one person, be he minister or layman, to monopolise many offices. Some ministers insist on keeping every department of Church life and Church work under control; some Sunday-school superintendents have apparently never learnt to educate their teachers to maintain the order of the school, or the children to feel that they may fill useful offices; and some Church officials, in their true desire to serve the Church, prefer to undertake more duties than they can perform satisfactorily, instead of setting to work to create or develop the younger men and women about them.

**Mr. Moody's Shrewd Saying.** Mr. Moody said shrewdly: It is better to set a hundred men to work, than do the work of a hundred men. You do a service to a man when you evoke his latent faculty. It is no kindness to others or service to God to do more than your share in the sacred duties of Church life. For the hand to do the work of the foot, or the eye intrude into the province of the ear, is to introduce anarchy and discord into body and soul. We are told that when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man he took him unto himself.<sup>1</sup> This is the law of Church consolidation and expansion.

**The Men We Want.** We must have in every Christian community our Moses, Aaron, and Hur, men who give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, men who are to God-ward, men who can inquire of God, who can teach statutes and laws, who can show the way in which we should walk, and the work we should do.

In every Christian community we must have men of affairs, whose character is admirably summed up in Jethro's words, *Men of ability!* Jethro evidently expected that there would be one man in ten who would commend himself as exceptionally able, and though to-day's standard of ability is higher than ever, the estimate is not too sanguine. They must be *men of piety!* "Such as fear God!" He who fears God will regard man; the unjust judge did neither. The Apostles asked for "seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." *Men of truth!* There can be no real piety without truthfulness, so that this qualification is in fact included in the last, and yet there is a semblance of piety which is not over-scrupulous as to veracity. This, however, is a bastard growth. *Men of uncorruptible honour!* In the East it is rare to find the office of judge exercised without a strong susceptibility to bribes. Like the sons

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xiv. 52.



of Samuel, the judges turn aside after lucre, take bribes, and pervert judgment. At whatever cost, let our nation preserve the great traditions which have always attached to our bench and legal profession! In all walks of life unbiased impartiality is of priceless worth to the community which is thus endowed.

**The Rank and File.** We must also in every Church have our warriors, who can encounter Amalek; our workers, whose deft fingers can build our Tabernacle; our financiers, who will see that no part of the Church-finance suffers; our singers; our aged men and women, who can sustain the duties of perpetual intercession; our boys and girls, inspiring us with their boundless hope and inexhaustible activity; our sufferers, who teach us tenderness and patience. Some must open the doors, some light the lamps, some lead the service of song, some preach, and others teach. There is no one who is not his neighbour's superior in some respect. There is no one from whom his neighbour may not learn something. It was necessary for Jethro to cross the desert to give Moses the conception of this organisation, which, one would suppose, ought to have occurred to him during his own ponderings over his failure to discharge his enormous tasks. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; or again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you."<sup>1</sup>

**Christ's Awards.** Some day we shall stand before our Lord, Who at His own judgment-seat—which must be distinguished from the judgment of the Great White Throne—will allot our rewards. At such time He will pursue a far different method than that adopted amongst even the best of us. We applaud the man who reaps the results, but He will equally congratulate those who ploughed and sowed to produce them. We allot the crown and palm to the pastor or evangelist whose fervent appeals win the largest number of accessions to the Church, but Christ will not forget the verger and the charwoman, the treasurer and the secretary, the organ-blower, and those who bring refreshment to the harvest-field. The players on instruments shall be there as well as the singers, and he that sowed shall rejoice with him who reaped. To each the reward will be apportioned, not according to the apparent results, but to the faithfulness with which each fulfilled his humble task. The smallest wheel in a big machine is able by its precision to promote, or its inexactitude to impair, the entire movement, just as a dispute among

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 21.

a few girls or in one class of operatives may throw out of employment hundreds of thousands, and affect a whole district. It is necessary, therefore, in adjudicating the rewards, that none be overlooked who have contributed, however slightly, to the general result.

**Personal Witness Necessary.** II. THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES IN THE SPREADING OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST. There is too strong a tendency in most congregations to leave the work of saving the lost to a salaried class. The plan of sending substitutes may have its advantages for heathen lands, but it cannot become universal, without serious loss to individual believers, as to the Church and the World. Your personal witness for Christ is an imperative obligation. You cannot evade it by any excuse as to your temperament, your nervousness, or your circumstances. The King makes no exceptions. His command is decisive. If we belong to His Church, we are bound to proclaim His love and death to every creature within our reach. You must speak of Him to your brother, your neighbour, and your fellow-citizen, saying, Know the Lord. He that heareth must say, *Come*. In this respect the converts on the mission fields set us a notable example, as we gather from the reports handed in to the recent Edinburgh Missionary Conference.

**Testimonies of Missionaries.** Bishop Tucker of Uganda wrote: The work of winning the souls of the people of this country to Christ is really being done by the natives themselves, under the supervision of the foreign missionaries. Dr. John Ross stated that of the 20,000 Church members in Manchuria, less than 100 had been led to Christ solely by the missionaries, and the remainder, 19,900, by the devoted labours of these newly-converted souls. Dr. Moffett of Korea has stated that the Korean Christians for the last ten years have been bringing in the converts faster than the missionaries have been able to provide instruction for them.

It is quite common, says Dr. Mott, in Korea, in Manchuria, and in other parts of China, for Christians to pledge themselves to give a certain number of days to the work of public preaching, as well as to speaking to individuals one by one, subscribing their time, just as we in the homelands subscribe our money. At one meeting, one Church member promised to devote to work of this kind, during the following year, one hundred and eighty days; and in reporting at the annual meeting a year later, he apologised because he had been able to give only one hundred and sixty-nine days.

**A Personal Call.** In view of these facts, shall we not, each one,

from to-day, dedicate ourselves to Christ for this service? Is it impossible to promise our Lord, that if He will open the door of opportunity, and give us a tongue and wisdom, which cannot be gainsaid, that we are willing to speak to some one daily on His claims? We shall not then have to assume any yoke of mere legalism, nor shall we force the matter on unwilling ears, but, as the opportunity offers, we shall look for the uprising impulse and the needed message. It is not what we do for Him, but what He does by us, that really tells.

“ Wherever in the world I am,  
In whatsoe’er estate,  
I have a fellowship of hearts,  
To keep and cultivate.  
And a work of lowly love to do  
For Him on Whom I wait.”

**How to Find a Good Investment.** It is the duty of the Chief Shepherd to call out His servants, who shall bear with Him the burden of the cure of souls; but it is His pleasure also to show each one in His Church the way in which he should walk, and the work which he should do. If you are in doubt as to the use that you should make of your one talent, at least bring it to the bankers, i.e. to the leaders of the Christian congregation with which you are connected, and they will show you how to invest it, that the Lord at His coming may receive it back with interest.

**The Work for Modern Apostles. III. THE SAME PRINCIPLE MAY BE APPLIED TO MISSIONARY ORGANISATION.** It is heart-rending to find how much of the precious time of missionaries is occupied in keeping accounts, attending to the repair of mission premises, and adjudicating matters which could as easily as not be dealt with by a godly layman. Every group of missionaries ought to have one competent business man attached to them, who could relieve them of these details.

It is clear, also, that missionaries, as the years go on, will have to avail themselves increasingly of the services of native converts. During my journey through India I came on one remarkable and godly man, whose service consisted in gathering around him a number of young men, with whom he ate and slept and lived, with the one object of reproducing himself in them, and sending them forth to tell out the Gospel. The Apostolic Peters of our time must concentrate themselves on the Corneliuses and the Priscillas on Apollos.

Alexander Duff, the pioneer missionary statesman, said that when the set time arrives, the real reformers of Hindustan will be well-qualified Hindus. Mackay said the same of Uganda, and Dr. Nevins of China.

**The Layman's Missionary Movement.** But without doubt all these questions, and similar ones, will be solved through the Layman's Missionary Movement, which is quite the most remarkable development of our time. It was inaugurated in New York in 1905, and has spread with amazing rapidity. Its aim is to interest laymen in the subject of Missions, and to lead them to recognise and accept responsibility to promote the cause of Missions, primarily in connection with their own Churches.

In Toronto, taking the five principal Christian Communions, we are told that in two years the contributions to foreign missions have practically doubled; £35,000 have become £70,000. But better, the movement has developed the lay leadership of the Church. Literally, and I can corroborate Dr. Mott's testimony on this point, thousands of laymen throughout the United States and Canada, who formerly had no interest in the subject, are now making speeches on Missions, leading Mission-study Circles, guiding missionary organisations, and conducting financial canvasses.

This is the far-away result of the spirit that animated Jethro in his advice to Moses, at the conclusion of which "he went his way into his own land."

**A Desirable Epitaph.** It is a pathetic conclusion to the chapter, but it is the epitaph which we may all desire to have recorded at the close of life. That we came for a few short days or years into the wilderness: that we had the grace to reverence and rejoice in all of good that we heard and saw: that we spoke words which lingered long after we were gone: that we relieved Moses from wasting away, initiated salutary reforms, and called out scores and hundreds of noble men, spoiling for want of work: and that we went our way back into our own country, in the Land o' the Leal.

## XXIII

### THE PREPARATION FOR THE GIVING OF THE LAW

EXODUS xix. 1-25

1. In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came *into* the wilderness of Sinai.

2. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come *to* the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

3. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

4. Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

5. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

6. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.

8. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord.

10. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their clothes.

11. And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

12. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, *that ye go not* up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount, shall be surely put to death:

13. There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether *it be* beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

14. And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.

15. And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at *your* wives.

16. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled.

17. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

18. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

19. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.

20. And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses *up* to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.

21. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.

22. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them.

23. And Moses said unto the Lord, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.

24. And the Lord said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them.

25. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

## XXIII

# THE PREPARATION FOR THE GIVING OF THE LAW

EXODUS xix. 1-25

**Was the Earth Made for Man?** To read the descriptions given by modern travellers of the scenery of the Sinaitic Peninsula, and especially of the heart of it, alluded to in this chapter, and to compare them with the events that took place there, creates the impression that it was prepared for this very purpose.

In the ages of Creation, the Divine Hand set itself to construct the localities which were to be specially associated with man's moral and spiritual development. Palestine, like a nest in the recesses of the hills, yet hard by the highway of the nations; Jerusalem, up-raised on its rocky plateau, amid the hills—"the joy of the whole earth"; the seven hills on which Rome sat, as mistress of the world through so many centuries,—these are illustrations of the work of the Divine Artificer, Who built our earth as the platform on which scenes were to transpire that were to affect the powers and principalities in heavenly places.

**God's Preparatory Actions.** If the moulding hand of God's purpose is manifest in these historic sites, may we not still more conclude that the action of glaciers, the rush of torrents, the deposits on the floor of oceans through uncounted aeons, the volcanic throes that rent and tore the surface of the earth and built up rocks of every hue, must have supplied the titanic implements employed by the Creator, Who was also the Judge of men, and desired to prepare a Tribune from which to announce His Law, and a Sanctuary in which to teach His people to worship?

**Arrival at Er Râheh and Sinai.** Leaving Rephidim, the pilgrim-host, led by the cloud, travelled slowly along the Wâdy-es-Sheykh, which still forms the great highway of the desert, running due east and west, from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Suez, until they came on

the plain *Er Râheh*, which means "the palm of the hand." It lies outspread from north to south two miles long and half-a-mile wide, nearly flat, and dotted over with tiny shrubs. On either side are mountains far higher than the loftiest mountain in Britain, composed of black and yellow granite, and at the end, blocking the southern extremity of the plain, rises the sheer precipice of Sinai, 1,200 to 1,500 feet in height—the Mount of God.

**God's Pulpit.** The peculiarity about this huge cliff is that it resembles, as nearly as possible, a colossal pulpit. It springs perpendicularly from the level of the plain, and might easily be touched, as though it were a wall, and in front are some slight alluvial mounds, on which the artificial railing was probably placed. From this pulpit on which the cloud brooded, the Almighty spake, in words that linger still upon the trembling air. Clouds and darkness were round about Him, and justice and righteousness were the habitation of His throne.

**An Ideally Chosen Spot.** No spot on earth, it has been affirmed, combines in a more remarkable manner the conditions of commanding height and of a plain in which the sights and sounds described here could reach the assemblage of two million souls. "That such a plain should exist at all in such a place," says Dean Stanley, "is so remarkable a coincidence with the sacred narrative as to furnish a strong internal argument, not merely of this being the actual scene of the giving of the law, but of it having been described by an eye-witness. All the surroundings suit the narrative. The awful and lengthened approach, as to some natural sanctuary, the long retiring sweep of the plain enabling the people to remove and stand afar off, the cliff rising like a huge altar, and visible against the sky in lonely grandeur from end to end of the whole plain." Those who, in Switzerland, have heard the shepherds and mountaineers speaking to each other across the valleys, quite a mile in width, will have no difficulty in understanding that even a human voice might be heard down that plain in the dry and quiet air.

**The Camp.** That part of the Peninsula abounds in water-springs, which are never dry; and though the heights are bare and wild, there are innumerable valleys of exceptional richness, and there must have been therefore an abundance of provision for the people and their cattle. Here the host encamped, little realising the long sojourn that was before them, and the world-wide, time-long importance of the events in which they were to take part. So far



in the history of the world nothing has happened, with the single exception of Bethlehem and Calvary, so august, so momentous, so sublime as the giving of the Law of God Himself at Sinai.

**God's Purpose about to be Explained.** THE OBJECTS FOR WHICH ISRAEL WAS BROUGHT INTO THIS VAST NATURAL TEMPLE WERE MANIFOLD. (1) *God desired to assure them of their unique relationship to Himself.* They had already seen what He had done for them. He had given Ethiopia and Egypt for them, had borne them on eagles' wings, had fed them with manna, had smitten the flinty rocks for them, had delivered them from Amalek, and now He desired to assure them that, as the children of Abraham His Friend, they were peculiarly dear to Him. They were to be a peculiar treasure among all peoples, a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

Do you look wistfully back on the privileges which were thus proposed for the chosen people? Remember that they were called with an earthly calling, whilst we with a heavenly. The Grace of God hath appeared, and our Saviour Jesus Christ hath given Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.<sup>1</sup> And so Peter said to the sojourners of the dispersion and to us, Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the praises of Him Who has called you out of a blacker darkness than that of Egypt to a gladder inheritance than of Canaan.<sup>2</sup>

**The Third Covenant.** (2) *God desired to enter into Covenant with them.* Scripture tells us of two Covenants that had already been made with man—the first with Noah, the second with Abraham. A third was now to be enacted, in fulfilment of pledges made four hundred and thirty years before.

A covenant is an understanding, a working basis, an agreement between the two covenanting parties, so that for each side may be stated their mutual rights and obligations. Does it seem, at the outset, altogether incredible that God, Whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, should condescend to enter into a compact with sinful man? It may seem so, if you degrade humanity and account men as worms or atoms. But if you realise, apart from sin, the greatness of man, his moral worth, his likeness to God, his creative powers, his patience, his hope, his love, then it will seem less wonderful that God should subordinate all else for the education of a being

<sup>1</sup> Titus ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 9.

who is capable of eternal fellowship with Himself, and who is doubly bound to Him, first by original creation and then by the blood of the Cross. How shall He not with Christ freely give us all things?

**The Covenant with the Israelites.** Still, God's covenant is with them that fear Him. Our Lord became the great Shepherd, because He sealed with His blood the new covenant which is opened and extended to each soul of man who will avail himself of its privileges and step out on its provisions. But how different is our covenant from theirs! That rested on the obedience of the people, an obedience which egregiously failed on that very spot; whereas ours rests on the obedience of Him in Whom we stand.

—**And with Us.** That consisted in *doing*, but ours in believing, which leads to doing. That for its reward had blessings largely temporal, whilst ours presents for our acceptance those which are incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading.

**Israel Governed by a Theocracy.** (3) *God desired to lay down the fundamental principles of His Government.* Israel was to be governed, not by a democracy, the rule of the people; nor by an aristocracy, the rule of the few; but by a theocracy, the rule of God; and here their Divine King announces the principles on which He is about to govern His people. No human sovereign could have been more careful for his people's welfare, or at more pains to lay down the beneficent requirements of his reign.

**A Method of Grace.** The Divine method is full of grace. First, God reveals Himself as the God of their fathers, then reminds them of all the goodness and mercy which He had shown, and finally challenges their faith and love. Had He commenced by uttering the Ten Words of the Law, or the precepts and statutes which follow, He might have aroused criticism and resistance. This is always the first effect of the Law. But there was nothing of this. No mutter of thunder, no blast of trumpet, no flash of the lightning's flashing sword. Nothing was attempted to frighten or compel the people's obedience. In His most winsome aspect their fathers' God reminds them of the mighty past, tells them of the relationship which He designs for them, and finally challenges their loyalty. It was only afterwards, when the people had declared that they would do as He had spoken, that the trumpet rung out its thrilling blast, and the requirements of God's holy law were enumerated.

**What the Giving of the Law Did.** But the giving of the Law had an aspect to the whole world. The Divine law is engraven on the moral

nature of man. The work of the law, says Paul, is written in men's hearts, their consciences bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts excusing or accusing them.<sup>1</sup> Else how could God judge the world? There must be one standard of appeal, one common denominator, one code of morality, not only set up in high heaven, but duplicated in each human breast. Otherwise it would not be possible to bring in all the world guilty before God. But it was necessary that these convictions of righteousness should be set forth authoritatively, in clear-cut and single majesty. Sir Walter Scott, in his *Old Mortality*, has depicted the peregrinations of a son of the Covenanting race, as he travelled throughout Scotland, removing the moss and lichens that had obliterated the inscriptions on the tombs of the mighty dead. This is precisely what the giving of the Law did. It would have had, comparatively speaking, small effect, if it had now been promulgated for the first time, as a new code of Morals. It is because God's code so precisely reflected and echoed man's deepest convictions, that the Decalogue, and the statutes which follow, have commanded universal respect.

**The Law but Repeating Dictates of Conscience.** It is wrong to steal, or murder, or covet, not primarily because these sins are forbidden by the Decalogue. They are forbidden by the Decalogue, because they were previously forbidden by conscience; and they are forbidden by conscience because they are forbidden by the nature of things; and the nature of things is God. It is right to love God with all our being, and our neighbours as ourselves, not because the Mosaic code says so, but because conscience says so; and conscience says so, because in the nature of things it is so, and because God is so. Thus Sinai is a pulpit whence God has addressed mankind.

**Why the Jews were Singled Out.** (4) *God desired also to impress on them the great truths which they were also to communicate to mankind.* He remembered that all the earth was His. Had He not made it, and put man upon it? Were not all souls His? Was He not responsible for them, as a shepherd for His flock? He could not rid Himself of the heavy burden which Creatorship had imposed. He had made, and therefore He must bear. When He said, "You shall be a peculiar treasure to Me," it was not that He proposed to monopolise that treasure for Himself, but that He might enrich the whole world by their words and songs, their character and gifts. When He said,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 15.

"Ye shall be a kingdom," it was not that they were to be merely a great realm ruled by Him, but that they were to go forth to reign in the earth. All were to help Him as kings and priests, calling back mankind to His Supremacy and ennobling them by their purity and prayers. If Israel were God's firstborn, then all the children were also His, and Israel were specially privileged that all the world might be brought into the close intimacy and high honour of the family of God.

**Why God Appeared as a Formless Cloud.** Consider how much light these thoughts cast on the Theophany of Sinai. All mankind at this time was deeply infected with idolatry. God as the Divine Spirit was seeking that men should appreciate His monotheism, and worship Him in spirit and in truth. If He had adopted any outward form, they would have seized upon it at once, reproduced it, and placed it in their shrines as an object of veneration. It was necessary that they should be thoroughly convinced of His Presence, and yet that there should be no outward form. Therefore, though Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended there, yet as Moses said afterwards they saw "no similitude."<sup>1</sup>

**A Sublime Creed.** How rich a revelation was this, and what a momentous effect it has had on all subsequent history! The Hebrew, the Christian, and the Moslem are to this hour existing to perpetuate this sublime Creed. The Lord our God is one God: a Spirit Who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth: and they repudiate all worship of images whatsoever, as likely to deteriorate the spirituality of the soul's fellowship with the Eternal.

**Covenant and Mediator.** It should be noticed also that the Covenant was promulgated through a Mediator. Paul says: "It was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator."<sup>2</sup> Three times apparently Moses went and came. As soon as the camp had been pitched, we were told that "Moses went up unto God." It was as though there had been some previous appointment that he should do this, and he was met by the voice of God telling him of the preciousness of Israel to Himself, and pleading for obedience—"If obeying, ye obey."

**Moses' Three Interviews with God on Sinai.** A second time he returns to God to bear the answer of the people: and a second time he was bidden to go down and bid the people prepare to meet their God when He came down. One of the results of that coming was

<sup>1</sup> Deut. iv. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Gal. iii. 19.

to be that the people should hear Jehovah speaking to him, and so believe him for ever. He went down to sanctify the people, to bid them wash their clothes, and put bounds and barriers around the mount, that none might touch it.

Yet once more, on the third day, when the smoke of Sinai ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly, because the Lord had come down, the Lord called His servant to the top of the mount, and said to him again, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish, and let the *priests* also sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them."

**People Forbidden to Approach Sinai.** It was absolutely necessary for mankind to learn the nature of holiness, and the awful contrast between God and humanity, between the Holy God and His sinful creatures. How could this lesson be impressed by mere words? They would convey no distinct or permanent impression. So God chose out of the human family one nation, which was separated and cleansed, so far as outward rites went. But even this people were deemed absolutely unfit to approach Him. Barriers must be erected, to keep them at a distance, which only one of their number might pass, and he their leader and saint. But even he exceedingly feared and quaked. No animal was to stay there under penalty of death, because the animal creation is closely related to man. If a man were to touch that mount, he would meet death; but no hand must touch him, he must be stoned or shot through. If even the priests broke through the barriers, they might be stricken with death. No lesson could have been more impressively taught: and it is for all time. Who would not fear Thee, Great God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? surely Holiness becometh Thy house. How shall we be thankful enough for Jesus Christ, in whom the Holiness of God shines so transcendently! and yet He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and is acquainted with our temptations and griefs. He lays His hands upon us both. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

**Contrast between God and Man.** This after all is always the first step in the soul's deepest union with God. We must somehow be brought to the point of realising and admitting the awful contrast between God and ourselves. There must be the bowed head, the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 5.

hushed voice, the reverent obeisance, and the broken heart. We must see ourselves, because we have seen God. We must see the King in His beauty, and cry, "Alas! I am undone!" We must behold Him as Job did, when he exchanged the hearing of the ear for the seeing of the eye. We must, like the publican, beat on our breast, as we go up to the Temple in prayer, saying, "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Only from such experiences at Sinai can we pass on to the beatific experiences of acceptance and peace.

**God's Awful Appearance.** It must have been a great spectacle on that third day. The dense clouds veiling the mountain-peaks and riven with lightning! The thunder like the rattle of an army of angel drums or salvoes of heavenly artillery, announcing the approach of God! The furnace flames that cast a lurid light upon the scene! The thrilling notes of the trumpet, "exceeding loud!" Only once again will the ear of man hear that resonant voice, "for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trump of God, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

But we are not come to the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, or unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest! No, the blackness hid the face of God from the eyes of our dying Lord! The darkness was the midnight in which He cried, "Why, My God, hast Thou forsaken Me!" The tempest is that which broke on the Cross and exhausted itself! Thank God, we are to the windward of the storm . . . for we are to come to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling.

## XXIV

### THE TEN WORDS

EXODUS xx. 1-17

1. And God spake all these words, saying,
2. I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
4. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth:
5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me;
6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.
7. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
8. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
9. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
10. But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the Lord thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates:
11. For *in* six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
12. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.
13. Thou shalt not kill.
14. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
15. Thou shalt not steal.
16. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
17. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

## XXIV

### THE TEN WORDS

EXODUS xx. 1-17

**The Decalogue for all Mankind.** The scene of the Giving of the Law is unparalleled in the history of our race. There is no single moment in the history of the nations—of Egypt, Babylon, or Rome, that can bear comparison with this august event. Search the annals of any nation under heaven, and there is but one report from every quarter. “Here were temples, pyramids, and palaces, wars and triumphs, discoveries and achievements, mythologies and ceremonials, but never is it recorded that God declared with audible voice His will.” This event was not for the Jews alone, but for mankind, not for an hour, but for all time.

**The Ten Words.** The phrase “Ten Commandments,” is suggested by our Lord’s words to the young ruler, “Keep the commandments.”<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew phrase for these Divine utterances is “The Ten Words.”<sup>2</sup> But they are also described as The Law, the Covenant, and the Tables of Testimony. They are distinguished from all other words, even of inspiration, by these three characteristics, (1) They were spoken by God Himself; (2) they were written by the finger of God on the Tables of Stone; and (3) they set forth His will for our human life, as He wrote it originally on the heart of man, and as He is writing it always in our hearts and lives by the regenerating grace of His Spirit.

**Distinction between Right and Wrong.** THE FOUNDATION OF LAW. What is the ultimate source of the distinction between Right and Wrong? Why is it wrong to steal, to commit adultery, or to do murder? Many might answer that question by saying: These actions were forbidden by God’s voice on Sinai: they are wrong, because He said *Thou shalt not*. But suppose that He had never said “Thou shalt not,” would they not still have been wrong? Or, travel back

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xix. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 28; Deut. iv. 13, marg.



to the long ages which preceded the giving of the Law, were they not equally wrong, though as yet Sinai had never trembled beneath the utterance of "the fiery law?"<sup>1</sup> Or go to lands and peoples that have never heard of Sinai, is it not clear that for them also these things are wrong? Clearly then, Rightness and Wrongness do not depend on the Law of Sinai.

**God Uttered Himself.** What then is the basis of the distinctions between right and wrong? For this we must go beyond the scene on Sinai, beyond the utterance of God, to the nature of things, older than Creation, older than the oldest angel, as old as eternity, i.e. from everlasting. These words were spoken here, because they had already been uttered by the Eternal Word; and He uttered them because they were in the foundations of His own Being. They were engraven on stone, because they had always been graven on the Universe. Is not this what the Psalmist meant, when he said, "Judgment and righteousness are the habitation of Thy throne?" It is for this reason that though Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled; and it is on this ground also that God is able to judge the world. As each of us carries a watch which declares for us privately and individually the time which is measured by the revolutions of worlds, so each moral being has first-hand knowledge of right and wrong. The moral law is written on the heart; and Sinai is a convenient epitome of the great sanctions within us, which bless each act of obedience, crying, "Blessed are ye," and which denounce their curse, when we fail to continue in all things written in the Book of the Law.

**The Law not Arbitrary but Necessary.** These rewards and punishments are therefore not arbitrary but necessary. Just as man, whilst an inhabitant of this world, is bound and limited by certain conditions, which are known as natural laws, to infringe any of which is to incur instant suffering, not by an arbitrary act of God, but in the nature of things: so if anyone infringes these great Words, defying them against the remonstrances of conscience and the acknowledged standards of rectitude, there is but one result—he must suffer. There cannot but be for him the fiery indignation of offended righteousness. He that has sinned against the laws of fire, of electricity, of gravitation, of health, dies without compassion; of how much sorer punishment, think ye, will they be thought worthy,

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 2.

who have trodden under foot the remonstrances of conscience, and have done despite to the Spirit of Grace!

**Heaven and Hell Necessary Outcomes of Conduct.** Men sometimes argue as though Heaven were an arbitrary gift, and hell an arbitrary infliction, as an estate to a loyal supporter of the monarchy, or the gaol for a felon. No! Each is the necessary outcome of a life. We go like Judas to our own places. Feathers float up, lead sinks down. They that by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and incorruption, cannot but enjoy eternal life. It is theirs in the nature of things. They are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, begin forthwith to suffer tribulation and anguish by the very nature of things.<sup>1</sup>

**Hooker's Dictum.** Again, therefore, we are reminded of Hooker's immortal dictum: "Of law there can be no less acknowledged, that her seat is in the bosom of God; her voice the harmony of the world." To be out of harmony with that voice, is to be out of harmony with oneself, with all holy beings, with the nature of things, and with God, whose Being is the Fountain of Grace and Blessedness. That discord is hell.

**Fourth Commandment.** It might at first sight seem that the Fourth Commandment, demanding the observance of the seventh day as the Rest-Day, were an exception to the assertion that the Decalogue is founded on the nature of things. Is this a matter of conscience? Does this rest on eternal and unalterable sanctions? Will its violation entail necessary rather than arbitrary penalty?

There is no difficulty in answering these questions in the affirmative. The Law of the Rest-Day is engraven on the physical nature of man. Even when the revolutionists of France determined to abolish every trace of the Christian faith, they felt that humanity must have a respite from incessant toil, and appointed one-rest-day in ten, which had afterwards to be altered back to the older arrangement.

**Man a Seven-Day Clock.** Man is a seven-day clock. He must be wound up with regular accuracy; and his soul needs time to adjust itself equally with the spirit. The sanctions for Sabbath-keeping lie deep in the heart of Nature, and for this reason it was included with the rest in the Ten Words.

**Majesty and Love.** THE INTRODUCTORY SENTENCE. "I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, out of

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 7.

the house of bondage." At Sinai, men have been wont to discern only the sterner and more terrible sides of God's nature, but in view of this tender preface it is difficult to maintain that view. Granted that the opening phrase, "I am Jehovah thy God," declares the majestic authority of the Eternal, does not that tender sequel, "that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," recall the love that espoused the nation when cast out "to the abhorring of their person"?<sup>1</sup>

**The Law Given for Man's Sake.** Mark the order. It is that of the Gospel. First, God saves, and then delivers His law. Because He had brought them out of darkness into marvellous light, therefore, as a return, He pleaded with them to remember His commandments to do them, not for His sake alone, but that it might be well with them during all their generations. It is out of love for us that God pleads with men. "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes . . . for our good always that He might preserve us alive, as at this day."<sup>2</sup>

**God's Order in Dealing with Israel.** Had He propounded these laws to Israel in Egypt, they would have turned from them in despair. Crushed with oppression, smarting under the lash of the taskmaster, with a sense of being forgotten and out of mind, they would not have hearkened, for bitterness of spirit. They could not have respected the will of a God who seemed powerless against the might of Pharaoh! Either the God of their fathers could not, or He would not help them, and in either case was not calculated to win or hold their respect.

But God did not begin by proclaiming His law in Egypt. He began by manifesting His greatness in actions that appealed powerfully to the imagination of the people whom He had set about redeeming. Why He had seemed to sleep so long, they knew not, but they had seen His mighty arm awake and make itself bare in the eyes of the heathen, and they were now prepared to listen to His voice, since those thunders and lightnings that played about Sinai had been launched on their foes, and had brought terror into the heart of Pharaoh and his advisers.

**"If Ye Love Me."** He had brought them as on eagles' wings to Himself. His manna was each morning awaiting their search, His waters were flowing from the flinty rocks, His guiding pillar was before their eyes. What more could they desire to show His love?

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xvi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. vi. 24.

But before us shines the more tender embodiment of God in Christ. He stoops to our mean life, treads our pathways, drinks of our cup, and is baptised with our baptism, then turns to us saying, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." He redeems us from the power of darkness, translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son, gives us His Son and Spirit, makes us heirs of an incorruptible inheritance and co-heirs with Christ, and then entreats us to walk in His ways and do His will.

**The Whole of Man.** With such a preamble, shall we not meditate on these words, as our Lord must have done till they nourish our innermost soul? "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Let us also remember those great words of the Preacher at the close of the Book of Ecclesiastes: "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep His Commandments; for this is the whole of man."<sup>1</sup> Not "the whole duty of man," as it is in the A.V., but "the whole of man." That is to say, if a man will fear God and keep His commandments, not to be redeemed, but as redeemed, not to win love, but because he is loved, not to be saved, but because he is saved—then he is a whole man, and therefore a holy one. All else is empty and vain, as the soap bubbles that break in the air. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, as he passes in review the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."<sup>2</sup> "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."<sup>3</sup> Because He has freed you, and brought you from the house of bondmen, render this your free and glad service.

**Division of the Decalogue.** THE CONTENTS OF THE DECALOGUE. *Note the divisions.* That there were ten is clear from Deut. x. 4, but opinions have differed as to how the material should be divided in order to give just *ten*. The division that we follow is that of the Prayer Book, the Greek Church, and the Reformed Church; but the Roman Church and the Lutherans combine our first and second into one, and break up our tenth into two. But this division does not acknowledge or emphasise the clear difference between having

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. xii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John ii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xii. 1-2.

another God than Jehovah, which is one form of sin, and making an image of Him, which is another.

It has been thought by some that since there were two stone-tables of the divine inscription, the ten commandments were equally divided between them, five on each. If this were so, the law about our honouring our parents would be on the same level with the four that refer to God, and this might be justified by the reflection that in honouring them we really honour Him, in Whom every family in heaven and earth is named. But on the whole the old Division is better into four and six, the first regarding our duty to God, and the second our duty to man.

**Duty to God First.** *Note the position of these two divisions.* Duty to God stands first, and lays the needful foundations for the right discharge of our duties to man. The Love of God is the foundation of all love to our fellows. Neglect the duties of piety, and you will soon neglect your duties to your neighbour. The Scripture does not ignore the distinction between Religion, i.e. the duties we owe to God, and Morality, i.e. the duties implicated through earthly relationships, but it unites the two in the deeper idea that all duty must be done to God, Who is above all, through all, and in all. The precepts of the first Table enjoin that God be honoured in His being, worship, name, and day. The precepts of the second follow naturally, requiring that he who loves God should love his brother also, who is made in the image of God; and surely that love implies that he will refrain from injuring him in deed, in word, and in thought, and neither in his person, his wife, his property, nor his reputation.

**Love and the Law.** *The whole of the Ten Words are gathered up in the one word Love.* Love is the fulfilling of the Law.<sup>1</sup> If a man should love God perfectly, but have never seen the Decalogue, and if after years of holy communion with God, he should suddenly meet with this enumeration of the Divine Code, there would be no new feature that he would have to introduce into his behaviour, and no newly discovered wrong that he would have to avoid. On the other hand, it is certain that, apart from love, obedience to the law of God is impossible. The heart of the Ten Words is contained in verse 6: "Showing mercy unto thousands that love Me and keep My commandments." It is in proportion as we love Him, that we can obey Him! Whatever of outward service or obedience we render

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii. 8-10.

to God or man, if love is withheld, the law is not fulfilled. "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth nothing."

**The Supreme Necessity of Love.** It is impossible to worship God in spirit and in truth, to reverence His Name, or delight in His Day, unless we love Him. It is impossible to keep the heart free from malice, hate, covetousness, and passion, except as it is possessed and filled by the opposite principle of love. Therefore when in answer to the challenge of His critics, our Lord refused to particularise any one of the Ten Words, but summed up the first table of the Law by saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"; and summed up the second by saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," we can repeat the comment of His interlocutor, and say, "Master, Thou hast well said! There is none other commandment greater than these!"

**The Decalogue a Unity.** *The Decalogue is therefore a Unity.* In the Epistle of James, we are told by that austere son of the Law that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all."<sup>1</sup> It seems a severe utterance. We are apt to think that if we obey nine out of the ten Commandments our obedience will be put to our credit, even though we fail in the tenth. But in thinking thus, we ignore the fact that the ten words of Sinai are not ten separate enactments, having no connection with each other, except that they are included in the same code.

**Ten Aspects of God.** Remember that they are ten aspects of the Holiness of God, as it looks out on different phases of human life. If then we infringe one particular, we are proved to be deficient in perfect holiness. A perfectly good man cannot fail in any single point; just as a man cannot make a single provincialism in his speech, without betraying himself to be a Galilean. We only live, as we ponder and obey *every* word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

**The Law a Revealing Power.** *These ten words imply that sin is in the world.* Looked at from this standpoint, what a revelation is this of the evils of our hearts! You can judge of a nation by its statute-book, and you may judge of the heart of humanity by these ten words. Evidently it finds it hard to worship the one God apart from some symbol, it turns aside to vanity, it ignores His worship

<sup>1</sup> Jas. ii. 10.

and rest, it is full of uncleanness, and hatred, of coveting and theft. "Out of the heart of men," said our Lord, "evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, coverings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness."<sup>1</sup> Judging from our knowledge of ourselves, and of the world around us, we are quite prepared to accept this enumeration, for there is not one of this terrible catalogue that is not included in these prohibitions. Is it not a grievous thing, that such a nature is ours by inheritance? How eagerly we need to utter the old prayer: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name." How gladly should we cling to the promise, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. . . . And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."<sup>2</sup>

**The Law becomes Death.** *The Relation of the Law to the Gospel.* In his profound self-anatomy, the great Apostle says that the commandment is holy, just, and good, but that it slew him.<sup>3</sup> What was good in itself became death to him, i.e. when he came to realise its perfectness and purity, his hope of ever being able to fulfil it, or to win the favour of God by fulfilling it, died. To use Bunyan's figure,—before he realised the claims and spirituality of the law, his heart had resembled an unswept room, in which the dust of months, undisturbed by the broom, lies in thick layers, though to a superficial gaze, viewing it in the twilight, it appears swept, cleansed, and garnished. But when the full light of the law fell on him and searched him, when he stood face to face with the mirror of eternal truth, and saw himself as he really was, he knew that he could never fulfil its high and holy demands. He died to self-confidence, died to self-satisfaction, died to the hope of ever gaining eternal life. Nay, more, the law even stirred up the slumbering evil of his nature by its prohibitions. Tell a child not to do a thing,—not to open a cupboard, not to break the seal of a letter—and you at once stir its whole nature to revolt. So Paul says sadly, "Sin revived, and I died." This is the invariable experience of those who observe carefully the phases of experience through which the soul passes.

**Law from Moses, but Grace by Christ.** What hope is there? None

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. vii. 11.

from man, but everything from Christ. We are, as the Apostle says, shut up to Him. The Law came through Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> "For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."<sup>2</sup>

First our Lord fulfilled the obligations of the Law to the last detail. He was made under the Law for this very purpose. He magnified it by His absolute obedience to all its jots and tittles. Not only did He abstain from its negative prohibitions, but He realised its positive requirements. When He died on the cross, He bore the sin and guilt of the world, and bearing them, delivered us from their curse. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us."<sup>3</sup> Dare to believe that He bare thy sins on His own body on the tree, and freed thee for ever from the house of thy sad and weary bondage. "Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins; and by Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."<sup>4</sup>

Then, when we are redeemed, the Lord by His Spirit comes to live within us, and the Spirit of His life repeats in us His own life, His life of love and obedience and righteousness. "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John i. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. iii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xiii. 38, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. iii. 31.



## XXV

### THE MOUNT THAT MIGHT BE TOUCHED

EXODUS xx. 18-21; HEBREWS xii. 18-22

18. And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off.

19. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

20. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

21. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*.

18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

19. And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which *voice* they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

20. (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

21. And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

22. But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.

## XXV

# THE MOUNT THAT MIGHT BE TOUCHED

EXODUS xx. 18-21; HEBREWS xii. 18-22

**The People at Sinai.** The Hebrew people had seen a great sight, in which no other people have shared. As they stood massed in the level plain at the foot of Sinai, they had beheld the Divine Theophany.

“The earth trembled,  
The heavens also dropped at the presence of God:  
Even yon Sinai trembled at the presence of God, the God of Israel.”

Such is the description of the Psalmist (Ps. lxxviii. 8).

“When God of old came down from Heaven,  
In power and wrath He came:  
Before His feet the clouds were riven,  
Half darkness, and half flame.”

Such is the description of our modern time.<sup>1</sup>

**Their Dread.** The effect produced on the people by these accumulated terrors was panic-stricken flight. “They removed and stood afar off.” They thought that they must die. They requested that Moses would act as mediator. “They said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” They were glad to participate in God’s merciful providence, and to believe that He was the unseen background of their life. They had sung His praise on the shores of the Red Sea; they had thankfully appropriated the supplies with which He enriched the desert wastes; they had rejoiced in the shadow of the brooding-cloud by day, and the light of the pillar of fire by night. But there they stayed. They were unwilling that the naked beam of the Deity, unveiled and undiluted, should shine forth upon their mortal vision.

**Man and the Divine Scrutiny.** This tendency is characteristic of us all. We are quite prepared to admit the existence and providence

<sup>1</sup> Keble: *The Christian Year*, “Whitsunday.”

of God, but we do not desire that He should obtrude His presence too obviously. The mass of men turn and hide their faces, or run away when the profounder aspects of life present themselves, much as a sensitive person will hurry past when there has been a terrible accident in the street, with which he feels incompetent to deal. Men do not object to think of God in His high heaven, but they object to conceive of each common bush as being aflame with the Divine fire.

**The Reluctance of the Religious Professor.** *Take the normal religious man.* True religion welcomes God's life and light into the innermost recesses of the soul, yields to Him the key of every department of life, views His hand in each particular providence, believes that no hair falls from the curly head of the child or the thin locks of age without the Father. But the typical church-goer of the time shrinks in alarm from such a Divine interpenetration of life. "Not so near!" he cries in apprehensive tones; and then bids his priest or minister, his creed or sacrament, his church or meeting-house become his Moses, to mediate God and supply the smoked glass, that the tempered light may be mitigated for his seeing. "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak, lest we die."

What a contrast is this to the condition of soul that says with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," or, with David, "Be not silent unto me, lest if Thou be silent unto me, I become like unto them that go down into the pit." We are thankful for Moses, thankful for the Creed and the Church, but we cannot be content with these; our heart and our flesh cry out for the living God—"When shall we come and appear before God?"

**The Reluctance of the Men of Science.** *Take the case of science.* There is, of course, a noble army of scientific men who have passed up the shining staircase of Nature into God's pavilion. But with many others it is not so. They set themselves to ascertain the facts of the universe, to arrange those facts into laws, to describe the action of the dynamic forces that operate through those laws. But there they stay their footsteps. When the light of a personal intelligence and will beyond Nature begins to glimmer on their souls, they draw back, and begin to talk of laws, of forces, of an eternal something not themselves. Their feet are on the mountain-path that culminates in God, but they turn aside, when they are on the verge of the greatest discovery of all. "Let not God speak to us, lest we die!"

**The Reluctance of the Politician.** *Take the case of modern politics.* No one thinks of quoting the Bible in the chamber of legislation, or enforcing an argument with the teaching of Christ. When we argue for the rest-day, it is not because God made and hallowed it, or because our spiritual nature requires an opportunity for worship but because our physical nature requires for its efficiency a periodic rest. When we speak of ameliorative legislation, it is not because the love of God demands the love of man, but because we would provide against revolution. And even if missions are argued for, it is because they exert a civilising influence and promote trade. Are not these methods of expression which are artfully designed to evade the profoundest aspects of human life, the noblest sanctions of human conduct? "Let not God speak to us, lest we die."

**A Contrast.** We cannot help contrasting this attitude of mind and speech with the conduct of that much-misunderstood and thoughtlessly abused body, of whom Macaulay wrote: "They were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging in general terms an over-ruling providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of a Being, for whose power nothing was too vast and for whose inspection nothing was too minute. . . . Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on His intolerable brightness, and to commune with Him face to face. . . . The Puritan therefore was never alarmed, when he was bidden to stand still and listen to the voice of God. His closet and his church were full of the reverberations of that awful, gracious, and beautiful voice for which he listened. He made little of sacraments and priests, because God was so intensely real to him. What should he do with lenses, who stood in the full torrent of the sunshine!"<sup>1</sup>

**Causes of this Reluctance.** This reluctance, on the part of ordinary men, to recognise the near presence of God arises from *three remediable causes*, which will repay our careful consideration.

**The Purpose of our Existence Misunderstood.** (1) *We are in danger of mistaking the true intention of our existence.* Existence is from the Latin *ex*, out, *sto*, to stand. We have been called into existence that we may live, and move, and have our being in God, and *know* that we were doing so. We were made for God. Our soul was intended to communicate with the great Spirit, through our

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Milton.

spirit. What the water is to the fish, what air is to the bird, what sunshine is to the eagle, that God's nature was intended to be to ours. As well might the fish ask not to be thrown into the water, or the bird ask that its cage-door might not be opened, admitting it to the air, or the eagle fly into a darksome cage, away from the glorious sunlight, as that any man should say, "Let God not speak to me, lest I die." The exact contrary is true: If God does not speak to us, we shall die; for the Speech of God is Jesus Christ, THE WORD.

—**From our Contact with the World.** But the soul has yielded to the binding, blighting influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that antipodean trinity below which is the antithesis of the blessed Trinity above. Through the senses of the body, the soul has come under the dominion of the earth-sphere, and so by long and evil habits has lost its sensitiveness to the spiritual and eternal. The eyes of the heart have become blinded, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God should shine in upon the soul. It is as though a man had been so long imprisoned in darkness, that when liberty is at last granted him, he preferred to remain in his cell, to bearing the glare of sunshine or mixing in the unaccustomed life of his fellows. Many of the animals in our Zoological Gardens have become so accustomed to their unnatural conditions, that they would soon perish, if emancipated, and set to find the means of livelihood for themselves. Similarly the soul of man has dwelt so long and habitually in the life of the senses, that the spiritual function has become starved, perhaps atrophied. "The Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit." Men forget that they came from God, that they need God, that they are akin to God, having been made in His image and after His likeness, and that they can never be truly at rest till they rest in Him. It is for such reason that they cry, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die!"

—**Remedied through Christ.** All this is altered in Christ. He comes to the sepulchre of sense, where the spirit lies entombed, and bids it awake, arise, and come forth. "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." We are born again of the Spirit, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The soul begins to use the wonderful apparatus of the spirit towards God, as formerly it used only the apparatus of the physical body towards the material world. And suddenly it awakens to see things which the physical eye had not seen, and to hear things which the physical ear had not heard, and to enjoy delights which the heart of the ordinary man has never

conceived of; but which God has prepared for those who live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and are therefore endowed with spiritual discernment. The things of Christ are not known, save by those who are born of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned. Only the twice-born can see the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. But when once the soul has seen them, it counts all things but loss for the excellency of that knowledge, and reckons them but dross in comparison. Then the cry becomes: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life."

**The Consciousness of Sin is Powerful.** There is yet another reason: (2) *We are deeply conscious of sinnership.* The holiest are most conscious of their failure. They have done what they ought not, and have not done what they ought. They know that there is no health in them. There is not one who has not missed the mark. So many resolutions have been like spent arrows, so many have flown wide of the golden centre. "I was shapen in iniquity," says one, "and in sin did my mother conceive me." "Among whom," says another, "we all had our conversation in time past, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

But those who are yet in their sins, swept before temptation, as leaves before the autumn breeze, are also deeply conscious of sinnership. It is for this reason that they contrive, if possible, never to be alone, and that they rush through an unending series of diversions. Yes! that is the word—*diversion*. Everything must be sought and tried that promises to divert their thoughts from themselves. These people, as our Lord said, hate the light, and refuse to come to the light. They avoid the society of good people, will change seats on an ocean-going steamer rather than face for a week at meals a minister of religion; will banish from their houses the godly servant-maid, and from their shelves the religious book.

**The Reminder of God Resented.** And why all these precautions? Because the presence of anything that reminds them of God hurts their conscience, as daylight a diseased eye, or salt an open wound. "Where shall I go from Thy presence? or whither shall I flee from Thy Spirit?" is a question they put from quite other motives than animated the Psalmist. If the wings of the morning, or the uttermost parts of the sea; if hell itself; if the darkness of the darkest cave; if rocks and mountains would only hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the Lamb,—how gladly would

they face any sacrifice, any distance, any other deprivation! It is for such reasons that they cry, "Let not God speak with us!" The strange thing is, that these people should desire to go to heaven when they die. What incongruity of thought! To be so afraid of the revealed presence of God here, and yet to desire the place of all others where "they see His face." But even in heaven it is improbable that they would see Him. A blind man might be face to face with a king without seeing him. A deaf man may sit amid ravishing music, and not hear a chord.

**The Remedy in Christ.** But our Lord has altered that. He has taught us that all sin and guilt are put away instantly and for ever for those who are penitent and believing. They shall not be remembered nor brought to mind; not even mentioned from the judgment throne; obliterated as a cloud from the summer sky; lost as a pebble in the depths of the sea! He clothes us in the white robe, frees us from the law of sin and death, puts a new song in our mouth, and presents us to the Father without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The supreme end and aim of our Saviour's work on our behalf is to bring us to God (1 Peter iii. 18).

**Man is Deemed More Merciful than God.** There is, lastly (3), *a lurking belief in the heart of man that man is more merciful than God.* It is for this reason that men have created priests, who might bear gently with the ignorant and erring, because they themselves were compassed with infirmity, and needed to offer sacrifices for themselves. It was for this reason that the worship of the Madonna obtained so wide a vogue, especially in the Middle Ages.

—**But God's Mercy is Revealed in Christ.** And it is for this reason, knowing our frailty and accommodating Himself to our weak faith, that God manifested Himself in human flesh. "It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, and make intercession for the sins of the people." Remember also how He said Himself to the despairing appeal of Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" No woman's heart is so tender, no mother's hand is so gentle, no father's care of his helpless babes is so pitiful as God's. He who made the dove's tenderness for her nestlings, or the sensitive watchfulness of the fallow-deer for her fawn, is surely more sensitive than either. He who causes the dew to distil, the light to fall so gently on our earth after its swift flight from the sun, and the soft rain to drop so lightly that it does

not break the petals of an overblown rose, cannot be devoid of a similar delicacy to those who are weary and heavy laden, or as the feebly smoking flax and the bruised, broken reed. Is it not written in the same chapter, that He who sustains the stars in their mighty orbits, and calls them by their names, in the greatness of His power will also gently lead the ewes that are with young?

**Let Us, then, Draw Near.** Therefore the sacred writers cry exultingly, "Let us draw near with boldness, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water"; and again, "Ye who were once afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"; and again, "Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, or to blackness, and darkness, and tempest . . . but ye are come to Mount Sion, the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; to the Church of the First-Born; to God the Judge of all; to the spirits of just men made perfect; to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that bespeaketh better things than that of Abel." This is the ladder let down from heaven to earth. Let us reverse it, beginning from the last clause, and climb through the glowing links of this sublime sentence till we are permitted to dwell habitually in the City of God!