

THE
WAYS
OF
PROVIDENCE



R. ROBERTS

WAYS OF PROVIDENCE.

64. Belgrave Road
Birmingham
Sept-21st 1933

To my Dear David on
his fifty third - Birth-
-day- from his loving
Mother

E Roberts

THE
WAYS OF PROVIDENCE

AS
AUTHENTICALLY ILLUSTRATED

IN
Bible History;

WITH THREE CHAPTERS ON THE MOST SANGUINARY PASSAGE IN HUMAN HISTORY,
VIZ:—

THE OVERTHROW OF THE JEWISH COMMONWEALTH
BY THE ROMANS,
AND
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY TITUS.

BY ROBERT ROBERTS, OF BIRMINGHAM,

Editor of "The Christadelphian;" and Author of "Twelve Lectures on the True Teaching of the Bible;" "Seasons of Comfort;" "Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse;" and other works.

BIRMINGHAM:

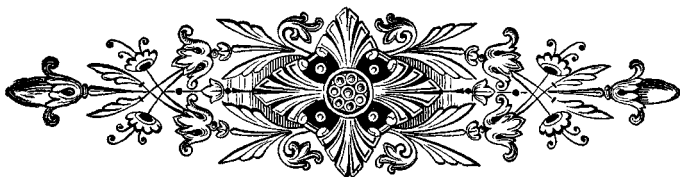
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR, ATHENÆUM ROOMS, TEMPLE ROW.

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1881.

Price Three Shillings.

LONDON.

J. DAVIS, PRINTER, STEAM WORKS, 201, OLD KENT ROAD, S E.



P R E F A C E.



OME time ago, a newspaper account of an accident spoke of the escape of a certain person as "providential." A reader wrote to the paper objecting to this mode of describing a natural occurrence. Another replied in defence of the reporter's phraseology, whereupon there sprang up quite a breezy controversy on the nature of providence, or whether there was such a thing at all.

The following chapters may be regarded as a contribution to this controversy, without, however, taking part in the particular fight occasioned. It is a contribution standing apart from the dispute of the combatants. It stands upon grounds totally different from those on which they argued the case. It recognizes the operation of the fixed laws of nature as evident to universal experience, and demonstrated by the experiments of science. But at the same time it accepts the higher form of truth presented to us in the Hebrew scriptures—prophetic and apostolic.

It proceeds on the assumption that the Bible is divine—an assumption which the author does not accept without the conviction of its demonstrability from a variety of sources. Looking at the Bible as divine, the author is concerned to know and exhibit the Bible doctrine of providence only, believing that outside the Bible channel, we can gather no reliable notions of providence whatever, but lose ourselves in the mist of speculation and uncertainty. Inside the Bible channel, we get definite notions—clear light and valuable guidance on all matters affecting human life as at present troublously exhibited on earth, whether as regards individual well-being or national development.

In the illustration of these, the author devotes himself to a work which is entirely out of harmony with the modern intellectual temper, and unsuited to the popular taste, but which, nevertheless, he believes to be a truly useful work that will be appreciated whenever and wherever the Bible comes to be estimated at its true worth, as the embodiment of the ideas and works of God among men.

THE AUTHOR.

BIRMINGHAM,

27th July, 1881.



CONTENTS.



PREFACE.....	<i>Pages</i> i. & ii.
--------------	--------------------------

CHAPTER I.—PROVIDENCE.

Loose notions of providence —Importance of right views.—The Bible the only source of reliable information —Helplessness apart from it — The danger of not being impressed by it while theoretically believing it—Classical learning of no value in this matter —Bible ideas and illustration of providence —Such a thing as "chance."—A first principle of the subject.—The relation of the universe to God.—Divine volition <i>versus</i> the mechanical action of nature —The platform of providence —Some things God's doings, and some not, though all things constituted of God and existing in Him	1
--	---

CHAPTER II.—GOD.

The next principle —Individuality of the Creator —Scripture illustrations — Localization in heaven of His being.—The physical glory and form of His person —The scientific bearing of the idea considered.—The angels.— Their relation to the Eternal Father and their place in the execution of His plans everywhere —Scriptural illustrations —Angelic agency the leading element in the operations of providence.—The necessity for providence	10
---	----

CHAPTER III.—ABRAHAM.

Page

Miracle as distinguished from providence.—The practical illustration of the latter.—Abraham.—Abimelech withheld from touching Abraham's wife — A privilege accessible now —The sending away of Hagar —Grievous in Abraham's eyes, yet for his good —Ishmael blessed for Abraham's sake.— A lesson for all times —Ishmael made a nation.—The Divine hand in politics.—Marriage of Isaac and Ishmael.—The "marriage question."— Divine guidance in the case of Isaac.—Eliezer's angelically guided visit to Mesopotamia 24

CHAPTER IV.—ISAAC.

Providence in the life of Isaac.—The promised seed.—Barrenness of Rebecca.— Faith and patience —Prayer and its answer.—Apparently natural, but God-given.—Isaac's contemplated removal to Egypt because of famine — The command to remain where he was —God with him —How manifest — A lesson.—Isaac doing his best —Faith and presumption.—The hand of God in common life —Isaac's departure to Gerar —The strife about the wells —Meekness of Isaac —His removal to Beersheba.—Cheering words to him from God —Similar words to all his children.—God "with" a man, and how we know it 33

CHAPTER V.—JACOB.

The life of Jacob.—Abundant illustration of the ways of providence.—Angelic guidance in it all.—The angelic hand not seen.—Jacob and Esau —Why Jacob was chosen, though the younger —Isaac's preference for Esau.— Esau's possession of the birthright.—How it was transferred to Jacob — The incident of the pottage.—Its moral bearings.—Importance of common incidents.—Isaac's parting blessing.—The importance of Jacob receiving it.—How it was diverted from Esau contrary to Isaac's intentions.—The deception involved.—How it is to be regarded.—Human speculations on the nature of "morality"—The true standard 45

CHAPTER VI.—JACOB (*continued*).

Esau's anger at the loss of the blessing.—His threatening attitude towards Jacob.—Jacob's departure to Padan-aram in quest of a wife.—Why he did not seek one among the daughters of the land.—Important influence of the marriage relation —A good wife "from the Lord."—The right sort not appreciated by the Ishmaels and the Esaus.—Providential guidance of

Page

the Jacobs.—The promise to Jacob that God was with him —His life read in this light.—Not unmixed prosperity —Rigorous service in the field.—An austere master —Affliction and labour.—Trouble no sign that a man is deserted by God —Jacob's fears and precautions —His return home with wives and children.—His terror at the prospect of meeting Esau —His prayer, his conciliatory arrangements and the result.—Our lesson 57

CHAPTER VII.—JACOB (*continued*).

Jacob and the completeness of his case as illustrating providence.—The abduction of Dinah.—Her violent recovery and the slaughter of the abductors by Simeon and Levi.—Jacob's fear of the consequence.—Divine directions.—The terror of God on the neighbouring tribes.—Divine help not always apparent —Evil allowed sometimes in punishment, sometimes in vindication —Presumption excluded by the method of divine ways —Constant need for faith and obedience.—The present state an evil state —Divinely regulated on behalf of those whom God will choose —Jacob as a broken hearted father —Joseph's disappearance —Twenty years of darkness for Jacob, ending with famine, and greater darkness still.—The visit of his sons to Egypt —Their rough experiences —The joyful end of the matter 79

CHAPTER VIII.—JOSEPH

The case of Joseph —A providential work of God placed beyond question by explicit testimony.—His troubled youth at home —His dreams.—Dreams that are divine, and dreams that are not —Joseph hated of his brethren.—Adversity a needful preparation for exaltation —Put into a pit.—Sold to traders.—Taken to Egypt.—From one dreadful experience to another—God with him, though not apparently so —A lesson to his brethren of all ages —Joseph's cheerful service in Potiphar's house —His false accusation by Potiphar's wife.—His imprisonment —The aggravated dreadfulness of his position —A little easement by and bye.—The lessons of the case.—Arrival of the butler and baker as prisoners.—The circumstances leading to Joseph's release —His promotion to the governorship of Egypt —His treatment of his brethren 85

CHAPTER IX.—MOSES.

The case of Moses.—The providential (apparently natural) features.—Arrival of the time of the promised deliverance from Egypt —God disposing events in preparation beforehand, yet not in a visible manner —Moses born —The edict for the drowning of the male Hebrew children.—Deposit of Moses

by the river brink in the ark of bulrushes.—Arrival of Pharaoh's daughter to bathe.—What followed.—His education by his mother.—His manhood at the court of Pharaoh.—His interpretation of providence.—His judicial slaughter of an Egyptian.—His flight from Egypt.—His life in Midian.—The quietness of the whole situation, yet a tremendous crisis impending.—Its commencement with the burning bush 100

CHAPTER X.—MOSES (*continued*).

The work of Moses.—The character of Pharaoh.—The result to be achieved by divine interference.—The nature of the interference.—A plain political issue.—The hardening of Pharaoh's heart.—The moral difficulties considered.—The raising up of providential men.—Apparently natural, yet divine.—The hand of God in public affairs.—Some things not divine.—Israel's multiplication in Egypt.—What God does, and what He does not do.—Modern applications.—God "with" Israel and God not with Israel.—The difference illustrated.—Human effort useless without divine co-operation.—Wrong applications of the principle.—Man's part necessary to God's part, yet the accomplishment all of God 115

CHAPTER XI.—MOSES (*continued*).

The conquest of Bashan.—God gave the land, yet Israel had to conquer.—Modern application of the principle.—The message of Moses to Sihon.—A wise way of doing divine work.—The action of Moses.—A clue to the work of Christ at His coming.—Proposals to the nations before destruction.—God with Joshua after the death of Moses, yet success dependent on Joshua's measures.—Providence towards the nations.—The moral state of the Amorites a reason for Israel's destruction of them.—The principle in modern times.—God's use of the Gentile nations in carrying out His purposes.—God's own explanations in the prophets.—God at work when men often cannot discern.—Individual application . . . 129

CHAPTER XII.—JOSHUA.

After the death of Moses.—Joshua to be brave.—Intrepidity required of the servants of God.—Jeremiah—Ezekiel.—The need for courage in Joshua's case.—The need in later times, as apostolically commended.—Joshua's adoption of wise measures.—The spying of Jericho.—The report of the spies.—The importance of casual information sometimes.—The case of Gideon.—Modern cases.—The campaign after the fall of Jericho.—The hardening of the hearts of the Canaanitish nations. 142

CHAPTER XIII.—THE JUDGES.

	<i>Page</i>
Unfinished state of the Amorite conquest at the death of Joshua.—The "chariots of iron" a difficulty to Judah, and why.—The divine thwarting of Israel's success for reasons specified.—The process apparently natural.—Causes of defeat and success.—Providential cases and multitudes of non-providential matters in newspaper records and daily life.—European politics angelically regulated.—The times of the Judges.—The divine strengthening of the adversary against Israel.—The source of all efficiency.—Human complacency and boasting irrational.—The tragedy of Abimelech.—Divine retribution rendered by natural means.—An instructive case.—The particulars.—The case of Samson	152

CHAPTER XIV.—SAMUEL.

The case of Eli.—The divine destruction of his house in a natural way.—Samuel raised up of God, yet brought upon the scene through natural circumstances.—Israel's request for a king.—Samuel's grief.—God's directions to Samuel to comply.—The divine sending of Saul.—How he was sent.—The lost asses.—God at work sometimes in the most unlikely circumstances.—God not in every circumstance.—Saul trying to force providence.—David apparently retiring before it.—An important lesson.—The choice of David.—His preparation beforehand an apparently natural work	166
--	-----

CHAPTER XV.—DAVID.

Life of David.—Brimming with instruction in the ways of God.—Divine deliverances accomplished in a natural way, and by means of David's own precautions.—David's "subtlety" not inconsistent with his righteousness.—The same principle in the case of Jesus and Paul.—The combat with Goliath.—A providential introduction of David to Israel.—The result of David's individual faith and courage.—A valuable example for modern imitation.—David's escape from Saul's menaces.—Undignified flight according to some.—A sensible avoidance of peril in reality.—Sensible expedients not faithless acts	178
---	-----

CHAPTER XVI.—DAVID (*continued*).

The days of David's exile.—Bitter adversity "good for" him.—God's dispensation, yet in a natural form.—A preparation for exaltation.—Important discernment of the ways of providence.—David at Keilah.—Divine statements sometimes qualified by unexpressed conditions.—The case of	
---	--

	<i>Page</i>
Nineveh.—Paul's shipwreck.—David's elevation to the throne.—The natural elements in the process —David's prudential measures.—David's dilemma.—His answer from the Lord.—The present a day of divine silence, and why?—The gradualness and naturalness of David's elevation.—Patience and faith	189

CHAPTER XVII—DAVID (*continued*).

The consolidation of David's power —The covenant made with him concerning Christ.—The circumstances leading to the covenant.—David's own faithfulness the cause of it —Other instances of the same thing —The lesson for modern times.—David's sin "in the matter of Uriah."—Its providential punishment —Its notoriety in the day of judgment.—Its retribution on David in David's lifetime —Troubles in his family —Absalom's revolt —David's flight.—Shimei's curse —The Philistine's inroads.—Adonijah's treason —All apparently natural, yet divinely caused.—David's recognition of the fact.—Double-sidedness of events affecting the chosen of God.—The closing scene	202
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII—SOLOMON.

Solomon —His recognition of the ways of providence in his dedicatory prayer —Modern misapplications.— Solomon's prayer and its answer.—The threatened destruction of Israel to be God's work, yet natural in the form in which it was effected —Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar divine instruments without knowing it, being at the same time self-serving individualities —Their self volitions regulated —Solomon's apostacy.—The punishment —The rending of the kingdom.—A divine act human in form.—The same with regard to the uprise of various adversaries —Consoling modern application	215
--	-----

CHAPTER XIX—JEROBOAM AND THE TEN TRIBES.

The divided house of Israel.—First, the Ten Tribes.—Jeroboam, their first king —His great opportunity.—His misuse of it —A low prudence.—Running into the very destruction he feared —Baasha's sedition.—The destruction coming about in a perfectly natural way, yet divinely caused.—The principle in its modern form —Smiting of the Ten Tribes.—Jehovah's work, yet apparently natural.—The nature of a divine "command" to the unwitting instrument in such a case.—Elijah's maintenance.—The command to the widow —Other instances.—The only drawback to the application of the principle now.—Ahab and Jehu.—Necessity of human co-operation with the plans of providence.—Explanation of this at first sight extraordinary fact	224
---	-----

CHAPTER XX—AHAB

Page

Ahab in Naboth's vineyard—God's message by Elijah—The prophecy that his blood should be licked by the dogs in the same place as Naboth's.—How it came to pass.—The same prophecy as to the eating of Jezebel by dogs—The incidents of its fulfilment, showing a human work divinely superintended.—The mode of Ahab's death.—The bow drawn at a venture.—The divinely-guided arrow.—Providence affected and diverted by human action.—Ahab's repentance—The siege of Samaria.—Famine inside and the unexpected relief.—King Joash's visit to Elisha's dying bedside—The arrows and the prophecy.—The removal of the Ten Tribes 236

CHAPTER XXI.—KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

History of the kingdom of Judah.—Rehoboam's departure from God and consequent punishment "by the hand of Shishak," an unwitting instrument.—The reign of Asa—Vexations and adversity to Judah from God because of disobedience—The rule not universal.—God's providence in well-marked and narrow channels only.—Israel's experience, a lesson for the saints.—Jehoshaphat's goodness, and "no war."—The opposite with Jehoram, his successor—The days of Amaziah.—Instructive incidents.—A prophet's interpretation of the ways of providence.—The reign of Uzziah.—Military intruders unconsciously doing the work of God.—Hezekiah.—His prayer and his wise precautions—A valuable lesson 250

CHAPTER XXII.—JOSIAH AND BABYLON.

Reign of Josiah.—Preservation of the scriptures.—A work of providence.—Josiah's enquiry and God's answer.—Coming judgment by the hand of the enemy.—Josiah's cleansing of the land.—His visit to Bethel.—The graves of the idolatrous priests.—His "turning himself."—The fulfilment of a prophecy uttered 300 years before.—The evil that came on Judah "at the commandment of the Lord"—The nature of it from a human point of view—Nebuchadnezzar's invasion.—Providence illustrated.—The wicked the sword of the Lord, but none the less wicked for that.—End of the seventy years' captivity.—Daniel and Cyrus.—Of the edict of restoration.—Bearing of the case on these latter days and the coming restoration 262

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE APOSTOLIC ERA.

From the Babylonish captivity to Christ—The providential in the case of Christ—Place of His birth—The difficulty as to the visit to Egypt.—The part performed by John the Baptist.—Christ's maintenance during His

	<i>Page</i>
ministry.—The pre-eminently providential character of the crucifixion.—Divinely pre-arranged and required, yet brought about in a perfectly natural manner.—A work of God, yet a crime of man.—Providential feature of the apostolic age.—Pentecost—Persecution.—Education of Paul.—John in Patmos.—A tendency of the contemplation of the ways of providence.—A corrective found in the visible hand of God	277
CHAPTER XXIV.—LAST DAYS OF JUDAH'S COMMONWEALTH.	
The overthrow of the Jewish state by the Romans—A divine catastrophe foretold, though not recorded in the scriptures—Josephus the providential recorder.—Christ's allusions to the impending calamity.—Its relation to His own disciples—Its bearing on our own day.—A summary of Josephus's narrative.—Disorders commencing A.D. 40.—Tumults and factions.—The Sicarii.—The Egyptian prophet.—Florus, the Roman Governor, exasperates the Jews and incites them to revolt.—The Jews in Jerusalem rise.—Cestius marches against them and is defeated.	291
CHAPTER XXV.—THE ROMAN INVASION.	
The repulse of Cestius causes uneasiness at Rome—The emperor Nero orders the suppression of the Jews in revolt.—Entrusts the work to the hands of Vespasian and his son Titus.—The Jews organise a war of independence.—A Roman army concentrated at Antioch—The Roman plan of operation.—The Jews commence hostilities at Askalon—Are twice defeated there.—Sepphoris surrenders—Gadara attacked and taken by the Romans.—They attack Jotapata—Desperate defence by Josephus.—The city finally taken and overthrown.—Capture and destruction of Tarichea.—Siege and capture of Gai nala.—Taking of Gischala.—Galilee subdued.—The country desolated.—Fugitives repair to Jerusalem.—Dreadful disorders break out in the city	302
CHAPTER XXVI.—THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM.	
Arrival of the Romans before Jerusalem—Preparations for siege.—The feast of unleavened bread draws large numbers to the city.—The city crowded.—The suburbs devastated by the siege works.—The Jews desperately molest the Romans—Capture of the first wall—Then of the second.—Deserters to the Romans.—Desperate resistance of the defenders.—Titus shows them the Roman army in array for four days without result.—Proposes terms of submission in vain.—Renews the siege.—Speech by Josephus.—Progress of famine.—Thousands of dead bodies thrown over	

	<i>Page</i>
the walls —Dreadful closing scenes.—Hundreds of Jews crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem.—The houses inside crowded with dead.—Capture and burning of the city and Temple.—Enormous crowds of slain.....	318

CHAPTER XXVII.—SUMMARY.

Summary.—Nature of providence.—Importance of understanding it.—Much that is not providence.—“Chance.”—God’s personality the basis of providence.—The leading illustrations.—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob —Joseph.—Moses —Joshua.—Israel.—The nations divinely used as instruments.—Myriads of incidents outside the channel of providence —European politics.—Prophecy.—Providence the divine machinery for saving the world.—A mighty work complete in many parts	335
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CHAPTER I.

Loose notions of providence.—Importance of right views.—The Bible the only source of reliable information.—Helplessness apart from it—The danger of not being impressed by it while theoretically believing it.—Classical learning of no value in this matter.—Bible ideas and illustration of providence.—Such a thing as “chance.”—A first principle of the subject—The relation of the universe to God.—Divine volition VERSUS the mechanical action of nature.—The platform of providence.—Some things God’s doings, and some not, though all things constituted of God and existing in Him.



IT is common to speak of “providence,” but the common way of speaking of it shows it is not common to understand the subject. So many things are ascribed to “providence” that the reflecting mind, acting apart from the enlightenment of the Scriptures, would be liable either to doubt whether there is such a thing as providence at all, or to conclude that all things are “providence,” which would practically be the same thing, for in that case, the central idea of providence, as a special discrimination and influence in the shaping of circumstances in particular cases, would be lost.

It is of great practical importance to have distinct and correct ideas on the subject. It is not a matter of barren speculation. It touches the springs of action,

THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE.

and bears upon the development of character. True views on the subject will sustain and expand and ennoble the mind, while false views will have a contracting and withering and depressing effect. True views will keep a man in the path of wise action, while erroneous views may turn him into a fool. True views will enable him to know when to recognise the hand of God in past and current history, and it may be in his own life, while false views will blot God from the world altogether, and consign a man to the dreary wastes of chance and orphanage.

Correct views on the subject are only to be obtained from the Scriptures. There is no light in any other direction. Science cannot tell us how or when God may operate in the affairs of men. The mere contemplation of human experience cannot help us, for we should not be able without guidance to say what parts of the labyrinth were due to Divine regulation, and what to the uninfluenced action of man. God could enlighten us by direct instruction, by the Spirit, as He did the fathers of old ; but there is a time for everything ; and in His wisdom, this is not a time for open communication from God, but a time for studying the communications He has already made and preserved so wondrously in the Bible, which is so much more wonderful and precious than familiarity allows the common run of men to realise.

Those who reject this source of enlightenment are helpless indeed. They are doomed to remain for ever in the dark. They can have no light except where God

has placed it. A first principle of the subject is to accept this light unreservedly. It is not uttering a mere platitude to make this remark. In our day, it is essential to decide with ourselves positively whether we are to accept the Scriptures as our guide or not. If we do not settle this, we drift on without the ability to appropriate and utilise the instruction it contains. Let us settle it, and when settled, act upon the settlement. This is not the place to discuss the question whether the Bible is the word of God. It has been discussed elsewhere, and may again be demonstrated in many more ways as occasion may arise. It is needful merely to refer to it as the foundation of this endeavour to elucidate the ways of providence by the help of the divine illustrations supplied to us so numerous in the Scriptures. Away from the divinity of the Scriptures, there is no guidance. There is not only in that case probably no providence at all: but even if there were, all talk on the subject must be useless speculation; for it is then left to every man to call that providence which he pleases to consider so, and reject as providence what may not happen to be in his favour, but which being in another man's favour would be considered providence by him. Let us see this point clearly, and it will greatly simplify and strengthen the effort to grasp Bible instruction and Bible instruction alone.

There can be no doubt in the minds of those who have fully mastered the facts of the case, about the Bible being God's word. But there is a possibility that a man may assent to its being the word of God and yet fail to

be influenced by its teaching in the way that ought to result from such an assent. Many causes may conduce to this. The leading cause is want of familiarity. Business and other studies interfere with that affectionate and intimate acquaintance which comes with daily reasonable deferential reading to the man who prays without ceasing. Let business and other things be attended to in their proper measure; but the Bible ought never to be displaced from the supreme position. It ought to have an inalienable place in the day's programme. Constantly read and devoutly pondered, it will, in course of time, emancipate a man from the dreamy state of misconception which thinks the incidents of providence all very proper and natural in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but not to be looked for in the humdrum days of machinery and manufacturing districts. It will remove that blindness of mind which listens to a quotation from the history of Joseph with a sort of feeling, "Oh, that is only a school lesson—a story book—only Genesis," without being impressed—while attaching great consequence to any statement or opinion derived from a merely human source. It will, in fact, bring us to see and accept and feel and be impressed and enlightened and comforted by and to thank God for the Bible, in every part of it, as a great light and a paramount authority, and an infallible teacher on things on which we can get instruction in no other quarter whatever, unless borrowed from itself. Persian, Rabbinical, Indian, Chinese, Greek, Roman and Mohammedan, Vedas and Mishnas, Talmuds and

Korans, and Sanscrit literature and books of Confucius, and the law-making and moral speculations and poetisings and philosophisings and dramatic outpourings of Greek and Roman Lycurguses and Catos, Homers and Horatios, Socrateses and Julius Cæsars, Euripideses and Virgils, and the remaining host of the wise of this world—with whose valueless lucubrations it is esteemed a high honour to be familiar, will, by such a man, be at last esteemed at their inherent and proper value. He will not be afraid, but rejoice in boldly endorsing Paul's declaration concerning them all: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain. . . . The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. . . . The foolishness of God is wiser than men."

This, then, is a first principle of the subject to be scrupulously observed and dogmatically insisted upon—that the Scriptures, in their entirety (given by inspiration of God), are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." With this full conviction, we have long desired to draw attention to that mode of divine operation among men currently expressed by the term "providence," as illustrated and plainly exhibited to us in the authentic cases recorded in the Scriptures. They

are numerous and plain, and by the light of them, studied in their details, we can see plainly where otherwise there is mist and darkness.

There are those who see a providence in everything, without being able to tell what they mean. There are those who see a providence in what they think good things, but none at all if the drift goes against men. Providence with them is a sort of benign blind-eyed deity who has no jurisdiction in the realm of evil occurrence, but whose sole function is to be illustrated by a good-natured farmer distributing plums among children. There are those who think there is providence somewhere—"a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may"—but they cannot make it out, and prefer to leave the subject as an impracticable one, not to be taken into account. There are those who think there is no divine interposition in human affairs at all, except such as happens when a Red Sea is divided, or a multitude fed with five loaves and two fishes. And there is finally the large class of fools who say in their hearts there is neither God nor providence, but simply the reign of blind power that in some inexplicable way has developed a universe replete with contrivance and arrangement of the most ingenious and elaborate kind.

We turn to the Scriptures for light, and we propose to obtain it, not so much by considering the declarations they make on the subject, as by pondering *seriatim* the practical illustrations of it with which Bible history abounds, beginning with the fathers and ending with the Lord Jesus, in whose crucifixion, by the hands of wicked

men, God fulfilled His previous purpose, the condemning sin in the flesh as the sacrificial basis of our reconciliation. This properly carried out, would be a valuable process. It will do more than anything else to give us confidence in the fact of divine participation in human affairs; and an insight into the apparent contradiction that the same act may be at once human and divine—human as regards the impulse and design of the performer, and divine as regards the initiation and regulation of that impulse and the objects to be accomplished in its execution. It will also show us that all human affairs are not divinely regulated; that many things happen that are not of God; that in only a certain narrow channel of things is providence a fact; that only certain classes are providentially guided and controlled; and that divine interposition as often takes the shape of bringing about apparently evil circumstances as those that are obviously good, and that not always with a good purpose, so far as the particular person operated upon is concerned, though in the wide sense, and as regards a certain class, all divine operations have good as the ultimate end.

There is such a thing as chance, as distinct from what God does. The Bible declares this (Eccles. ix. 11) and the experience of every day teaches it. Every moment teems with the incidents of chance. The whirl of a cloud of dust before the windy gust coming round the corner of the house illustrates the point. God has control of all chance; but all chance is not controlled. It is controlled when His purpose requires it. His purpose

does not require Him to decide which shells every or any child on the sea-shore shall pick up and which throw away, unless the incident be a link in a purpose being worked out, and then the hand of the child will be guided. This illustration touches a great fact which it is important to see clearly.

A first idea to be mastered in apprehending the ways of providence is the relation of the universe to God. All things are in Him, and He, though personally located in the highest heaven, is everywhere present by the Spirit, which is His substance in diffusion, so to speak. Nevertheless, God is different from His works. Creation, as organised by Him and in Him has a fixed nature, in virtue of which it has, by His appointment, an independent action, so to speak. Results ensue from certain conditions without His volition participating in the results. For example: you place a strip of paper in the candle flame: ignition follows. The ignition did not require the will of Almighty God to produce it. It resulted from conditions originally established by His will, but now having permitted independence of action. The same thing is illustrated in the million occurrences of everyday experience. It is essential to recognise it. It constitutes the platform of providence. There could be no such conception as providence if everything were due to direct Divine volition. This conception requires that some things are God's doing, and some are not. All things are of God, as regards the establishment of the conditions and affording the power-basis of their existence; but the play of the conditions are the affair of

what is called chance. The flames produced by the servant maid in the grate are not God's doings, but the result of the conditions God has established and fixed; but the flames that consume the sympathisers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram are the direct work of God. So with a thousand illustrations, from the capture of a fly by a spider to the vast elliptical revolution of the unmeasured comet; the occurrences and phenomena of "nature," though all in God, and known to Him, and cannot take place without Him, are the result of fixed affinities existing in His will, but not manipulated by His volition in their details. He can and does interfere where necessary, and this is the distinction between what He does and what He does not do. A recognition of this distinction will prepare the mind to discriminate between those incidents in human history which are the direct work of God, and those countless millions of incidents with which He has no more to do than with the selection of which blades of grass on the hill side are to be consumed by the browsing cattle. It will therefore qualify us to read the hand of God in current events, as well as in the history of the past in our individual lives, as well as in the affairs of nations.





CHAPTER II.

The next principle.—Individuality of the Creator.—Scripture illustrations.—Localization in heaven of His being.—The physical glory and form of His person.—The scientific bearing of the idea considered.—The angels.—Their relation to the Eternal Father, and their place in the execution of His plans everywhere.—Scriptural illustrations.—Angelic agency the leading element in the operations of providence.—The necessity for providence.



ILLUSION has been made to the permitted independence of "the laws of nature" for all ordinary purposes, and to the importance of recognising this mechanical independence in order to obtain distinct views of the operations of providence. Next to this, if not before it, it is essential to recognise the individuality of the Creator, without which the idea of providence would be without its very root; for though the operations of providence are angelically carried out in their details, yet they have their origin in the initiative of the personal Father, of whom the angels are but the obedient instruments.—(Psalm. ciii. 20.)

Intense personality is the first revealed characteristic of the Creator of heaven and earth. Not only the incessant use of the pronouns "I," "Me," "He," "Him," but express declarations in many forms attest it.

"The Father hath life in Himself."—(John v. 26.)

"He is the living God."—(Jer. x. 10.)

"He is Lord of heaven and earth."—(Acts xvii. 4.)

"There is none like Me in all the earth."—(Ex. ix. 14.)

"To whom will ye liken Me or shall I be equal?"—(Isaiah xl. 25.)

"I am the Lord and there is none else; there is no God beside Me."—(Isaiah xlv. 5.)

"The Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting king."—(Jer. x. 6.)

"I have made the earth and created man upon it."—(Psalm xlv. 12.)

"The living God made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein."—(Acts xiv. 15.)

"I lift up My hand to heaven and say, I live for ever."—(Deut. xxxii. 40.)

The force of these expressions is strengthened by the frequent and uniform declaration that the Father dwells in heaven, in contrast to the earth as a locality.

"God is in heaven and thou on earth; therefore, let thy words be few."—(Eccles. v. 2.)

"Our Father who art in heaven."—(Matt. vi. 9.)

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh."—(Psalm ii. 4.)

"O Thou that dwellest in the heavens."—(Psalm cxxxiii. 1.)

"The Lord looked down from heaven."—(Psalm xiv. 2.)

"Hear Thou, in heaven Thy dwelling place."—(I. Kings viii. 30.)

"I (Jesus) go to Him that sent Me."—(John vii. 33.)

"He (Jesus) was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God."—(Mark xvi. 17.)

The physical glory of His person powerfully leads the mind towards the same conception, testified in various ways:

"The glory of the incorruptible God."—(Rom. i. 23.)

"God is light."—(I. John i. 5.)

"He dwelleth in the light that no man can approach."—(I. Tim. vi. 15.)

"Thou art clothed with honour and majesty, who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment."—(Psalm civ. 1.)

"His glory is above the heavens."—(Psalm cxiii. 4.)

"His brightness was as the light; He had horns (shafts of light) coming out of His hands; there was the hiding of His power."—(Hab. iii. 4.)

Furthermore, the form of the glorious Creator, shadowed to us in various places, completes the chain of ascending clues by which we are enabled to lay hold of that conception of the Father which is exactly suited to our spiritual requirements: the idea of a glorious corporate intelligence located in the heart of the universe, upholding all things by the word of His power. Man is stated by James to be "made after the similitude of God," even the Father—see context.—(James iii. 9.) Paul also says he is "the image and glory of God."—(I. Cor. xi. 7.) Christ, formed in fashion as a man, is said to be "the image of God" (II. Cor. iv. 4; Col. i. 15); and "the express image of His person" (Heb. i. 3); which gives force to Jehovah's description of him as "the man that is my fellow."—(Zech. xiii. 7.) From this results the conviction that the Father is not only glorious substance, even spirit substance, but that this substance has the human form in its perfection. The Father's person is, in fact, the prototype of all intelligent being. Of Moses, it was said, as indicative of the privilege which he alone enjoyed in his day, "the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. xii. 8); and, further, that "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10), "as a man speaketh to his friend."—(Deut. xxxiii. 11.) That this referred to the angelic manifestation of Jehovah is unquestionable; but

still the fact remains that the similitude he beheld was the similitude of Jehovah. Thus the angels are in Jehovah's image, and we in the image of the angels, and therefore Jehovah's.

Dr. Thomas, in a scrap written just before his death, and found among his papers afterwards, thus defines the foregoing scripturally-revealed conception of the Father, of whom are all things: "Absolute power, from whose incorruptible substance or hypostasis free spirit radiates, is before all existing things. This self-existing incorruptible substance is essentially spirit—spirit substance—a concentration and condensation into ONE BODY of all the attributes, intellectual, moral and physical, of omnipotence—all things are out of Deity.—(I. Cor. viii. 6.) All things being out of Deity, they were not made out of nothing. The sun, moon and stars, together with all things pertaining to each, were made out of something, and that something was the radiant effluence of His substance, or free spirit, which pervades unbounded space. By free spirit, all created things are connected with the centre of the universe, which is light that no man can approach unto, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father, who is not far from every one of us. The formation of the first man of the earth was the expression by spirit of the peculiar divine idea or mental image. The spirit-developed form, styled man, was the result of power divinely exercised upon the dust of the ground. Electricity, divinely manipulated and incorporated with the dust (itself an electrical product) assumed *the form*

of the divine image and likeness and stood erect, a living, natural body, or man."

A recognition of the Father's person, enthroned in the heavens in glory, yet *en rapport* with universal space, brings immense practical power with it. It makes worship a reality, and helps us to feel the purifying truth of Hagar's speech: "Thou God seest me." That conception of God which thinks of Him as mere abstract power, impalpable, universal, without person or locality, is apt to degenerate unto the blind god of Pantheism, which is no god at all, but the mere impassive sum total of universal phenomena. The God revealed to us in the Bible is a Creator, a Father, and a person, universal in his presence and power, but still a located and glorious person whom we can contemplate, love, confide in, and adore. This suits our mental constitution. We cannot worship abstract universal power, but we can worship a glorious being who possesses the universal power, and has made all things by His wisdom. This is the Father revealed to us in the Bible, and manifested especially to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must not allow our own thoughts on the subject, as natural men, to act as a barrier to what is revealed. "An evil heart of unbelief" is every man's possession by nature, because of native ignorance of everything, and evil bent at the start; and in no way are its propensities more inveterately manifested than in "departing from the living God." Idolatry is the gross manifestation of this tendency: the philosophic rejection of personal Deity is its modern and more refined illus-

tration, and the one against which we have to be most on our guard. It will help us to combat this tendency if we recollect that, as mere observers of nature, we know nothing about how nature has come or is upheld. The evolution theories of Darwin, Huxley and Spencer, are with a small substratum of fact, mere guesses, and hideous at that, with quite as much of mystery at their roots as may ever be felt to attach to the idea of a Creator. A primary, eternal, intelligent, and, therefore, personal force, with a located nucleus of form, power and glory, is, in reality, more in harmony with the facts of the universe as we find them, than the notion of impassive force, which is only a name for something nobody can conceive. At all events, so far as any knowledge on our part goes, or any perceived necessity, the eternal starting point may just as well be one thing as another. It is a simple question of what—not how. This the Bible settles. The ideas suggested by our own sensations are to be rejected in any attempts to conceive of the illimitable Holy One of Israel. We are weak, limited and abortive forms of intelligence; we must not conceive of or measure the Eternal Being by the light of our feelings or notions. Our simple duty is to accept implicitly what is revealed, relying, at the same time, on the force of David's argument: "He that hath planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" to which we may add, He that hath bestowed upon us the mystery of personal individuality, shall He not possess it in the highest form? Yes, the God of Israel is a personal God. The Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ is a personal Father, yet not a man, though we faintly borrow our image from Him. He is glorious and incorruptible in His substance; unchangeable in His nature, one with the universe, clothed with eternal light and power. He fills heaven and earth by His spirit, which is one with Him. By this He upholds all things, and knows and controls everything. "Honour and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty in His sanctuary. Who in heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable. I will speak of the glorious honour of His majesty to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom."

With the two ideas before us—the fixed nature of the laws of heaven and earth, and the personal, sovereign, individuality of the Father, their Creator, it requires but a recognition of the angelic element to complete the purview of the subject, and to qualify us to conceive of and rightly interpret the operations of providence in the affairs of men. We read that "the angel of the Lord campeth round about them that fear Him" (Psalm xxxiv. 7); that the angels are Jehovah's ministers and servants who do His commandments (Psalm ciii. 20); that concerning Christ and His people, He gives His angels charge for their guidance and protection. That these are no figures of speech is evident from :

1. *The actual appearance of angels in various visible transactions.*—Three appeared to Abraham (Gen. xviii. 1);

two visited Sodom the night before its destruction, and led Lot out of the place next morning (Gen. xix.) ; one wrestled to be released from Jacob, who held him (Gen. xxxii. 24 ; Hosea xii. 4) ; one withstood Balaam on his unrighteous errand to curse Israel (Numb. xxii. 22) ; one appeared to Gideon, in the depth of Israel's distress, to instruct him as to the measures for deliverance (Judges vi. 11) ; one appeared to Manoah, the father of Samson, who, with his wife, at first supposed him to be a mortal man.—(Judges xiii. 3, 16).

2. *The reality of things done by them in their capacity of servants.*—One went before the camp of Israel on their departure from Egypt, and when the Egyptians drew near, removed and went behind Israel, interposing himself between the two hosts, and harassing the movements of the Egyptians by taking off their chariot wheels.—(Exod. xvi. 19, 24.) One ravaged the coasts of Israel with pestilence, and was divinely arrested in the act of destroying Jerusalem for David's sin.—(II. Sam. xxiv. 16.) One decimated a whole Assyrian army in one night.—(II. Kings xix. 35.) One undid the locks of a Roman prison, and liberated the apostles (Acts v. 19) ; and, on another occasion, liberated Peter in the same practical way.—(Acts xii. 7-11.)

3. *Their intimate relation to Christ's first appearing.*—One appeared to Mary, and announced his coming conception (Luke i. 26) ; another announced his birth to a company of shepherds on the open plain, and the announcement was followed by the song of a multitude of them.—(ii. 10.) Angels ministered to him on the

occasion of his temptation in the wilderness (Matt. iv. 11) ; and again at the crisis of his trial in Gethsemane.—(Matt. xxvi. 53 ; Luke xxii. 43.) One angel descended and rolled away the stone from the sepulchre preparatory to Christ's resurrection (Matt. xxviii. 2) ; and two remained after the event to testify it to those who came to the grave.—(John xx. 12) Two also appeared at the ascension, and comforted the disciples with the promise of his return.—(Acts i. 10.)

4. *Christ's recognition of them in His teaching*—"Of that day and hour knoweth no man ; no, not the angels of heaven."—(Matt. xxiv. 36.) "Him shall the Son of Man confess before the angels of God."—(Luke xii. 8.) "There is joy in the presence of the angels."—(Luke xv. 10.) "They are equal unto the angels."—(Luke xx. 36.) "I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels."—(Rev. iii. 5.)

5. *Their foretold participation in the events of His second coming.*—"The Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him."—(Matt. xxv. 31.) "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels."—(Matt. xvi. 27.) "Of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."—(Mark viii. 38.) "We are come . . . to an innumerable company of angels."—(Heb. xii. 22.) "I heard the voice of many angels . . . and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands."—(Rev. v. 11.)

6. *Incidental scriptural allusions to their power,*

goodness and wisdom.—"Like the countenance of an angel of God, *very terrible.*"—(Judges XIII. 6) "Good in my sight as an angel of God."—(I. Sam. XXIX. 9.) "As an angel of God, so is my lord to discern"—(II. Sam. XIV. 17.)

The doctrine of angelic supervision is therefore not a mere drapery of description, but the revelation of a literal fact in which the children of God are invited to place their faith, and of which God has vouchsafed numerous palpable illustrations in the ages that are past, and of which He is about to grant the most striking of all exemplifications in the return of the Lord Jesus, with a multitudinous retinue of the glorious host, before whose brightness the glory of the present world will pass away in more senses than one.

An element of enlightened discernment in the case is found in the fact that what the angels do and say are spoken of as the sayings and doings of their Creator. The angels and Jehovah, for whom they act, are indissolubly associated in many Scripture narratives. Let one or two illustrations suffice. The angel that appeared to Lot said. "Haste thee, escape thither, for *I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.* The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then *the Lord (Jehovah) rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah.*"—(Gen. XIX. 22-24). Here the work done by the angel is said to be the Lord's work. Again: God said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering."—(Gen. XXII. 1.)

Afterwards, "*the angel of the Lord* called unto him out of heaven and said, . . . Seeing thou hast not withheld thine only son from ME."—(Verses 11 12.) Again: "*The angel of the Lord* spake unto me (Jacob), saying, I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. *I am the God of Bethel.*"—(Gen. xxi. 11-13) Again: "The angel of Jehovah appeared unto Moses . . . Moreover, he said, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."—(Ex. iii. 2, 6.) The angel of the Lord camping round about them that fear Him is, therefore, Jehovah camping, &c. Yet the angels are not Jehovah, except in so far as they are embodiments of His own eternal power, and the instruments in the accomplishment of His will. The distinction is visible in many cases. Thus, the angel that came to Manoah (Judges xiii. 16) said, "Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, *thou must offer it unto Jehovah.*" So Gabriel, who came to Daniel, said, "At the beginning of thy supplications *the commandment came forth*, and I am come to show thee."—(Dan. x. 23.) So also the angel, who exhibited the apocalypse to John (Rev. i. 1), said to John when John fell down to worship him, "See thou do it not . . . worship God."—(xix 10)

The conclusion resulting from this brief survey of the testimony is, that the leading element in the operations of providence, where those operations really take place, consists of angelic interposition, but that this interposition is the carrying out of instructions they have received from the Creator of all things, or from the Son of His

love, to whom the angels have been subjected: and is not the result of their own devising.—(I. Peter iii. 22.) The eternal Father fills and discerns all space and its incidents by His Spirit. He is the possessor and the head of all things: to Him our prayers must be addressed in the name appointed—the name of Jesus; but the working out of His will toward us is committed to the hands of vigilant immortal beings, whom we are not permitted to see in this our probation in the days of Gentile ascendancy.

That there should be such a thing as providence is reasonable, in view of the fact that God has a purpose among the nations of the earth, as revealed in prophecy of political matters. This purpose would never be realised were the endless caprices of human action not subject to vigilant divine supervision, carefully guiding events at the turning points. Hence we read: “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” (Dan. iv. 25.) The form in which this divine rule is carried out is exemplified in the words of the angel to Daniel: “Now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia, and when I am gone forth, lo! the prince of Grecia shall come. . . . Also I, in the first year of Darius the Mede, even I (the angel) stood to confirm and strengthen him.”—(Dan. x. 20; xi. 1.)

The reasonableness of providence results also from the other truth, that God is preparing for Himself a people by the Gospel during, and by means of, the present reign of evil. The development of these is largely

the work of circumstances operating in connection with their enlightenment. They could not be developed without trouble; but the trouble, if not regulated, would be destructive. Hence, first, the intimation that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. xii. 6); and, secondly, that He "will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape that they may be able to bear it."—(I. Cor. x. 13.) It could not be imagined that the objects of the Father's love should be left to the operations of chance, and that He, without whom a sparrow cannot fall to the ground, and to whose eyes all things are naked and open, should leave undirected, in the morass of human life, the steps of those whose eyes and affections and trust are directed to Him in daily prayer. The testimony declares the contrary: "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.

. . . Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."—(Matt. vi. 8, 33.) "Cast all your care on Him, for He careth for you."—(1 Pet. v. 7.) "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me."—(Heb. xiii. 5, 6.) "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."—(Prov. iii. 6.) "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand. I have been

young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."— (Psalm xxxvii. 23-25.)

With this citation of the testimony, or rather of a very few specimens of it, going to show that such as fear the Lord in sincerity and truth are even now under divine protection, we close these two preparatory chapters, with the purpose, if the Lord will, of proceeding in our next to the exhibition of the practical illustration we have of these truths in the histories contained in the holy oracles.





CHAPTER III.

Miracle as distinguished from providence — The practical illustration of the latter — Abraham — Abimelech withheld from touching Abraham's wife — A privilege accessible now — The sending away of Hagar — Grievous in Abraham's eyes, yet for his good — Ishmael blessed for Abraham's sake — A lesson for all times. — Ishmael made a nation — The Divine hand in politics — Marriage of Isaac and Ishmael. — The "marriage question" — Divine guidance in the case of Isaac — Eliezer's angelically guided visit to Mesopotamia



THE Bible abounds with cases of direct, open, manifest interposition of divine power on behalf of the subjects of divine favour. The dividing of the Red Sea, the destruction of Sennacherib's army and the resurrection of the Lord from the dead, are leading illustrations of a large class of such interpositions, great and small, scattered over the course of Bible history. It will not be relevant to the present purpose to cite such cases. The times of the Gentiles in which we live, though times of divine regulation of human affairs no less than the times of Israel, are not the times of open work, *alias* miracle, and, therefore, it would not be helpful to the object in view to cite miracle. We propose to confine the illustrations of providence to those incidents and aspects of Bible history, first, which resemble our own experience, and, secondly,

which are expressly declared in the illustrations brought forward to be the work of God, *alias* providence.

The first signal illustration is the case of Abraham. There was much in his life that belongs to the category of revelation, such as the direct summons to leave the land of the Chaldees, the command to offer Isaac, repeated interviews with members of the angelic host, &c. With such, at present, we have nothing to do. We look to the incidents of what may be considered the natural order avowedly manipulated by the hand of providence. They are not awaiting.

Abraham, at a certain stage of his journeyings, sojourned at Gerar.—(Gen. xx. 1.) Seeing the licentious character of the neighbourhood, he feared his life might be endangered by the comeliness of his wife, if the relation were avowed. He, therefore, agreed with Sarah, who was his sister on his father's side, though not on his mother's (verse 12), that she should announce herself his sister. The result was that Sarah was the object of the king's attention, and Abraham was honoured for her sake. "Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah." She was at his court for a considerable time —(verse 18) He supposed her to be an unmarried woman and free, and his desires were towards her. How came it that he did not give effect to his ideas? We learn from a divine message communicated to him (verse 6). "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart; for *I also withheld thee from sinning against Me, THEREFORE, SUFFERED I THEE NOT TO TOUCH HER.*" This instance bears two ways, first, with respect to Abraham, God

invisibly protected his wife in the dangerous position in which she was placed through Abraham's own prudence. Secondly, with respect to Abimelech, who seems to have been a righteous man.—(verse 4.) He was withheld from doing a thing which, while legitimate from his own point of view, would have been a wrong against God. He would not be aware of the fact. From day to day, domestic events and his own mood would simply take that turn, apparently in the ordinary course, which would keep him from the course that seemed open and desirable to him. God was withholding him and he did not know it. Why did He withhold him? Because he was animated by integrity of heart in the matter. This is the point of the case in its bearing in subsequent times; for it was intended for subsequent times. The Spirit in Paul informs us that these things were "written for our learning."—(Rom. xv. 4.) They were not written as human records are written—merely for their historic interest. They were not even written for Abraham's sake alone, but for us also.—(Rom. iv. 23, 24.) They were written for our instruction, guidance and comfort. Consequently, if we set ourselves, with earnest purpose, to pursue the ways of righteousness, Abimelech's case shows us that we pray not a vain prayer when we pray "deliver us from evil." Nor is it an empty allusion when Jude ascribes glory "to Him that is *able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."—(verse 24.) The lesson of the case is both comforting and purifying. It is the lesson embodied in the words of Peter: "Let them

that suffer according to the will of God, *commit the keeping of their souls to Him* IN WELL DOING as unto a faithful Creator."

In the course of time, Abraham was requested by Sarah to send Hagar and her son Ishmael away from the house. "And the thing was *very grievous in Abraham's sight* because of his son" (Gen. xxi. 11), from which we learn that a thing may be of God and yet very unwelcome to the beloved of God for whose benefit it is devised. This will help every godly man to entertain a comforting reservation with regard to every evil circumstance—a reservation to this effect: "Well, I do not see the object of this, but God is wiser than man; let the will of God prevail." The commonest and most distressing domestic incident may be the hand of God in our affairs, if those affairs are committed to Him in prayer and obedience. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." Abraham was told not to be grieved at Sarah's request (verse 12), for in Isaac, Sarah's son, and not in Ishmael, was his seed to be called. "And also of the son of the bond-woman *will I make a nation* because he is thy seed." Here are two points: first, for Abraham's sake, Ishmael was favoured. The righteous are a blessing to all connected with them, because God regards their connections for their sakes. This principle constantly appears throughout the whole Scriptures. Lot was saved for Abraham's sake (Gen. xix. 29); Rahab's family for her sake (Joshua vi. 23); the kings of Judah for David's sake, even when David was long dead (I. Kings xi. 12; II. Kings viii. 19; xix. 34.) On

this principle, Sodom would have been saved if there had been ten righteous men in it.—(Gen. xviii. 32.) On this principle the Lord's people are the salt of the earth.—(Matt. v. 13.) On this principle, too, we are forgiven and saved for Christ's sake, if we conform to what is required of us.—(Eph. iv. 32; Acts xiii. 38, 39.) The second point lies in the expression: "*I will make a nation of the son of the bond-woman.*" If we follow the history of Ishmael's descendants, we find them become a nation, and a nation that has played a very important part in history; but we do not find on the face of that history anything that would apparently answer to the idea that Ishmael's national development was a divine work. Read as merely natural men read, it would appear a perfectly natural affair throughout—that is an affair left to chance; but here we have the certainty before us that it was not an affair of chance. It was a matter divinely regulated and fostered for Abraham's sake, whence arises the conclusion that affairs of human action may be perfectly natural and uninfluenced on the face of them (like Abimelech's abstention), and yet be the subject of divine manipulation from behind. It is merely a question of whether the affair comes within the range of divine manipulation, and not a question of appearance. This question is determinable first by the other question whether a divine purpose has been declared, as in the case of prophecy; or, secondly, whether the Lord's people are involved, by prayer or otherwise. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

Abraham, like every enlightened father, was anxious on the subject of the marriage of his son. His anxiety differed altogether from that of the moderns, whose principal solicitude relates to income and worldly prospects. He might have found a likely-enough match on this score among "the daughters of Canaan"—the landed folk of the age; for he was on terms of equality with the leading people, even to their very kings. But he declined an alliance in this direction. The cup of the Amorites was not *yet* full, but it was *filling*, and he did not wish alliance with a state of society whose corruptions may be learnt from Lev. xviii. as applied in verses 24, 25. He preferred to seek a wife for his son in the family of his own father, who had joined with him in the original pilgrimage from Ur at the command of the Lord (Gen. xi. 31), and the members of which showed in their subsequent intercourse with Abraham's servant that they knew and feared the God of Abraham. Thus early did scrupulosities on the "marriage question" characterise the friends of God. Later on, Esau, the prototype of the rejected class, Isaac's son, acted otherwise. He married Canaanitish wives, "which," we are told, "were grief of mind to Isaac and Rebecca" (Gen. xxvi. 35), and Rebecca, in advising Isaac to save Jacob from a similar mistake, said: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these who are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"—(Gen. xxvii. 46.) However, we are not dealing with Esau but with Abraham. Abraham took steps in the matter. He

called the steward of his house and said: "I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but thou shalt go unto my country and to my kindred and take a wife unto my son Isaac." There are two difficulties in the way. Eliezer, his steward, did not know where he was to find his master's kindred (for there were no Directories in those days, and a general reference to Mesopotamia was a poor guide); and even if he found them out, it might turn out there was no woman suitable for a wife for Isaac, or being suitable, she might be unwilling; and how, in that case, was the thing to prosper? Eliezer started the latter difficulty, and enquired, in case it should turn out so, whether he was, in that case, to take Isaac back to Mesopotamia? Abraham was emphatic on this point. Wife or no wife, Eliezer was to beware of taking Isaac back to Mesopotamia. It was a command from God that he and his seed were to sojourn in the land wherein they were strangers, and Abraham would not break one command in trying to keep another—a striking and important example. Abraham's confidence was this: "The Lord God of heaven shall *send His angel before thee*, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." He was prepared, however, for failure, if the will of God were so. "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath." Eliezer starts; in due time he arrives in the neighbourhood where Bethuel, the son of Nahor, his master's brother, resides.

He does not know exactly where to go. He has seen no angel on the way. All things have been perfectly natural. But he has confidence in the guidance of Abraham's God. He stands by the well outside the city. Other men besides Bethuel dwell in the place; and there are many daughters whose custom it is to come to the well in the evening to draw water. Which of them all is it that suits his delicate errand? He asks God to give his errand good speed. He proposes an indication: let the first woman to whom he shall speak be the woman, if she offer to draw water for his camels as well as himself. He speaks to her; she not only complies with his own request for a drink, but so soon as he had slaked his thirst, she says, "I will draw water for thy camels also." "The man wondering at her, held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not."—(verse 21.) When the camels had done drinking, he asked her whom she belonged to, and discovered she was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. He then made known to her that he was Abraham's steward, and was cordially welcomed at Nahor's son's house, Bethuel. He said the Lord had "led him to the house of his master's brethren," and he refused to eat till he had told his errand, and demanded an answer at once. They said to him: "The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak to thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee; take her and let her be thy master's son's, as the Lord hath spoken."

Now, here is a case of angelic arrangement beyond

question. Yet no angels were seen. The man Eliezer went on from step to step in a natural way. He was not conscious of any interference. He seemed to follow his own volitions all the way. How is this reconcilable with angelic guidance? The case of Balaam illustrates it inversely. An angel stood in the way to arrest his progress.—(Numb. xxii. 22-31.) Balaam did not see any angel, but attributed the awkwardness of the animal he rode to a freak of temper. “The Lord opened his eyes” (verse 31) and then he became aware of the situation. There was no need to open the eyes of Eliezer, Abraham’s servant; the case did not call for it. But if his eyes had been opened, he would have seen that an angelic guide was directing his way, invisibly operating upon him and causing him to conceive impulses and think thoughts which to his consciousness were all his own.

The teaching of the case is plain. “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about those that fear Him,” and directs their way without any open or apparent interference with the natural order of things. What is due to a man’s own thoughts and what to angelic supervision, a man cannot by his own ratiocination discriminate. He need not attempt it. His part is simply to fear God, do His commandments, commit his way to Him, in the full and cheerful confidence that “all things work together for good to them that love God and who are the called according to His purpose.”



CHAPTER IV.

Providence in the life of Isaac.—The promised seed.—Barrenness of Rebecca.—Faith and patience.—Prayer and its answer.—Apparently natural, but God-given.—Isaac's contemplated removal to Egypt because of famine.—The command to remain where he was.—God with him.—How manifest.—A lesson.—Isaac doing his best.—Faith and presumption.—The hand of God in common life.—Isaac's departure to Gerar.—The strife about the wells.—Meekness of Isaac.—His removal to Beersheba.—Cheering words to him from God.—Similar words to all his children.—God "with" a man, and how we know it.



HERE is scantier illustration of providence in the recorded life of Isaac than in that of either Abraham or Jacob. Such as there is will be found of similar import and value.

The first instance is connected with Rebecca, whom on the return of Abraham's servant with her from Mesopotamia, he loved and took for his wife. For the first twenty years of their married life, they were without issue. The matter was made the subject of earnest petition on the part of Isaac (Genesis xxv. 21), whence we may infer it was a cause of anxiety to both Isaac and Rebecca. It was natural it should be so in their special relation to the promises. Those promises hinged upon "seed" plural and singular, national and Messianic, and in the absence of family there was an absence of

the obvious link with promised futurity. Their domestic experience was thus blended with spiritual solicitude, and was at once the basis and occasion of faith. In this matter "the fathers" stood in a position peculiar to themselves with regard to their ordinary life. None of their children, natural or spiritual, can be like them in the pregnant significance and strong interest of their domestic history. Nevertheless, the same general principles apply as we shall see.

It is a striking fact that a matter so directly promised and so vitally important to the divine purpose, should have been the subject of delay, and threatened with frustration through natural barrenness on the part of Rebecca. It shows that the fathers themselves were much more practically tried in their faith than their tried children are apt to realise. Year after year rolled by—year after year—without a symptom of the promised fecundity. Human views would have suggested that time was being lost. God's ways are large and slow. As Dr. Thomas used to remark, "He is in no hurry, He has plenty of time." When the occasion calls, He can deal a lightning stroke like the overthrow of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, or the engulfment of a rebellious company of priests in the wilderness; but in the general proportions of His plans of operation, magnitude, deliberation, gradualness are characteristics. Then it is essential that He must be honoured. "I will be sanctified in them that approach unto Me."—(Leviticus x. 3.) "Them that honour Me, I will honour."—(I. Samuel ii. 10.) Faith is honouring to God :

and faith requires time for its exercise. God had made "great and precious promises" to the fathers: and He tried them by not specifying time and causing them to wait long. "And so after he had *patiently endured*, he obtained the promise."—(Heb. vi. 15.) Let us not weary under a similar test: "a patient continuance in well doing" is the revealed rule of our acceptance (Romans ii. 8), and this means a long time of waiting with nothing to rely on but confidence in the pledged word of Jehovah, *i.e.*, faith, "without which, it is impossible to please Him."—(Hebrews xi. 6.) By such a process, we shall be prepared for a place among the tried sons of God, with whom we shall be enabled to say at the last, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation."—(Isaiah xxv. 8.)

But it is not to be a stoical waiting. "Isaac *entreated the Lord* for his wife because she was barren."—(Genesis xxv. 21.) He made the promise the subject of petition. This was according to the will of God, who has said, "For these things I will be enquired of."—(Ezekiel xxxvi. 37.) In this, Isaac was an example to us of the duty enjoined upon us by the Lord Himself: "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."—(Luke xviii. 1.) "Pray to the Father who is in secret, and He that seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." The specimen prayer the Lord has given is an example of the topics to be made the subject of petition. They embrace every desire and every hope, as summarised by Him in the phrase "what things ye have need of."—(Matthew

vi. 8.) Paul, His messenger, gives us, by the Spirit, the same command. "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: make your requests known unto God."

A short-sighted view of the matter would have suggested to Isaac that there was no need to entreat the Lord on a matter that had been the subject of promise. But all God's ways work together. There is no clash. He makes a promise; but He wills to be asked for the thing promised, and makes its individual attainment dependent upon our compliance with His will. In this way, the connection that exists in fact between God and His children is kept constantly before their minds, with the double blessedness of yielding God pleasure and His people peace and joy and benefit.

Isaac, ignorant of the meaning of the barrenness, yet strong in faith, gives expression to his anxious desire on the subject, and asks God on Rebecca's behalf. "And the Lord was entreated of him, and his wife Rebecca conceived." God answered the prayer, but the answer was apparent only in its results. There was no audible voice, no visible token. The course of things was natural in appearance, but God was in it. God is the same still. His children are invited to pray, and the prayer of faith—(i.e., the prayer founded in conviction of His existence, and in the recognition of His wisdom and sovereign right to withhold our request, if He see fit)—may often have its manifest answer, yet, in ways perfectly natural on the surface of them. Open answer, by voice or sign, would be inconsistent with the dispensation of faith in which we are trained for the endless

ages of sight. "This is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us."—(I. John v. 14.)

A famine occurred in the land. Isaac apparently meditated removal to Egypt, as Abraham had done before him, under similar circumstances. While he was thinking of it a message came to him, "Go not down into Egypt. . . . Sojourn in this land, and *I will be with thee*, and bless thee."—(Gen. xxvi. 2, 3.) Accordingly, Isaac stayed there (in Gerar) "a long time" (verse 8), during which he tilled the land and realised extraordinary crops—"an hundredfold." "He waxed great and went forward, and grew until he became very great"—so much so that the king of the district, Abimelech, grew distrustful of the effect of his prosperity, and asked him to move into another part, which he did. There are several things here for profitable consideration. It was natural for Isaac to look upon the prevalent scarcity in the land as a reason for seeking a more plentiful country. But duty required him to stay where he was. And in the confidence that God would be with him, he stayed in the midst of evil, and was preserved and prospered. We are Isaac's children if we belong to Christ. Have we no promise that God will be with us in our difficulties? If anyone doubt it, he has but to recall the words of Paul in Heb. xiii. where he applies a promise to us which, without his guidance, we might have lacked boldness to appropriate. He says (verse 5): "Let your conversation (your course in life) be without covetousness (without desire to possess), and be content

with such things as ye have, *for He hath said, I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE NOR FORSAKE THEE ;*" so that *we* may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper : I will not fear what man shall do unto me." It has to be understood, of course, that the "we" and the "me" of these sayings are not of indiscriminate application. Paul wrote to "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus," such as know God, and have His love and fear indwelling with them and walk in the obedience of His commandments in the confidence and rejoicing of the hope. Their character is described in this very chapter as those who accept the position of strangers and pilgrims in the present evil world ; "who have here no continuing city but seek one to come : who offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name : who do good and forget not to communicate." Such are not those who have a name to live and are dead, who are in name brethren and sisters of Christ, but in principle, sentiment, affection and actions, are identical with the children of the present world. This class do not rejoice in the promises under consideration. No wonder, then, that they find them fail in time of need, and perhaps it is as little to be wondered at that they presumptuously speak against the applicability of the promises to our time, as if God had changed or His arm had shortened. As regards all who truly trust and obey the God of Israel, David's words will remain true to the last : "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." They may be taken through seas of affliction,

like Job, and may sometimes know hunger and want, like Paul; but it will only be for their good—not for their destruction. God will not forsake them; and “if God be for us, who can be against us?”

But we must do our part, otherwise God will not be for us, for so is His will that we do what He has appointed. “Isaac sowed in that land.”—(verse 12.) If he had not, the hundredfold increase which God bestowed on his labour would not have come. There is a difference between faith and presumption. Faith is obedient and modest; but there is an article called faith in our day which is the reverse. With much “piety” of talk, it is, in its spiritual essence, dictatorial to God, insubmissive to His arrangements, presumptuous in its expectations. It expects God to give a crop at their call without that sowing of the land which is the way He has appointed for the crop to come. Let us do our part in all humility, and God will do His. He can spoil or prosper our work, but our work is the basis of His action toward us. “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” A presumptuous attitude will be to our destruction.

The hand of God was not openly visible in Isaac's affairs. His crops were good; his herds fruitful; his house in peace. But it was all apparently natural. The blessing was dispensed in a form calling for constant faith. God is great and dreadful; His kindness does not stoop to familiarity with sinful man: it is around and with the men who tremble in wisdom at His word, but in a form that precludes presumption, and shuts off the gaze of mere curiosity. Let us commit our affairs

to God in faith, and resist the disposition to think that God has nothing to do with them because they are all natural. Faith is founded on true reason, while unbelief is the mere mutterings of ignorance and intellectual stunt. The wicked prosper, but only for a time, as part of the probation of the righteous, and they prosper not as the righteous prosper, but to their final hurt. The righteous fall into trouble, but it is for their good. They come out of it to find themselves benefited. When trouble comes, do not think it is not from God, because it is natural. It may not differ from the trouble of other men in apparent origin and form, but it differs from theirs in being under an invisible supervision which aims at a result, and will say, at a certain point, "Thus far and no farther." Truth, like the prism, has many sides—all beautiful and consistent one with another. Childlike docility in its study will open up her treasures which are hid from the eyes of the proud. Our affairs are small in the measureless universe; but they are of great consequence, for good or evil, to worms like ourselves, consequently not insignificant in the eyes of Him who invites us to "cast all our care upon Him," with the assurance that "He careth for us."

Abimelech having requested Isaac to remove from him, "Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar."—(xxvi. 17.) Here Abraham had been before him, and had dug wells which, on Abraham's death, his Philistine neighbours had enviously stopped. These stopped wells Isaac now restored. His servants, while so engaged, struck a spring; but they were not

allowed to enjoy it. The men of the neighbourhood said it belonged to them. What did Isaac do? He gave way to the unrighteous intruders. He allowed them to take possession of the spring, and ordered his servants to dig in another place. They succeeded in finding another good supply of water. But here, also, the herdmen of Gerar—loutish fellows, who owe their memory with posterity to their boorish encroachments on the patient son of Abraham—claimed the well as their own—by what law it would be hard to make out, except by that law of prior occupation which worldly folks think very dignified and indefeasible, but which will be effectually ignored and dissipated to the winds when Christ arrives to eject all prior occupants from the soil. Isaac has recently arrived on the ground. Still his father Abraham had lived there before him, and he might have insisted on his rights, so far as that gave him a right; but he was a stranger and sojourned in the land which was his by promise. Therefore his servants, for a second time, gave way. They allowed the men of Gerar to have the well, moved to another spot and dug another well, of which they were allowed to remain in unchallenged possession.

In this matter Isaac left an example to the household of faith—an example emphasised by the precepts of Christ. He “gave place unto wrath:” he “resisted not evil.” He meekly gave way before the sons of pride. The brethren of Christ occupy precisely the position of Isaac. They are strangers and sojourners in the very place of their promised possession. The “rights” are all on

their side, for there can be no true right except that conferred by God, the original proprietor. Nevertheless, for a season, they are called upon to submit to unrighteousness, exactions and encroachments, like sheep among wolves, who try to escape their pursuers, but do not turn upon and try to retaliate on them, or attempt to enforce the restitution of a torn ear.

Afterwards, Isaac removed from the scene of his unneighbourly treatment in the valley of Gerar, to Beersheba. Here the Lord appeared to him, and gave him this comfort: "Fear not, for *I am with thee*, and will bless thee." How many consoling reflections are suggested by this. It was natural for Isaac to fear, for he lived a stranger in the midst of enemies. He is told to fear *not*, for God is with him. What cheering words! Who has not felt the effect of cheering words in times of danger and distress? Sometimes, alas! they are nothing more than words, because the speaker of them is a man, and speaks perhaps against hope, for the mere sake of preventing despondency, without power in his hand to alter evil. But consider the cheer contained in a divine summons to "fear not." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" He knows we are prone to fear. He knoweth our frame; He remembereth we are dust. He knows we can only see things as they appear to mortal sense, and not as they are to His all-penetrating eye. He knows that the cloud and the immensity and the silence appear greater to our feeble faculties than He appears who fills all, holding even the ocean in the hollow of his hand. He knows we walk by faith and not

by sight, and He knows that, though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Therefore He recognises the tendency of our poor hearts to flutter and quail, and He says "Fear not." Not only to Isaac, but to all his children are these words elsewhere addressed. "*Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*"—(Luke xii. 32.) "*Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, and FEAR NOT.*"—(Isaiah xxxv. 4.) "*Fear not, thou worm, Jacob, and ye men of Israel.*"—(Isaiah xli. 14.) "*Fear ye not nor be afraid: have not I told thee?*"—(Isaiah xlv. 8.) "*Fear not; ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"—(Matthew x. 28.) "*The angel said to the woman, Fear not.*"—(Matthew xxviii. 5.) "*The angel said to the shepherds, Fear not.*"—(Luke ii. 10.) "*Jesus said to Peter, Fear not.*"—(Luke v. 10.) "*Jesus said to Paul, Fear not.*"—(Acts xxvii. 24.) "*Jesus said to John, Fear not.*"—(Rev. i. 17.)

The basis of this cheering adjuration is the assurance supplied to faith: "I am with thee." Isaac had to lean on this, though in many dreary years there was nothing visible to show it. True, he had the message to that effect, but in the long intervals, all was natural. The wing of the Almighty was over him; but the fact was not apparent as a matter of sight. Isaac walked by faith. We are invited to do the same. The only difference is that, while Isaac had the assurance directly and individually, we have it indirectly in the form suitable to our time in the world's history—the promises recorded in the word. But one may say, How do I know that

God is with me? Such may find their answer in these words: "*The Lord is with you while ye be with Him.* If ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you."—II. Chron. xvi. 2.) The Scriptures abound with similar declarations. They make the course of every earnest man clear. Seek the Lord in the reading of His word, in prayer to Him, and in the doing of those things He has commanded; and He will guide your way in the darkness without any apparent interference, and cause all things (yea even evil circumstances) to work together for your good, viz., your preparedness for an entrance into His glorious kingdom. But if ye decline from His ways and seek your own pleasure, He will leave you to your own—perhaps successful—devices, which will at last work out your own self-destruction.





CHAPTER V.

The life of Jacob.—Abundant illustration of the ways of providence.—Angelic guidance in it all.—The angelic hand not seen.—Jacob and Esau.—Why Jacob was chosen, though the younger.—Isaac's preference for Esau.—Esau's possession of the birthright.—How it was transferred to Jacob.—The incident of the pottage.—Its moral bearings.—Importance of common incidents.—Isaac's parting blessing.—The importance of Jacob receiving it.—How it was diverted from Esau contrary to Isaac's intentions.—The deception involved.—How it is to be regarded.—Human speculations on the nature of "morality."—The true standard.



THE ways of providence are more abundantly and clearly illustrated in the case of Jacob, perhaps, than in that of either Abraham or Isaac—not that the operations of providence were a whit more actual, frequent, or signal in the case of Jacob, but that the incidents of his life are more varied, and the record more extensive; and, therefore, the exhibition of God's guiding hand more manifest. As in the case of Abraham and Isaac, so in the case of Jacob, there is a large element of open vision, and visible divine interposition, in the shaping of his affairs; but, as in their case, so in his, the present series of chapters must leave such features out of account, as the object is to bring into notice those points in their case which may have a parallel in these days when, for a season, open vision and visible interference are suspended.

The key to his whole experience is to be found in the expression he made use of in his old age, when blessing the sons of Joseph in Egypt “*God who fed me all my life long to this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.*”—(Gen. xlviii. 15, 16) The superintending providence, which waited on his steps, and directed his way, giving his affairs an intelligent bent this way and that, as occasion required, consisted of an angel’s volitions, in harmony with the testimony adduced in the second article, that the Father’s designs are carried out in their details by the angels, and that, where the angels do not operate, providence is not at work, but affairs are left to work themselves out on natural principles. Yet the angelic operations are not known or discernible except the case call for visible manifestation. Apart from this, the results induced by them appear mere effects of nature, as when Balaam attributed the restiveness of the animal he rode to the creature’s perversity, till his eyes were opened to the angelic cause.—(Numb. xxii. 31 34.) The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him this is testified (Psalm xxxiv. 7), consequently, those who fear the Lord may go forth with courage, careful only to do so in faith and well-doing, and not seeking to discover the angel’s hand, which they cannot do. Keep the commandments, and trust, though you do not see. “We walk by faith and not by sight.” In due time, the veil shall be taken away then shall we know, even as we are known, and take open part with the legions of angels who will openly co operate in the mighty work to be done when they escort the Lord, in

their ten thousands, to the earth.—(Matt. xxv. 31 ; Rev. v. 11)

The first matter in which providence is markedly visible in the history of Jacob concerns his relations with his twin brother Esau. These are, in many points, peculiar, and deserve attentive consideration. Before the children were born, God told Rebecca (Gen. xxv. 23) that they were the beginning of "two manner of people," and that the elder would serve the younger. As it turned out, Esau was the first born, and therefore the elder. According to the law of primogeniture (which has been in force from the earliest antiquity, though not in its monstrous Gentile form, which dismisses the others without a portion), Esau was entitled to priority in rank and inheritance, but this natural order was set aside in the intimation that the elder would serve the younger. Of the domestic incidents in the lives of the patriarchs, Paul says "which things are an allegory" (Gal. iv. 24), that is, they bear the impress of the general plan on which God is working out the redemption of the world. An analogy runs through all. The plan roughly stated, is this: "first, that which is natural, afterwards, that which is spiritual." Adam first, Christ second: "And the elder shall serve the younger," for Christ (the younger in point of appearance on the scene) is to have the dominion, and the old man will come into subjection. But there was a moral analogy inside that of the chronology. Esau had the priority of birth, but he was not the sort of man with whom the covenant could be established. When it was ordained, before the birth of

the children, that the elder should serve the younger, respect was had to what they would turn out to be when they grew to be men, which was known to God; for, "known unto God are all His works from the beginning." God made choice of Jacob in preference to Esau, because Jacob was more suitable to the spiritual objects contemplated in the election. True it is, as Paul says in his comments on the case (Rom. ix. 11) it was "that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Nevertheless, this purpose operates in harmony with God's moral attributes. He does not choose an Abraham to act the part of a Pharaoh, nor a John to stand in the place of a Judas. Esau turned out to be a purely natural man, delighting in the objects and exercises of nature, without reference to nature's Constitutor, while Jacob had a lively recognition of God. "The boys grew, and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. —(Gen. xxv. 27.) This plain man, dwelling in tents, turned out a worshipper of God, while the out-of-door pursuer of the prey was only a lawless lover of nature. Though the two were the subjects of prophetic appointment, it was not without a reason that it was afterwards written "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"—(Rom. ix. 13.)

But the difference between the two was not fully manifest while they were at home together. Esau, as the elder, had the birthright, and "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison. —(Gen. xxv. 28.) Here was a situation of things requiring an interposition

of providence to bring about a change in harmony with the divine purpose. It might be asked, Why was there such a situation?—why was not Jacob the firstborn and beloved? It is one answer to say that the allegory required that Esau, the rejected, as typifying the human race in their first Adam relation, should be first in privilege and first in the enjoyment of preferential regard, but a more comprehensive answer is that it is not for us to criticise the arrangements of the irresponsible and all-wise Possessor of heaven and earth. The situation was there, and had to be changed. The interest for us, as investigators of the ways of providence, is to watch how the change was brought about. First, as regards the birthright. The matter must have been the subject of frequent conversation between Jacob and his mother Rebecca—for two reasons: Rebecca knew, from God's intimation to her before the birth of her children, that her sons were the heads of "two manner of people, and she knew that the chosen people would be in the line of the younger, and that that younger was Jacob. She perceived the difference between the two growing boys, and with a clearer sight than Isaac, who was biased by Esau's welcome and probably manly ministrations, "she loved Jacob. —(Gen. xxv. 28.) Loving Jacob, and knowing he was the chosen, and yet perceiving that the family birthright was in the possession of Esau, she must often have spoken of the matter with her son, as the subsequent narratives show them familiar and confidential with one another on matters affecting Jacob's interests. What more likely than that they should

suggest the desirability of inducing Esau to part with his legal privilege? The difficulty would be to carry out that idea. Their thoughts would be angelically stimulated in this direction. At all events this is what happened. On a certain occasion, Esau, returning faint and hungry from his favourite occupation afield, asks Jacob for some food, which, in the absence of precise domestic arrangements, he had prepared for himself. This is the opportunity for which Jacob had been previously prepared. It is also precisely the occasion to test and manifest Esau as the type of the class who sacrifice future well-being to present gratification. Some might say it exhibits Jacob in an unneighbourly aspect, and that he ought not to have seized the moment of hunger to extort a bargain; but ought rather to have unconditionally ministered to his brother's need. The answer is, there is a time for everything, and that these men were in the hands of a special providence for the working out of a national purpose in their posterity, and for the development of a spiritual allegory, serviceable for all time. Esau's character comes out, and he seals his own doom. Physical craving is more powerful with him than the perceptions of wisdom. For a moment's gratification, he bargains away a position germinally containing countless gratifications in the future. He stands before us as a man swayed by his senses, and not by the dictates of enlightened judgment; and, therefore, as the type of the class who love the present world, and have not faith sufficient to practise that self-denial by which the birthright of the future age is preserved and secured.

Jacob obtained the birthright cast away by his brother, thus completing the spiritual allegory of the transaction. The practical bearing of the case on present times is obvious. God put Esau to the proof by a common-place home incident, in which the hand of God was not visible. God may prove us by common-place home incidents. The Spirit exhorts us: "Let no man take thy crown." Esau illustrates the failure of this exhortation. He would not be aware of the issues involved. Crowns are lost and won in the common ways of life. The general habit of man is to look upon these common ways as insignificant—a view which puts people off their guard. The attitude of wisdom is to have our eyes open towards God in all our ways—in all these ways acknowledging Him, that He may direct our steps. It was part of the folly of Jerusalem bewailed by Jesus, that she "knew not the time of her visitation."—(Luke xix. 44.) She looked upon Jesus and the apostles as common men, and their teaching as matters of debateable value. She discerned not in them the approach of God's expostulation, invitation and entreaty. Her mistake is possible individually. God works in "divers manners" with the "sundry times." He may come near to a man in the special instrumentality of His word brought to bear in an apparently unofficial, natural and common-place way. If there is no loving intelligence to discern, the visitation may be turned to hurt, and without our knowing that God has anything to do with it. Jesus intimates as much to the ecclesia at Sardis, saying, "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee AS A THIEF, and *thou shalt*

not know what hour I shall come upon thee."—(Rev. iii. 3.) Esau's case is a fair illustration of God's coming upon a man as a thief. He took away his birthright in a way, and at a moment, when Esau was unaware of the operation. God works still, and changes not. Our only safety lies in the attitude of constant watchfulness over our tongues and our hands, that word and deed may be in harmony with the will of God. Practically, this is to be accomplished in the daily reading of the word, and continuing instant in prayer. Pleasure and too much business, frustrate the operation of these, and leave us a prey to that insensibility and neglect in which we may fall from our steadfastness and lose our birthright.

The transfer of the birthright from Esau to Jacob brought the situation more into harmony with the purpose of God; but there was a remaining obstacle Isaac loved Esau, as we have seen, and this love prompted him to resolve on bestowing his parting blessing on his elder son. There was more in this than we can know It might seem as if it were a matter of indifference what any man might utter, in the way of benediction, if the will of God were opposed to the blessing, but when we are dealing with men on whom the Spirit of God rested, and whose volitions may, to some extent, have controlled its effects, we are really dealing with the working out of the will of God by some hidden law which we cannot understand, as merely natural men, but which we may see quite into when we ourselves have passed out of the animal into the spiritual state, if it please God to grant us that great blessedness in Christ. At all events, it became a matter

of importance that Isaac should be diverted from a purpose which was due to his likings, as a natural man, rather than to his understanding of the purpose announced to Rebecca concerning their two sons. Rebecca was herself made use of to frustrate Isaac's intentions. Some say that if Rebecca had waited, God would have interposed in some other way to bring Isaac's blessing upon Jacob. It may be so, but there is no intimation of this in the testimony. The crisis was at hand. "Isaac called Esau, his eldest son, and said unto him: My son; and he said unto him, Behold here am I. And he said: Behold, now, I am old: I know not the day of my death. Now, therefore, take, I pray thee, take thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison. And make savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee before I die.'—(Gen. xxvii. 1-4.) Esau having received this express and interesting direction, went immediately out to carry it into effect. Rebecca was a witness to what had passed. She was greatly exercised by it. If Esau returns successful, as he is likely to do, the blessing which belongs to the younger will be obtained by the elder, in opposition to what had been told to her of the Lord before the birth of the children. She resolves to take upon herself the responsibility of coming between Isaac and the fulfilment of his intentions. Who shall say she was not stirred up to defeat a merely natural partiality of Isaac's? She informs Jacob of what was pending, and directs him to bring to her two kids from the flock that she may dress them in the manner that

his father liked. With these, she sends Jacob into the presence of his father, who was blind from age; and, representing himself as Esau, his father having eaten, bestows upon him the blessing which was his by the divine purpose and the purchased birthright. "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee. Cursed be every one that curseth thee and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

The only difficult feature of the case is the deception by which the blessing was diverted. Some easement on this point may be obtained by realising that God may do what man must not do if God forbid. To man it is a command, "Thou shalt not kill," and to kill in disobedience of this, is murder; but God may kill without unrighteousness, as He says "I kill and I make alive. . . . Neither is there any that can deliver out of Mine hand."—(Deut. xxxii. 39.) To us it is sin to avenge ourselves, because of the command "Avenge not yourselves," but "is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid: for then how should God judge the world."—(Rom. iii. 5.) He says "Vengeance is Mine: I will repay."—(Deut. xxxii. 43.) So on the subject of deception: in all normal relations, "God is a God of truth and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (*Ibid*) but when circumstances call for it, He may, as a man without unrighteousness deceives a wild beast, to its capture and destruction, "send strong delusion" upon the perverse, "that they may believe a lie."—(II. Thess. ii. 11.) On this principle, we read "If the prophet (that is, the idolatrous prophet:

see context) be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, *I, the Lord, have deceived the prophet.*”—(Ezekiel xiv. 9.) And again in the parable uttered before Ahab by Micaiah, the prophet of Jehovah: “There came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him (Ahab, to go up to battle). And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, . . . ? Go forth and do so. Now therefore, *the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.*”—(I. Kings xxii. 21-23.) Applying this principle to the case in hand, we may understand that God stirred up Rebecca to deceive Isaac, that Isaac might be defeated in the wrong use of the divine gift of blessing which rested upon him.

The difficulty in understanding such instances, arises principally from our pre-conceived notions on the subject of “morality.” Human speculation, *alias* philosophy falsely so-called, has evolved the assumption that “morality” (as men speak) is a fixed element in the constitution of things; and to this “morality,” they have imagined God is as much subject as His creatures. The fact is—as the Scriptures reveal and nature accurately studied attests—that there is no such thing as fixed morality at all. The question of right and wrong is determinable in all things by the appointment of the eternal Creator. It is a simple question of what He has commanded. With Him is sovereign and irresponsible authority. “None may say unto Him, What doest Thou?” He may command a man to kill,

and it is then sin not to kill, as in the case of Saul with the Amalekites; and righteousness to kill, as in the case of Samuel with Agag, on the same occasion; while when He chooses to command: "Thou shalt not kill," he that even hates his brother becomes a murderer. This simple principle relieves the subject of the world of difficulty that human philosophy has created. It explains, too, how it is that the belief of the gospel is righteousness, and enables us to realise how unutterably out of the right way is the present generation, with all their educated contempt for the promises and the commandments of God.

In these remarks, we have digressed somewhat from the general subject to which these chapters are devoted. Yet they have naturally arisen from the topics discussed, and may not be without use. The lesson of Jacob and Esau, as bearing on the subject of providence, is the same as we found in the prior cases: that, besides the visible interposition of His power, God works by apparently natural circumstances in the execution of His purposes, and that the eye of an enlightened faith may discern His hand where unbelief sees nothing but mechanical chance; yea, mischance, untoward and evil occurrence. The further lessons in this direction yielded by the life of Jacob, we must leave for another chapter.





CHAPTER VI.

Esau's anger at the loss of the blessing.—His threatening attitude towards Jacob.—Jacob's departure to Padan-aram in quest of a wife.—Why he did not seek one among the daughters of the land.—Important influence of the marriage relation.—A good wife "from the Lord."—The right sort not appreciated by the Ishmaels and the Esaus.—Providential guidance of the Jacobs.—The promise to Jacob that God was with him.—His life read in this light.—Not unmixed prosperity.—Rigorous service in the field.—An austere master.—Affliction and labour.—Trouble no sign that a man is deserted by God.—Jacob's fears and precautions.—His return home with wives and children.—His terror at the prospect of meeting Esau.—His prayer, his conciliatory arrangements and the result.—Our lesson.



GSAU'S anger was naturally excited against Jacob on finding that Jacob had been before him, and taken the blessing intended for himself. "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him ;" and Esau showed his character as a man of ungovernable natural impulse by vowing to kill Jacob as soon as his father should be out of the way. This led to a new chapter in Jacob's history.

Rebecca heard of Esau's menacing words, and knowing from Esau's character that her son Jacob was really in danger, she proposed to Jacob that he should take refuge for a while with his uncle in Padan-aram, till Esau's

anger should subside. She had another object in this proposal. Esau at forty years of age had married two Hittite women who were "a grief of mind" to both Isaac and Rebecca.—(Gen. xxvi. 35.) Why were they a grief of mind? Because, partaking of the character of the surrounding population, they would be women without discretion, having no inclination for wisdom—no interest in God, in His purposes or His will—no taste for anything beyond the passing pleasures and enjoyments of the hour. Their idolatrous proclivities would be a comparatively passive element in the obnoxiousness which Isaac and Rebecca experienced in their daily contact; for idolatry, as a sincere though mistaken exercise of the worshipping faculty, is respectable compared with the insipidity and foolery of a vacant mind. They would probably be handsome women enough. You do not find a natural man of the Esau type fancying any other sort. There would have been no harm in the beauty if the beauty had been linked with divine wisdom (and there is no other true wisdom). Such a combination is rare. The wives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were, however, instances of it, as we incidentally glean from the narrative.—(Gen. xii. 11; xxvi. 7; xxix. 17.) It is much more common to find beauty alone, or what is worse, in combination with a foolish mind. A fair countenance in such a case is a trap—a deception. Solomon's comparison of beauty in such a case is "a jewel of gold in a swine's snout." Nevertheless it is all powerful with the natural man. The glitter of the jewel fascinates him: he has no eyes to discern the nature of

the animal that wears it. Even the sons of God are in danger. It was a potent cause of the corruption that ended in the flood. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all they chose" (or fancied). In this they did wrong. Esau had committed the same wrong to the grief not only of Rebecca but of Isaac, who had a partiality for him. Rebecca was resolved that Jacob (now considerably over forty) should not fall into the same mistake: and she took advantage of the necessity for protecting Jacob from his brother's threats, to press the subject on Isaac, and induce him to consent to Jacob's departure to her brother's family in Padan-aram who though not entirely enlightened, recognised and feared the God of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac, not difficult to persuade, adopted Rebecca's views, and called Jacob and said, "Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, thy mother's father, and take thee a wife from thence, of the daughters of Laban, thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee and make thee fruitful and multiply thee that thou mayest be a multitude of people, and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed after thee, that thou mayest inherit the land where thou art a stranger which God gave unto Abraham. . . Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan."

Thus was the anger of an evil brother, excited by one operation of providence, made use of as another operation of providence, to divert the steps of Jacob into a channel favourable for the purpose of God with him, and conducive to the development of well-being. There is

nothing on the face of the transaction to indicate a divine guidance; but the sequel and Jacob's subsequent allusions to his course show it, whence we have the conclusion that God may be guiding our steps not only in the midst of, but by the very means of, circumstances that in themselves appear evil. "A good wife is from the Lord." So Solomon says; and so Jacob's steps are guided to the precious gift. Esau's action on his brother's departure is worthy of passing notice, as illustrative of the natural man's way of looking at the subject. "When Esau saw that Isaac had sent Jacob to Padan-aram to take him a wife from thence, and that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father, then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had, Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son." Esau thought Isaac's objection to his Canaanitish wives was on the score of their not being blood relations. It could not occur to him that spiritual incompatibility was the stumbling-block; this was a thing he could not understand, for on many points it is true that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God." He thought to put straight a spiritually-caused family hitch by a resort to a natural remedy. He married a daughter of Ishmael, his father's brother, to soothe the irritation caused to his father by the daughters of Canaan. It might have occurred to him that if blood relations were all that Isaac desired in the wives of his sons, Jacob would have been sent to Ishmael (near) for a wife instead of to the house of Laban (far off). The daughters of Ishmael, the wild man, were as bad as the

daughters of the land. In Esau's estimation, they were as good and perhaps better; and, from a merely natural point of view, probably Esau was right. But the other point of view remains. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."—(Prov. xxxi. 30.) This sort of woman is not appreciated by the Ishmaels and the Esaus: to the Jacobs she is all-important, and sometimes they are sent by curious twists of providence to the places where they are to be found.

Jacob went on his journey. As he slept at a place afterwards called Bethel, the Lord appeared to him in a dream; and, for the first time, extended to him the promises that had been made to Abraham and Isaac, in which Ishmael and Esau were not permitted to share—the promise of possession of the land wherein he was a stranger, of a multitudinous seed, and of the blessedness of universal man in an unspecified futurity through him and his seed. In this he was associated with Abraham and Isaac as one of "the fathers" with whom the leading covenant of promise was established as the basis of human hope in all subsequent generations. But it is with the assurance personal to himself, and appertaining to the days of his pilgrimage, that we have in this connection to deal. That assurance was this: "Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into the land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." The right way to look at the history of Jacob is to look at it in the light of this

promise. By reading it in this way, we get illustrations of the operations of divine providence in the life of a man, such as we can feel there is no mistake about. It is not like the loose allusions to providence we hear around us, which may be altogether beside the mark. Hundreds of things are ascribed to providence with which providence has nothing to do. Not so in the case of Jacob. Here we have the intimation that God was "with Jacob, and kept him in all places whither he went." We have, therefore, a capital case to study. Human views of such a case would lead us to expect in Jacob's life a life of unmixed prosperity—no hitches, no clouds, nothing to endure—nothing of which a man should say, "All these things are against me." If God is "with a man, and "keeps" him, how can anything go wrong? So man might reason. It would only be so far right. It is true that, as regards ultimate results, a God-kept man will suffer no evil—will attain perfect blessedness, but the very process by which God causes a man to reach both results may involve unpleasant and apparently untoward experiences.

Let us follow Jacob after his departure from Bethel, and learn that a God favoured and God kept man is not a man who suffers no evil, feels no anxiety, and resorts to no expedients. The modern notion is as unlike the reality as the clerical "St. Paul" is unlike the "beloved brother Paul" of Peter's allusion. We do not propose a minute biography, but just a glance at some of the incidents. Guided to the house of Laban, Rebecca's brother, and brought at once into contact

with the wife prepared for him, he enters into a contract of service with Laban. His business is to look after Laban's flocks. God is with him but is the work a continual pleasure on that account? Listen to Jacob: "In the day the drought consumed me, and the night by frost, and my sleep departed from mine eyes." Ye who suffer the rigours of hard work, remember Jacob; do not think God has forsaken you because you feel the hardness of the way. In everything consider the end. Your suffering may be needful to hedge your way to the kingdom of God, or to prepare you for the exaltation that is to come. Resign yourselves to the will of God, and "hope in Him in all thy ways." You may yet see your deepest trouble was your best experience. God was with Jacob, and He led him to the house of his relations, but did He thus give him a kind, considerate and just master? Man might reason that if God gave Jacob a master, it would be sure to be a good master, but man is shortsighted. It all depends upon the object in view. The tool is adapted to the work. A saw to cut the wood that is to make a fence for a dangerous place over which the children might fall, is not necessarily an instrument of torture, but the children do not always understand, and the sight of the saw makes them shudder. Though God was with Jacob, Jacob's master was of the character thus sketched by Jacob "This twenty years have I been with thee. . . . That which was torn of beasts—(what? God with Jacob and allow wild beasts to molest the flocks he was tending? —Yes.) . . . of my hand didst thou require it,

whether stolen by day or stolen by night. . . Thou hast changed my wages ten times (that is, to Jacob's disadvantage)." Jacob's wages consisted of a certain sort among the increase of the cattle; and when the sort agreed upon became numerous, Laban appointed another sort that he thought would be fewer. "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen *mine affliction and the labour of my hands.*" Who would have expected "affliction" in the case of a man whom God accompanied and protected? So it was, and so it has always been, in measure and for good—even in the case of the Son of His love, who, "though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered." "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." It is no sign that a man is deserted of God that he falls into trouble; all depends upon the nature and effect of trouble and the attitude of the man. It is no sign that a man is favoured of God that he prospers like a green bay tree; it all depends upon how the prosperity is employed, and what the man's mental state may be. In these things we must intelligently discriminate in the light of the fact that God taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, and hath chosen him that is godly for Himself; and that His regard for such may sometimes allow of prosperity while it sometimes calls for the chastening rod. We must judge all cases from the point of view of the kingdom of God. If we are guided there, no adversity is too bitter that may have prepared us; no exaltation

too high that has not spoiled us. Adversity may be bitter to the point of destructiveness; prosperity also may be uplifting to our ruin. God can poise both and judge when they are safe or necessary for such as walk before Him in well-pleasing. Our part is to commit our way to Him in well-doing, forgetting not in any state of circumstances that at present we are strangers in the earth with Him, and stewards for Him of whatever favour may come to our hands.

In a certain crisis in his affairs, "Jacob stole away unawares from Laban the Syrian," taking with him all that he had. Laban pursued after, and overtook him. Laban told Jacob he had "done foolishly" in going away secretly. He asked him the reason. Jacob answered, "Because *I was afraid*; for I said, peradventure, thou wouldst take by force thy daughters from me." Jacob afraid and God with him? Yes. Jacob knew that, though God was with him, God looked to Jacob to arrange his affairs with discretion, as the spirit of God testifies in all the Proverbs of Solomon; and, not knowing in detail what God might in His wisdom permit, he naturally feared when circumstances were threatening, and adopted the course that appeared wise. Human action is the basis of divine supervision in human affairs. If a man were to lie down in sloth, the angels would have nothing to work on, so to speak, as regarded that man's matters. The co-workship of God and man is a delightful fact of experience and revelation—in affairs both present and future, both spiritual and temporal.

Affairs having been amicably settled between Jacob and Laban, Jacob proceeded on his journey; and from one fear, we find him falling into another. He is approaching the land of the Amorites. He remembers the hatred of Esau and the occasion he had given for it, and he thinks it wise to send a conciliatory message to him. The messengers return and say, "We came to thy brother Esau and also he cometh to meet thee and four hundred men with him. There was no explanation what Esau was coming for; but knowing Esau, Jacob concludes the worst, and becomes the subject of a kind of panic. "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." Why should Jacob be "greatly afraid and distressed," seeing that God was with him and had promised to keep him in all places whither he would go? Because the form of circumstances was fear inspiring. God had not said "Thy brother Esau shall not hurt thee," and Jacob could not know that he would be unhurt on this particular occasion. He knew that God was with him, but he knew that this did not mean exemption from all evil, though it meant exemption from final harm. Consequently, we find him in trepidation at the prospect of an attack by a band of lawless men; and making arrangements on the hypothesis that the will of God might allow of a disaster. "He divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and the herds into *two bands*, saying, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." Having made the best arrangements he could think of, he prays: "O God of my father Abraham, and

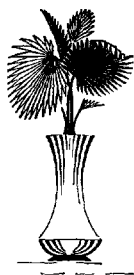
God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred and I will deal well with thee, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him lest he will come and smite me and the mother with the children. And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude —(Gen. xxxii 9) Here we have a visible conflict in Jacob's mind, the fear that Esau will do him evil struggles with the belief that such an event would be inconsistent with God's own promises to him. He pleads those promises, acknowledges their fulfilment, thus far confesses his unworthiness, throws himself upon God in prayer, and then proceeds to take further precautions. He makes up a series of presents for Esau of the various animals composing his flocks. He sends on the present droves before him, one by one, with a friendly message in the mouth of each driver. His object he thus explains: "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterwards I will see his face, peradventure he will accept of me. Why should Jacob resort to such measures if he left the matter to God? Why not trust to the mollifying effect of God's action on the mind of Esau? Well, because Jacob while committing the matter to God, recognised the duty of doing his best to bring about the result he desired;

and if the steps of those who thus commit their way to Him are directed, may we not conclude that Jacob was moved to take the measures which were needful to avert the impending danger? The result justifies the thought; for Esau, whatever his original intentions may have been, was entirely propitiated by the friendly arrangements of his brother, and the meeting was a meeting of friendship instead of hostility. God has conferred upon man the god-like gift of independent volition *alias* free will within the boundary imposed by surrounding conditions. This limited independence of will is the basis of all God's dealings with man. Consequently, "providence" is a complex and interesting operation which manipulates circumstances, and so acts through without setting aside the natural action of the unconstrained human will. If the objects aimed at were to be accomplished on mechanical principles, the operation would be more direct, more brief, but vastly less interesting and effective in every way. It would exclude faith on the part of those for whom it is conducted, which of itself would be a fatal flaw; for it is a truth in many relations that, "without faith, it is impossible to please God."

The incidents of Jacob's life, like the rest of the Scriptures, were "written for our instruction." He was an heir of the kingdom, well-pleasing to God. Consequently we need have no fear in accepting his constructions of providence. We shall not err if, like him, while trusting to God's guidance and co-operation, we humbly and prayerfully resort to the best arrangements our wisdom can suggest, always taking care that none

of our arrangements are forbidden; for if we are disobedient in the means we employ, we cannot expect the divine approbation and blessing.

We find it necessary to devote yet another chapter to the case of Jacob.





CHAPTER VII.

Jacob and the completeness of his case as illustrating providence.—The abduction of Dinah.—Her violent recovery and the slaughter of the abductionists by Simeon and Levi.—Jacob's fear of the consequence.—Divine directions.—The terror of God on the neighbouring tribes.—Divine help not always apparent.—Evil allowed sometimes in punishment; sometimes in vindication.—Presumption excluded by the method of divine ways.—Constant need for faith and obedience.—The present state an evil state.—Divinely regulated on behalf of those whom God will choose.—Jacob as a broken-hearted father.—Joseph's disappearance.—Twenty years of darkness for Jacob, ending with famine, and greater darkness still.—The visit of his sons to Egypt.—Their rough experiences.—The joyful end of the matter.

THE case of Jacob is perhaps one of the most striking in the whole range of scripture history, in the combination of human fear and divine guardianship. There are many cases of God preserving and delivering, but only in a few other cases—(notably Job, David, and Jeremiah)—have we such a complete exhibition of the mental distresses of those delivered and the human details of the process by which deliverance was wrought out. All cases of scripture illustration are really alike in principle, but in only a few cases is the picture drawn completely. Jacob is one of them. His experience is thoroughly, though so briefly pourtrayed. The result is, we can look at him closely,

and are enabled to realise how human he is, while at the same time so devout and so direct and continual in his recognition of the divine hand in his ways. In this his case is all the more helpful to us, who, by our position in the times of the Gentiles, are so far removed (in the past at all events) from those interpositions of divine power which necessarily characterised the initiation of the divine plan, and which enabled those who stood related to them so much the more easily to realise the guidance of God and to be in His fear all the day long.

We have looked at some of the illustrative episodes of his life. There are others. He was put in great fear by the action of his two sons, Simeon and Levi. This was after their return from Padan-aram, and when they had pitched their tents, for a time, outside the city of Shalem, in Shechem, a district of the land of Canaan. Here Jacob was on terms of peace with the leading men of the neighbourhood, Shechem and his father Hamor, from whom he purchased a considerable piece of land, for the use of himself and his large company. While dwelling here in peace, Shechem falls in love and takes unlawful possession of Jacob's daughter, Dinah. Jacob hears of the circumstance, but holds his peace till the arrival of his sons who were "with his cattle in the field." He communicated the matter to them, "and the men were grieved and they were very wroth." While their resentments are aglow, Hamor arrives to make proposals of marriage on behalf of his son. The men are in a dilemma. If they say No, they will provoke the hostility of their neighbours; and they cannot say Yes, without

violating the family tradition which prohibits inter-marriage with the daughters of the land, not to speak of the impossibility of their consenting to their sister being married to her ravisher. So "the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully," promising compliance with their proposal on condition of themselves and all the men of their city submitting to circumcision. Shechem and Hamor submitted to this condition, and on the third day, when they were all disabled from the effects of circumcision, "Simeon and Levi took each man his sword and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went out." They justified their proceeding by saying, "Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?" Jacob was exceedingly distressed when he heard what they had done. He feared the effect that would be produced on the neighbouring tribes. He said to his two sons, "Ye have troubled me to make me of ill savour amongst the inhabitants of the land. . . . They shall gather themselves together against me and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

At the crisis of his distress, he receives command to remove to Bethel, where God appeared to him when on his single-handed journey to Padan-aram. This was a solution of his difficulty which we are cut off from in our time of suspended communication. Many a time it would be a great relief to have the word of command what to do. However, we must not be discontented

with our position, which, notwithstanding the absence of open vision, is one of great privilege. If Jacob had angelic communication, he had not a Bible in which the ways of God were thoroughly illustrated in a multitude of divine instances, and declared in many and varied precepts and commandments. He could not understand, even as we may understand with the word in our possession. Then angelic guidance was more a necessity in his case, and fear more natural than where the ways of God are entirely spread out to our view. In obedience to the command, he departs. There is a likelihood that the neighbours of the slain Shechemites (for Shechem was "prince of the country") will pursue and harass and perhaps destroy him, for his bands, consisting of cattle droves and family wagons, are feeble and practically defenceless. How is Jacob's fear on this head provided for? "The terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob."—(Gen. xxxv. 5.) In this there was a direct interposition of divine help, yet not of an obvious character. There was nothing to be seen except desired results. Jacob's company journeyed in safety, yet probably in fear, looking apprehensively for a molestation which did not take place. The statement that the surrounding cities "did not pursue," would imply this, for otherwise, there was no reason to mention the circumstance. As for the cities themselves, there was no visible restraint. They experienced a depression of spirits which extinguished hostile enterprise. Perhaps their fears of the family of Jacob which had prevailed

against the city of "the prince of the country," were angelically exaggerated; that is, their imaginations, already at work, may have been stimulated in this direction. There are many cases of divinely-caused illusions for a purpose.—(II. Kings vii. 6; xix. 7.) At all events, they stayed at home and the helpless caravan was allowed to get away in safety to Bethel. It is an illustration of what David afterwards said concerning Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "He suffered no man to do them wrong, yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." In this case, there was no visible intervention: it was all apparently natural: Jacob, in fear, getting away safely: his enemies apprehensive staying at home. God was taking care of Jacob, though not apparently.

May we not apply the fact to ourselves who trust in the same God? Shall we forget that God is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever? He himself rallies Israel on the subject (and we are a part of Israel by adoption through the gospel): "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." But there came a time when the hand, though unshortened was not out-stretched; and the ear, though cognizant, irresponsive. Why? "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear."—(Isaiah lix. 1-2.) This was the national reason: but it may have an individual application. James points this out in telling the brethren to whom he wrote "Ye

ask, and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts. . . . Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? . . . God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up."—(James iv. 3-10.) Paul illustrates the same principle when he says, concerning the faults of the brethren at Corinth, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world."—(I. Cor. xi. 30-32.) There are, therefore, two sides of the case to realise: if we do the things that please God, we shall be preserved even when apparently no preserving effort is put forth: and if we are straying, evil will be permitted to bring us right.

Just another fact is needed to complete the view of the case. Evil may be permitted, not to punish, but to vindicate. Job, a man perfectly approved of God, was brought into the lowest depths, without explanation; it was that it might be evident that his righteousness was not mercenarily inspired by prosperity, but begotten of the recognition of the rights of God, without respect to individual experience of good or evil. Consequently

(the case having been recorded for guidance), adversity is no evidence of iniquity, as prosperity for the time being is certainly no evidence of righteousness. Some may exclaim, "What confusion! Prosperity an evidence of divine preservation and yet a possible condition of wickedness! Adversity, the punishment of sin and yet the correction of love, and again neither the one nor the other, but the vindication of moral excellence!" Well, it has simply to be said that like many seeming paradoxes in beautiful and harmonious nature, so the truth stands with regard to the present dealings of God with man. The whole matter is so situated that we are shut off from all presumptuous prying into the ways of God, and thrown entirely on the principle of faith and obedience. It is not for us to presume on any phase of circumstances. It is for us to avoid the mistake of Job's friends. The attitude of wisdom cannot be more exactly or satisfactorily defined than in the words of Peter, "Commit the keeping of your souls to Him *in well-doing* as unto a faithful Creator."

A wide-reaching phase of the whole subject is involved in the family incident which led to Jacob's departure from Shechem. It was such an incident as the short-sighted view which is common in our day would have said could not happen to a man chosen and protected of God as Jacob was. If this shortsighted view had been called upon to write a probable history of Jacob, it certainly would have excluded the abduction and seduction of Jacob's daughter by a neighbouring aristocrat as an impossibility. But there the incident stands, in all its

grievousness, distressing Jacob and firing his sons with man-slaying indignation. What view comes out of it? Why just the view expressed by Jacob himself when presented in his old age before Pharaoh in Egypt. "Few *and evil* have been the days of the years of my life."—(Gen. xlvii. 9.) We must never forget that the present life in its best state is a state of exile from Eden; therefore a state of separation from divine fellowship and perfect blessedness. Reconciliation and return are in process of accomplishment, and the foundation of the work was laid in the promises and institutions appointed first in Eden and afterwards with the fathers; but, until the work is actually brought to its completion, the effect of separation will and must continue. Out of evil, and by means of it, God is bringing great good, but till the good arrive, evil will remain the characteristic of our present experience. It is this that gives point to and enables us to pray the prayer of the man of God in Psalm xc: "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."—(Verses 13, 15.) This prayer will be answered, perhaps in measure now, but not in its final form till the appointed time, even the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, till which time, as Paul remarks, "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

We shall make a mistake in looking anywhere for unmixed good till the proclamation is heard, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away."—(Rev. xxi. 3.) Most people will readily admit that we must not look for unmixed good till this time arrives; yet there is a tendency to overlook the constitutional evil of the present order of things, and a tacit assumption that evil cannot be among the experiences of those with whom God is pleased. The fact is that the very best experience at present is only a state of divinely regulated evil, and that the occurrence of evil is one of the necessities involved in the development of saints from a race of unjustified sinners. All are sinners more or less, and, "why should a man complain for the punishment of his sins?"—(Lament. iii. 39.) While all are sinners, more or less, some are forgiven sinners—those who fear and obey God, confessing their sins and forsaking them. All things work together for the final good of this class; but amongst these "all things" evil itself has a place. God is the judge of when and how much it is needed. In this light, let us not be amazed at the grievous domestic convulsion that sent Jacob and his sons to Bethel; and let us rightly interpret our lives and not imagine ourselves God-forsaken if we are called upon to drink perhaps many a bitter cup. "In every-

thing consider the end." The end will be joy and gladness unutterable.

We have next to consider Jacob in the aspect of a heart-broken father—an aspect that perhaps appeals more directly than any other to our human sympathy. We follow him into the cloud, the long-brooding cloud; the valley, the long deep valley, and learn that the cruelest and apparently most aimless wrench of affliction may be but a preparation for us of the highest blessedness. Jacob had a son whom he loved more than the others. He could not help it, for Joseph was not only the son of his old age, but he was more excellent than his brethren, and Jesus himself showed a preferential love for "John, the beloved disciple" (this is not respect of persons but respect of character, which is divine). Jacob manifested his love for Joseph in making him a coat of many colours. "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him." This was a distress to Jacob, but nothing to what was to come. Joseph added to the hatred felt for him by his brethren, and excited the curious contemplations of Jacob himself by the narration of dreams which seemed to foreshadow the exaltation of Joseph over them all. In process of time, his brothers repaired with their flocks for pasturage to Shechem, which they had left under the circumstances already considered. When they had been away awhile, Jacob, who had a true father's love for them all, became desirous of knowing how they fared, and decided to send Joseph to ascertain

and bring him word again. Joseph started on his journey and never returned. By and bye his brothers came. We can imagine Jacob's heart-quaking enquiry: "Haven't you seen Joseph?" Oh! the anguish of the answer, "No: but here is a torn coat, besmeared with blood that looks like his. Examine it and see." Jacob examines it; he recognises it as Joseph's, and he gives way to inconsolable grief. "It is my son's coat! An evil beast hath devoured him! Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces!" And he mourned many days. "All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, *but he refused to be comforted*; for he said, I will go down unto the grave unto my son mourning." Poor Jacob! Was it to be wondered at? A noble boy, just seventeen, full of intelligence and the fear of Abraham's God—the flower of the flock—not only torn from him but apparently the victim of a cruel and purposeless death! Jacob's other sons were lusty grown men of not particularly admirable dispositions. He himself was old, and his son Joseph was the comfort of his old age. We cannot wonder at his tears. Yea, we can weep with him. The case was, on the face of it, without hope, and God vouchsafed no explanation. A word would have ended the grief; but it would also have ended the chastisement "whereof all are partakers;" and so God, who though He pity those who fear Him as a father pitieth his children, yet wisely afflicts, though not willingly—withheld the word; and we behold Jacob prostrate in bereavement; and made to feel, in the midst of much blessing and privilege, the evil of this

present time, and so prepared for the gladsome place which awaits him in the kingdom of God, when the words of Isaiah, though national in their meaning, will be individually fulfilled: "Jacob shall not be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of Mine hands in the midst of him, they shall (together) sanctify My Name and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."—(Isaiah xxix. 22-24.)

Over twenty years afterwards—dreary desolate years for Jacob—Jacob is confronted by a new anxiety. The crops fail on all hands and famine sets in. Food is not to be obtained and their reserve stock is running down. What is to be done? Has God forsaken Jacob? Oh no: it only looks like it. The immediate future is big with unheard-of joy for Jacob and undreamt-of honour and blessing for his old age, reminding us of the true saying, "The darkest hour of all the night is that which heralds morn." But this is the way it comes. Mortal peril threatens. The clouds are blacker than they have ever been in the course of his life. There is apparently no escape. His sons look wistfully at one another with dismal foreboding. At last, Jacob hears (probably from some arrival in the neighbourhood) that there is corn in Egypt. He communicates the good news to his sons, without knowing all the good involved in the intimation. "Why do ye look one upon another? Behold I have heard there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither and

bring for us from thence that we may live and not die." They go down to Egypt: and in due time they return with supplies. But with the relief, there is new trouble. One of his sons, Simeon, has not come back. His other sons tell him that they had fared strangely in Egypt. "The man who is the lord of the land spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. . . . And he said, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men: leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your household and be gone. And bring your youngest brother unto me; then shall I know that ye are no spies." And when they had made their report, they emptied their sacks, and "behold every man's bundle of money was in his sack." Fear and perplexity are the results. Jacob is simply distracted. He cannot understand the new turn of affairs. He groans out "all these things are against me." Addressing his sons, he says "Me have ye bereaved of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. . . . My son shall not go with you: for his brother is dead and he is left alone; if mischief befall him on the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

And so the matter ends for a time. By and by the corn gets eaten. Here comes the strain again. There are no signs of the famine giving way. Food is not procurable anywhere except in Egypt—(thus is Jacob's unwilling way hedged up to the appointed issue). He suggests to his sons a second journey for further supplies. Yes, says Judah, if Benjamin goes with us. "The man

did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you." Jacob cannot hear of it and so the time passes. By and bye, necessity presses again. Jacob moots the proposal once more. The subject of Benjamin is again pressed. Judah says "If thou wilt not send him, we will not go down." Jacob indulges in one of those unavailing impeachments of accomplished facts to which people are prone when in the iron grasp of a disliked situation: "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" His son's answer is reasonable, "The man asked us straitly of our state and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? Have ye another brother? . . . Could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?" At last Jacob gives in. Benjamin is allowed to go, and the ten brothers depart with the almost despairing benediction of their father, who says, "God Almighty give you mercy before the man that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children I am bereaved." Jacob is left alone in distress. His sons are all gone to a country where he knows they are suspected and from which perhaps they will never return. That austere "lord of the land," the burden of his apprehensions, may fall upon them all, Benjamin too, as he had done upon Simeon, and make them bondsmen, and he may never see them again. He is uneasy; he cannot rest; he trusts in God, yet the clouds are dark and his heart is heavy. It is almost at the breaking point. He cannot endure much longer. Poor Jacob! "To the upright, there ariseth

light in the darkness." His sons return in due time, and what fine equipages are these they have brought with them? Wagons that Joseph has sent to carry Jacob and all the little ones to Egypt. Who? Joseph! "Joseph is yet alive and he is governor over all the land of Egypt." Jacob faints at the report! No wonder. Give him time. He slowly rallies. He listens; Benjamin and Simeon are there. He looks at the wagons. He puts all things together. He comes to the only conclusion admissible in the circumstances: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."

What more forcible illustration was it possible for God to have given to all succeeding generations of His children that trouble (so far from being evidence of desertion) is a means employed in His hands to lay the foundation of future joy and blessedness. Let His children then be comforted and strengthened to endure even the deepest and most inexplicable affliction. Let them learn to see God in the darkness and to feel His hand in the tempest. Let them beware of the folly of Job's three friends rebuked of God. Let them know that this time of our pilgrimage is the night, and that though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning and that joy a joy prepared by the weeping. Let them apply the consolation Christ has given them: "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall be comforted."



CHAPTER VIII.

The case of Joseph.—A providential work of God placed beyond question by explicit testimony.—His troubled youth at home.—His dreams.—Dreams that are divine, and dreams that are not.—Joseph hated of his brethren.—Adversity a needful preparation for exaltation.—Put into a pit.—Sold to traders.—Taken to Egypt.—From one dreadful experience to another.—God with him, though not apparently so.—A lesson to his brethren of all ages.—Joseph's cheerful service in Potiphar's house.—His false accusation by Potiphar's wife.—His imprisonment.—The aggravated dreadfulness of his position.—A little easement by and bye.—The lessons of the case.—Arrival of the butler and baker as prisoners.—The circumstances leading to Joseph's release.—His promotion to the governorship of Egypt.—His treatment of his brethren.



No more signal illustration of the ways of providence is to be found in the whole of the scriptures than the case of Joseph—the most illustrious of all the sons of Jacob. It is not merely that great results came out of unpromising experiences: this might happen when the results are not of God, for there are things that are not of God. But the whole case is declared to be a case of divine manipulation. Thus Joseph told his brethren who had sold him into Egypt: “God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth.”

So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."— (Gen. xlv. 7 8.) Again, after his father's death, when his brothers, fearing Joseph's resentment for what they had done to him, sought to propitiate him, he said, after re assuring them, "As for you, ye thought evil against me, but *God meant it unto good* to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."— (Gen. l. 20.) So, also, we have the oft recurring remark, "And the Lord was with Joseph :—" and the statement of David in Psalm cv. : God "sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant."

In studying the events of Joseph's life, therefore, we are studying a case in which God was at work beyond all question, and from which, therefore, we shall be able to learn instruction with regard to the experiences of our own lives, if our lives, like his, are framed in the fear of God and committed to his keeping in prayer and well doing, for his case, like all the others, was "written for our learning."

Joseph enjoyed a sunny youth at home till he was seventeen. 'Jacob loved him more than all his children.' But this sunny youth was not unclouded. The ill-feeling of his brothers was a shadow in the sky. This existed without any cause from Joseph—at least without a cause for which he could be held responsible. He dreamt prophetic dreams. Perhaps he did not know they were prophetic. At all events, he told them to his brethren, who were angered at them because they exhibited Joseph in the position of supremacy over them all. These dreams were of God, as we may understand

Joseph afterwards recognised from his declaration to Pharaoh: "It (the power to interpret dreams) is not in me: God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace;" and also his question to the butler and the baker in prison: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" All dreams are not of God: very few are. "Dreams come of the multitude of business."—(Eccles. v. 3.) "He that hath a dream, let him tell his dream; but he that hath My word, let him speak it faithfully. What is *the chaff* to the wheat, saith the Lord."—(Jer. xxiii. 28.) Yet, there were dreams that were from God: "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will *speak unto him in a dream*."—(Numb. xii. 6.) Of this order are the dreams referred to in the promise of the latter-day outpouring of the spirit: "Your old men shall *dream dreams*."

This was the nature of Joseph's dreams—divinely communicated forecasts of coming events. They were communicated as a part of the agency that was to develop the future to which they pointed. The narration of them by Joseph filled the minds of Joseph's brethren with envy—a bitter feeling that banishes mercy. Their self-esteem was hurt by dreams that appeared to them the mere embodiments of a petted boy's complacency, and thus they were predisposed to act the part that was to send Joseph to the sphere of his discipline and promotion. "They could not speak peaceably to him." Their feelings settled into hatred, and hatred was ready to seek and find an opportunity of putting its object out of the way. Joseph was perfectly innocent of anything

to justify their malignity. He was free of guile, a lover of righteousness, loved of his father, and loved of God; and behold him the object of gathering clouds of enmity! A short-sighted view would have judged such a situation impossible. It would have said an innocent youth would have been shielded from malice; and, in the opposite experience, it would have complained of injustice, or, at the least, of a bewildering inscrutability in the ways of God. The facts of Joseph's case at this juncture confute such views. Joseph was innocent and excellent, but Joseph was young and untried, and God had a great purpose with him that required that he should be matured and perfected in character as men only can be perfected—in the school of adversity. Joseph had to be fitted for exaltation and the exercise of power, and therefore Joseph had to suffer for Joseph's own good and for the bringing about of a great result to the whole house of Israel. Joseph was allowed to become the object of his brethren's successful hatred. Therefore, if sympathy sheds a tear, the understanding admires, while Joseph is bound by his unfeeling brethren, and in spite of his frantic entreaties, lowered into a pit where death appears inevitable, both in his own estimation and that of his brothers. No greater evil short of death could befall a human being than that which thus came to Joseph. A spectator on the spot would have said it was evil in which it was not possible to imagine any good purpose. There was no explanation of it. Joseph was not permitted to know the meaning. He could not have understood if told. It would have frustrated the object for him to know. Let

us recollect this when in any matter similarly situated. Circumstances may be dark; calamity unmixed; the situation such that enemies may appear to speak the truth if they say, "There is no help for him in God;" yet God may be at the bottom of all the trouble for purposes of goodness which the future alone will reveal. The only policy is, in all circumstances, to commit ourselves to the keeping of our Creator in faith and well-doing, as the Spirit commands: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday."

The object of Joseph's brethren was to kill him. They proposed to do this out and out before casting him into the pit (Gen. xxxvii. 20); but this would have interfered with the purpose of God. They were therefore diverted from their purpose. Reuben was touched with compassion for his brother, and proposed that they should do nothing violent to him, but merely put him into a pit, and let him come to his death there—his object being to release him afterwards, and take him back to his father. Reuben's proposal was accepted; and Joseph, arriving, was seized and stripped of his outer coat. Nothing is said in the narrative of Joseph's terror: but it comes out in their remarks one to another in Egypt twenty years afterwards, "We saw *the anguish of his soul when he besought us*, and we would not hear." The poor boy was let down into a living death, as it seemed, appealing in vain to the mercy of his hard-hearted and grown-up brothers. Had Reuben's idea of coming back alone and

taking him up again been carried out, God's purpose would have been interfered with. So something occurs—we are not told what—to take Reuben away from the company of his brothers for a short time. While he is away, a company of travelling merchants, *en route* for Egypt, come in sight. An idea occurs to Judah: "Let us sell Joseph: let us not kill him." The brothers willingly adopt a suggestion that delivers them from the crime of fratricide, while relieving them of the object of their hatred. Joseph is taken out of the pit and sold in Reuben's absence. The merchants take their terror-stricken property and depart. Joseph's brethren also go their ways. Reuben, by and bye, comes to the pit expecting to put an end to his brother's agonies. Alas, he is gone!—Reuben knows not whither—and he gives way to his grief.

Follow Joseph in his journey. From one dreadful experience he has been plunged into another and far worse. A father's favourite, accustomed to the ways of love and the surroundings of comfort, he finds himself in the hands of unfeeling and mercenary strangers, who regard him as a chattel, and think only of how much he will fetch when they arrive in Egypt. It is written, "Oppression maketh a wise man mad." Judge, then, the violent revulsions of feeling to which Joseph, the choice of Jacob's family, must have been subject in the custody of the Midianites as a slave going to a strange country. It was enough to break his heart altogether. Probably, we should have thought it was broken if we could have seen him "all of a heap," exhausted with

grief, broken down, unable to cry any more. It is not possible for human situation to be more agonising; human prospects to be darker; or human grief more poignant or more unavailing than Joseph's at this part of his life. And yet "God was with him," and was directing his way, and fitting him for exaltation and for untold usefulness in the execution of the divine purpose. The fact is to be pondered by every son of God in all possible evils that may befall them; for these things were "written for our learning." The kingdom of God lies ahead, and Paul has told us that "through much tribulation we must enter therein." How much, and what sort we require, God knows, and not we ourselves. Therefore, let us "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; and He will exalt us in due time." Joseph's agonising journey to Egypt was a journey to exaltation; and so is ours, if, like Joseph, we fear God, do His commandments, and commit our way to Him. But exaltation comes not at once. There were dark and dreary years before Joseph. Let us not be impatient.

Arrived in Egypt, the Midianite merchants find a ready market for Joseph, who was a "goodly person and well-favoured."—(Gen. xxxix. 6.) A government official—Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard, buys him of their hands, and takes him into his house as a servant. Here we have to consider an instructive feature of the case. Joseph cheerily and faithfully addresses himself to the duties of his position. Had he been like some, he might have considered himself justified in sulking and dawdling, seeing that he was stolen and unjustly brought

into his position. In that case, the Lord would not have been with Joseph; for the Lord is not with those who are slothful and contemptuous, from whatever cause. He is only with those who faithfully act their part in the circumstances into which He may bring them. "Ay," may the Son-of-Belial class rejoin, "we would submit to any position the Lord brought us into, but we do not mean to put up with the injustice of man." They have not eyes to see that the very injustices of men are often the Lord's agencies to subject His people to the proof, and to guide them at last into ways of blessedness. There was nothing to tell Joseph that the act of his brethren was the act of God but he feared God and submitted himself, knowing (as all true sons of God know and recognise) that God ruleth in the kingdoms of men even now, and orders the steps of those who please Him by their faith and submission.

Joseph acted his part faithfully, and God worked with him and prospered what he did. "His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him, and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, that *the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake* and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field." The Egyptian was an unenlightened natural man, and, as such, was not an object of interest to God, who "taketh

pleasure in them that fear Him, and them that hope in His mercy.' —(Psalm cxvii. 11.) It was not for his sake that He prospered the Egyptian's affairs, but for Joseph's sake, who was of the specified character—a fact the Egyptian seems somewhat to have recognised. Are there no Josephs now? They are very scarce—very. But, wherever they are, there is the same favour from God on their behalf, for God is "the same yesterday, to day, and for ever," and "all things work together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose —*all* things, absolutely, including the very worst occurrences, as Joseph was again about to experience.

Things went well with Joseph in Potiphar's house for some years, when, suddenly, the earth clave beneath his feet, and precipitated him into an apparently bottomless abyss of woe. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph to hide her own shame, and Potiphar, believing his wife, commits Joseph to prison as a malefactor. We read the statement lightly, perhaps, but consider what it meant. Joseph's desolate servitude was becoming somewhat mitigated with the lapse of time and the honour and comfort of the position to which his owner had promoted him as the responsible steward of his affairs, and here he is suddenly plunged into a lower deep than ever. He is not only in a strange land, but disgraced, and in a position debarring hope—not only a slave, but a branded slave, not only a prisoner, but a prisoner under circumstances that shut off all prospect of possible release. In the first moments of his incarceration, Joseph must

have been in a dreadful state of mind. We know what came after, which makes it difficult for us to realise the darkness of his situation. Joseph did not know what was coming after. He only knew the dreadfulness of his position—a prisoner and an outcast, unjustly banished from his country, in the first instance, and now the victim of a false accusation. He had said, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” and this was the consequence. Had such an one as Job’s wife been near, she would have had capital occasion for her foolish speech: “Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Curse God and die.” Perhaps she would have received the answer with which that woman’s truly wise husband rebuked her folly: “Thou speakest as one of the foolish: shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?” It would have been an answer to her to say: “The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord,” and that “all things work together for good to them who love God; to them who are the called according to His purpose.” It seemed very unlikely that this was being realised in Joseph’s case. Joseph, doubtless, bemoaned his position with many tears. The “stoical grin” with which educated Britons are taught to meet misfortune is a part of the polished Paganism of the times. It results from imperfect development of the moral nature and the consequent false standard in vogue among those who, clever enough and proud, know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It belongs not to the school of which Job, David, Jeremiah and the Lord

Jesus are prominent examples. These recognise that "there is a time to weep" as well as a time to laugh, and they do not require to invent the weeping time: it lies hard upon them in the present constitution of things in general upon the face of the earth, and sometimes comes close to them in the piercing sword of dire personal calamity, like that which shows us Joseph prostrate in an affliction which seems to lack a single ray of hope, and yet in which God was guiding him to great blessedness.

Joseph gets habituated to his grief and his position. By and bye, God lets in a little light upon his darkness. "The Lord gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in prison; and whatever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because the Lord was with him; and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper."—(Gen. xxxix. 21-23.) Thus was Joseph's position, as a prisoner, greatly mitigated. Thus does God lessen the troubles of His children "after they have suffered awhile, that they may be established, strengthened, settled."—(I. Peter v. 10.) He does not let their troubles press to their destruction. He afflicts with an object, and when the object is accomplished, the affliction is eased. If men will but commit themselves to Him *in well-doing*, He will guide their steps and frame their way for comfort and well-being. It is where they leave Him out of account and follow their own

devices for their own purposes that He may leave them to be snared in their own way. Joseph was not of this class. He feared God and was afraid of sin, and God was protecting him in the midst of evil, and slowly guiding his paths to exaltation and honour. But the work was all apparently natural. It had been so up to this point. It continued to be so for a good while. Two fresh prisoners arrived. They were both domestics of Pharaoh. Their arrival was a link in the chain of Joseph's deliverance; but he knew nothing of this: it was, to all appearance, a commonplace circumstance. They had offended Pharaoh, and were naturally rueful enough at their position—a ruefulness increased by striking dreams, which they both thought had a special meaning beyond their understanding. On the morning after the dreams, Joseph asked them the cause of their extra sadness, and being told, remarked, “Do not interpretations belong unto God? Tell me, I pray you.” And they told their dreams; and Joseph interpreted them as indicative of their coming treatment at the hands of Pharaoh, which was realised in harmony with his interpretation. The butler Pharaoh restored to his office: the baker he hanged.

Here, doubtless, comes in the extra-natural element which distinguished the case of the fathers from ours of these barren days, viz., the endowment in the case of Joseph of special faculty in the discernment of special dreams; but the use of this faculty by Joseph and its relation to the operations of providence were all in a natural way. Joseph did a neighbourly turn to the two

interesting prisoners in his charge, and out of this came his own deliverance—not immediately, however. The train was being laid—but nothing was hurried. Joseph made the most of the circumstances to bring about his release to no purpose. When apprising the butler of his coming liberation, he said, “Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here (in Egypt) also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.”—(Gen. xl. 14-15.) But alas! the butler was like the ordinary run of mortals. When he found himself in prosperity, he was satisfied to enjoy his portion without a thought for the welfare of others. “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.”—(Verse 23.) However, the butler was to be made use of. Joseph’s deliverance was not to come through the butler’s gratitude, nor at once. It was to come after a considerable patience-requiring lapse of time, through the providentially-developed baser desire of the butler to please Pharaoh.

In two years or so, Pharaoh has a dream which troubles him, and of which no one can give an interpretation—not even a guess. The thing is known in all the palace. It is talked of among the servants. When every assistance has been mooted in vain, the butler remembers the realisation of his own and the baker’s dream as interpreted by Joseph. For the first time, he speaks of the matter to Pharaoh. Joseph is hurriedly

summoned. The rest is familiar as a household word. Joseph finds himself transferred in a moment from a dungeon to a throne. The blackness of midnight gives way to a sudden burst of noonday splendour which abides with him through a long and illustrious day. God delivers him from all adversity, and, as he expressed it, "made him forget his toil and his father's house." From a prison keeper's servant, he is transformed into a governor of Egypt—the king's son-in-law: an object of universal deference, and controller of the land's pouring treasure. It was God's work in providence. God's hand was visible at one or two points; but, in the main, it was accomplished in an unseen manner by means of perfectly natural circumstances.

See, also, how naturally God brought about Joseph's sweet revenge on his brothers. They came to buy corn. They did not know him, for, whereas he was seventeen when they sold him, he is now over thirty seven, and attired as an Egyptian official, speaking the Egyptian language, which he has learnt during his servitude. But he knows them, for they were grown men when he saw them last, and they are in the main unaltered, and they are dressed in the same way as when they handed him over to the Ishmaelites. They are most obsequious in their deferences. He uses the whip severely, because he knows the end will be sweetness for all. He speaks roughly to them, and puts them through direful exercises of mind, until he can stand it no longer. No more exquisite story was ever written or conceived. It breaks down the strong man to-day every time it is

realised. It is part of a story yet unfinished, for Joseph has yet to re appear in the land of the living to learn of the deliverance of his people from Egypt, and of the long, sad, yet God illuminated history coming after ; and to take part in a still more thrilling situation when another, who, like himself, was hated by His brethren, and sold for thirty pieces of silver, makes Himself known to His misguided brethren for the joy of Israel and the blessedness of all mankind.

Meanwhile, the lesson of Joseph's life is unmistakable. It is what we have already seen illustrated, viz., that God works when His hand is not apparent, and often when it would seem as if He must be taking no notice, and by means that would seem to exclude the possibility of His being at work. The conclusion is comforting to those who commit their way to God. It may seem to them that God is not only not working with them, but actually working against them. Let them remember the agony of Joseph in the pit, in slavery, in false imprisonment, and learn that the darkest paths of their life may be the ways appointed for them to reach liberty and life, wealth and honour—yea, a throne in the kingdom of the anti typical Joseph, who Himself had to tread the dark and tearful valley of humiliation, and who, in the day of His glory, will introduce all His brethren, amongst many bright stars, to the most interesting of Jacob's sons.





CHAPTER IX

The case of Moses —The providential (apparently natural) features — Arrival of the time of the promised deliverance from Egypt — God disposing events in preparation beforehand, yet not in a visible manner —Moses born —The edict for the drowning of the male Hebrew children —Deposit of Moses by the river brink in the ark of bulrushes — Arrival of Pharaoh's daughter to bathe —What followed —His education by his mother —His manhood at the court of Pharaoh —His interpretation of providence —His judicial slaughter of an Egyptian —His flight from Egypt —His life in Midian —The quietness of the whole situation, yet a tremendous crisis impending —Its commencement with the burning bush



NEXT we turn to the case of Moses. This towers over all others like a great mountain over the surrounding country. Moses is next to the Lord Jesus, "the prophet like unto him," in the height, breadth, importance, and greatness of his case in all points and relations, yet all of God, for apart from God's use of him (God's word to him and work with him), Moses would have lived a quiet pastoral life in Midian, and passed off the scene without leaving much if any mark behind him.

It belongs not, however, to the present series of articles to consider him in the mighty and faithful operations by which he broke the resistance of Egypt, held a mighty,

insubordinate congregation in subjection in exodus, inscribed the name and the law of Jehovah indelibly in the earth, and established the most illustrious nation of history. Our contemplations must be confined to those aspects of his case in which God though avowedly was not apparently at work. Our aim is to extract comfort and light for our day and situation, when that "long time" during which Jehovah "holds His peace" and "hides Himself from the house of Jacob" (Isaiah xlii. 14; viii. 17, xlv. 15) is yet unexpired. Therefore we look at Moses where all was apparently natural, but where God was at work in providence.

This mode of study leads us at once to fix on his birth. To estimate aright the incidents attendant on that event, let us recall to mind the situation of things to which it had relation. Jacob's children (multiplied greatly) had been in Egypt for several generations. Their position had greatly changed from that which they occupied during the lifetime of Joseph. When Joseph lived, their position was one of comfort and honour in the land, but after he was dead, "there arose a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph" (Exodus i. 8), and this new king regarded this thriving and prolific colony of Israelites with a jealousy which prompted him to devise harsh measures against them. He "made their lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar and in brick and in all manner of service in the field." This grievous experience was calculated to revive Israel's recollection of the promise that God would deliver them—a promise made long before, but which the prosperity of the first part of

the period of their settlement in Egypt may have caused the people to forget or undervalue, in the same way that we find that in our own day, prosperity for the Jews in any part of the world makes them think lightly of the promised restoration. The promise dated back to the days of their father Abraham: "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 shall serve will I judge, and afterwards shall they come out with great substance."—(Gen. xv. 13.) This promise was held in recollection by the faithful of Abraham's seed. Jacob spoke of it on his deathbed. "God shall be with you and bring you again unto the land of your fathers."—(xlviii. 21.) It was the last thing Joseph spoke about to his brethren: "I die, and *God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land* into the land which He sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. . . . *God will surely visit you*, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."—(l. 24, 25.) The recollection of this promise was treasured by others after Joseph's time, as evidenced by the faith of the parents of Moses (Heb. xi. 23), and Moses' interpretation of the times.—(Acts vii. 25). It was "the hope of Israel" in Egypt. Not all, however, adhered to this hope. The bulk of the Israelites had sunk into a state of indifference, and even of idolatry. This we learn on the testimony of God Himself: "In the day when I chose Israel and lifted up Mine hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, . . .

to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, . . . then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abomination of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord 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.*"—(Ezek. xx. 5-9.) This statement is illustrated by the fact that after their deliverance, they proposed on more than one occasion to stone Moses, make gods of their own, and go back to Egypt.—(Numb. xvi. 2-4; Exodus xxxii. 1.) In fact, before they actually crossed the Red Sea, they said to Moses, "Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians."—(Exodus xiv. 12.) Thus we have the spectacle distinctly before us of God's own nation (concerning whom promises had been made, and the time for the fulfilment of which had drawn near), looking at the situation as it appeared from the divine point of view, not only with indifference, but with absolutely perverse and carnal eyes. That God should be at work at such a time may console us who live in the latter days, when the time has again approached for God to remember the house of Israel, and when that house of Israel everywhere is similarly unenlightened and indifferent.

The time spoken of in the promise to Abraham as the time of the affliction of his seed had about run out. We need not trouble ourselves here with any chronological difficulties. It is plain there were 430 years from the promise to the giving of the law on Sinai.—(Gal. iii. 17.)

Our reading of the promise must harmonise with that fact which is in agreement with the genealogies of Israel after the settlement in Egypt. It is plain also that at the birth of Moses the time of the promise had drawn near.—(Acts vii. 17, 20.) As Moses was 80 years old at the Exodus, it follows that the time of the promise was considered to have drawn near a long time (as men reckon) before its actual arrival. Let us realise this. Let us think of ourselves as in Egypt 80 years before the promised deliverance. God was remembering the promise and disposing events in preparation for its execution. What evidence was there of this? None to be seen with the ordinary eye. To the ordinary eye, everything seemed to be in the most unlikely form for the realization of Israel's hope. The Egyptians were great and prosperous. A dynasty unfriendly to Israel was established on the throne. Israel themselves, the bulk of them, were sunk in idolatry; and besides being in a state of indifference to the purpose of God, they were the objects of a cruel oppression on the part of the king of Egypt, who deliberately aimed at breaking their spirit and destroying their strength by hard measures. The Israelites everywhere were engaged in the meanest drudgery under the most exacting and cruel taskmasters. God was silent, and the hope of Israel seemed a forgotten dream. But God was at work without speaking or making His hand manifest. A baby boy was born. It was a very commonplace occurrence. It was probably an unwelcome occurrence to his father and mother; for Pharaoh had decreed the destruction of every Hebrew male child that should

be born. If it had been a girl, they might have been at liberty to rejoice: but here was a fine boy: an unusually fine boy, "exceeding fair" (Acts vii. 20): "they saw he was a goodly child" (Exodus ii. 2), and they were bound by the law to destroy him. We can imagine the conflict of feeling that raged in the bosom of his father and mother. "They hid him three months;" they could hide him no longer. Their concealment would be discovered. They would be in danger of their own lives as well as the child's. What were they to do? They would comply with the cruel law, but they would give the child a chance. They were bound to put him in the river: but they would at least put him in a waterproof basket that would float, and in which he might be found and appropriated by someone else to the saving of his life. God was directing them, but they did not know. They got ready the unnatural and cruel cradle; they put the beautiful, plump, smiling boy into it (they would rather it had been into a coffin) with agonized hearts, they carry it out of the house with its living freight, and go their way to the river. Oh, how dark and cruel the whole situation seemed! Yet God was preparing a nation's deliverance. They did not know this. In much affliction they submitted to the evil, and in faith left the matter with the God of Israel. They deposited the little ark with its lovely freight among the flags by the river brink, and, with failing and reluctant hearts, tore themselves away. They dare not be seen in the neighbourhood, for the preservation of the child was a disregard of the law and would bring the parents,

if found out, into trouble. They hastened home, but they could not altogether abandon the precious child to its fate. They posted his sister, probably a girl of fourteen or fifteen, near the spot to watch what would become of "baby." In this, also, they were directed of God but they did not know it. It was a link in the circumstances destined to place Moses in a position for the right training, viz., in the hand of his mother. The sister (probably Miriam) did not have long to wait. Pharaoh's own daughter came down to the river to bathe. There was nothing unusual in that: she came there for the reason she always came for: but her present coming was very important, of which she knew nothing. She was being used for the purpose of God without being aware of it: her movements for once were controlled, though not apparently so: her perceptions and feelings for once were influenced in a particular direction. She quickly saw the little object among the reeds on the bank of the river. Her curiosity was aroused. She despatches one of her maidens at once to fetch it. It is brought: doubtless the maiden says excitedly as she brings the curious box, "It is a child!" They open the lid, and there poor cold little Moses (not yet called Moses) lies crying heartily before them. The heart of Pharaoh's daughter is touched. She might have been differently affected in another case. She might have taken up her father's views and said, "It is one of those nasty Hebrew children: they are all to be drowned: take it away: put it back in the water." But it was not to be so. God's purpose was involved.

Her heart was touched. "She had compassion on him." The child's sobs were too much for her. She probably wiped his little face, and tried to comfort him in a motherly way. The question arose, "What shall we do with him?" Pharaoh's daughter says, "I should like to keep him." Moses' sister had drawn near, and was an attentive onlooker. She seizes the opportunity. "Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for thee?" A word in season, how good is it. This proposal was of God. Pharaoh's daughter jumped at it. It exactly commends itself. It relieves her of the burden of the child: at the same time it preserves the child to her. "Go," says she. With what a bounding step we may imagine Miriam (if it was Miriam) darted home to Moses' mother. With what unspeakable gratitude Amram and Jochebed—Moses' father and mother—must have received the tidings—the child saved and to be confided to their own keeping! Jochebed returns in haste with her daughter. She stands before Pharaoh's daughter. She sees her own darling child: her heart yearns upon him. She can scarcely conceal her motherhood. "Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." Wages! Wages for doing what she would have been glad to pay any amount of money to be permitted to do! How exquisitely beautiful are all the ways of God. "And the woman took the child." Yes, with a zeal never shown by nurse before. Why did not God allow an Egyptian nurseship to be arranged for? Because it was most important for Moses to receive the right instruction in

his early years. Had he been brought up with an Egyptian nurse, he would have been inoculated with a contempt for the Hebrew and scorn for the God of Abraham. Confided to a Hebrew nurse, and that nurse his own mother, and that mother a woman of faith, his young mind was early enlightened as to the true situation of things, and biassed in the right direction with a power that no amount of after education in Pharaoh's court could efface.

Why, then, give him into the hands of the Egyptians at all? First, to save his life; and secondly, to give him a status high in Egyptian society, and a thorough knowledge of Egyptian ways, that he might be fitted to act the part of God's messenger to Pharaoh when the time should come. Both needs were met with consummate wisdom, and all apparently in the most natural way. At a certain age—Josephus says twelve, the Scripture is silent and probably nobody knows—Moses was given up by his mother. Her nurseship had terminated and Moses was handed over to Pharaoh's daughter, to be thenceforth educated "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" in which he became proficient.—(Acts vii. 22.) The power of his early training, however, withstood the effacing effects of courtly ways. Pharaoh's daughter called him her son; but Moses, instructed of his mother, knew better and "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He chose, in preference, to bear the reproach of his Hebrew extraction. This was not human nature. Most men exalted to high spheres, would gladly forget their humble parentage. But Moses had good reason

for his choice. Paul's testimony is that he "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*"—(Heb. xi. 25, 26.) This shows that Moses' spiritual education was of a very robust order, and that his faith in the promises made of God to the fathers was of a very practical and fruit-bearing kind. He was not ashamed of his connection with the slaves of the country. He did not seek to avoid the reproach of such a connection. He did not bury himself in the grandeur and the luxury and the splendour of Pharaoh's court as he might have done. He deliberately maintained his character as a Hebrew, and his profession as a believer in Israel's God. "He chose rather to suffer affliction" with the despised of Pharaoh's realm. In this he showed himself a true brother of Christ, and of kin with every brave believer in our day who in any position in society openly identifies himself, at the peril of loss and shame, with faith in the promises which all the world despises and rejects.

Moses not only held fast to the faith of the promises. He considered his own position, and came to the conclusion that he was elevated among the Egyptians for the purpose of serving Israel. This interpretation of the providence of God would probably originate in his mother's suggestions. At all events, we find it recorded that "When he was full forty years old, *it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.*"—(Acts vii. 23.) "He supposed," adds Stephen, "his brethren

would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them." Moses was right in his supposition, although, as a matter of fact, he was forty years before the time; for it was not till he was eighty years of age that God appeared to him and commissioned him to deliver Israel. It is interesting to observe that, without revelation, Moses should entertain such a view of his position. It was the conclusion he had come to as the result of his interpretation of the ways of providence. He knew that God purposed the deliverance of Israel from Egypt: he knew that the time had come near (when he was forty, it only wanted ten years to the end of the 400 years spoken of to Abraham): he looked at his own position—a Hebrew admitted to the court of Pharaoh through a circumstance arising out of the Egyptian persecution of Israel: and he came to the conclusion that God's purpose was to deliver Israel by his hand. His conclusion was right as events ultimately showed, but he was premature in the way he attempted to give his conclusion practical effect. He did not wait for God himself to use the situation thus providentially prepared. He began to act without directions. Of his own motion, he smote an Egyptian who wronged a Hebrew. He did the thing secretly, and supposed it would remain secret. Such things do not remain secrets. The matter was soon reported, and, fearing the consequences at the hand of Pharaoh, he found himself under the necessity of absconding. And he did abscond and found himself a wanderer in the wilderness of Midian, and the prospect of Israel's redemption postponed in the

most indefinite and hopeless manner. Through an act of courtesy, he obtained an introduction to the leading man of the country, Raguel, or Jethro, a flockmaster, with whom he ultimately accepted employment as chief herdsman, and married one of his daughters. Years rolled by, and Moses was engaged in the quiet life of a flock-tender in the comparative solitudes of Horeb.

Let us consider the situation. The ten remaining years of the 400 spoken of to Abraham had expired, and there was no visible token of interference. Israel were yet in Egypt in hopeless subjection to Pharaoh. Moses' own return to Egypt was barred. He dared not show his face in a country where he was regarded as an outlawed murderer. All was dark everywhere. Had the promise failed? No. There were to be four hundred years of subjection, and "afterward," the deliverance was to be accomplished. How long afterwards was not revealed. "The time of the promise" had "drawn near" at the birth of Moses, as we have seen, and was of course much nearer now when Moses was fifty years old. The four hundred years were up, and therefore the time of the end of Israel's sojourn had arrived. Still there was no sign, except such as the reader of providence could discern. Moses was in readiness—a man of reverence for God and readiness to obey, and qualified to hold intercourse with Pharaoh. True, he had been driven from the country and was now a herdsman. This looked the wrong way, but enlightened experience in Jehovah's ways would have enabled a man to say, "Even this may be part of the

work." It was so. Moses, after a life of elevation and Egyptian education, had to have his zeal and his general views sobered by adversity. He had to be prepared by quietness and humiliation for the mighty work which God had in reserve for him. So here he was, in the unexciting wilderness, in a monotonous occupation, perplexed perhaps by the inexplicable delay, and discouraged by the total absence of direct symptoms of God's promised interference on behalf of Israel. His neglect to circumcise his children (Exodus iv. 24, 26) would seem to indicate that he had fallen into a state of supineness. When he fled from Egypt ten years before the end of the 400, perhaps he consoled himself with the thought that in ten years, at all events, God's hand would become visible. At the end of ten years, nothing happened: and we can easily imagine that after that, as month after month rolled by in the routine of a shepherd's life, without witnessing any token of the promised visitation, the sickness of deferred hope crept over him and reconciled him to the idea of spending his days where he was. Nearly thirty long years dragged wearily by, after the expiry of the 400, without the expected message from God. Yet God had not been unmindful. He was at work, though not apparently. He had prepared the situation long in advance. Moses himself, pining in the dreariness of inexplicable delay, was part of the situation. God is great, and His works in providence with men are slow, gradual, and deliberate. There are points where rapidity of action is called for, and the rapidity of action then takes place; but the developments

leading to these points are all conducted on natural principles as far as appearances to the human eye are concerned.

Moses at last experienced the truth of this. To the last moment, there was nothing distinctly indicative of the tremendous crisis impending. Israel was slowly baking in the furnace of Egyptian affliction, without any man regarding or God taking any notice, as it seemed. The Canaanites, on whom God's vengeance was to be poured by the sword of Israel, were indulging in all their abominations in safety in the midst of a fertile and glorious land, without molestation or fear. The eye ranging over the whole earth could see nothing but ease, carelessness, power on the side of the oppressor, and wickedness established in safety. The purpose of God was the most invisible thing in the whole situation, and Moses had long ceased to entertain sanguine thoughts on the subject. But at last, on a particular day, in the course of his ordinary affairs, while the flocks grazed under the shadow of Horeb, an unconsumed burning bush attracted his attention. Going near to ascertain the cause of so unusual a thing, the angel of the Lord announced his presence, and informed him of Jehovah's purpose to deliver Israel by his hand.

Thus commenced that long series of marvellous events in which God wrought with unbarred arm in the redemption of Israel and in their establishment as a nation before Him in the land promised to the fathers. With the glorious history of these, this chapter does not concern itself. They are the grounds of faith and the

source of hope ; but they have no counterpart in these, the days of probation, when, like Moses, we stand in an unexciting interval in the divine programme.

Our aim is to bring to bear so much of the history and experience of the fathers as may be applicable to our own case. Like Moses, we are living at the end of a time of Israel's downtreading. Like him, we are looking for a promised divine interposition. Like him we are able to discern providential signs characteristic of the situation ; but like him we have been the subjects of delay in our expectations. As in his case, we may see that notwithstanding adverse appearances, God is at work, and we may hope that like him, we shall one day, and that soon, be rescued and cheered by the angelic intimation that the moment of open interference has at last arrived.





CHAPTER X.

The work of Moses.—The character of Pharaoh.—The result to be achieved by divine interference.—The nature of the interference.—A plain political issue.—The hardening of Pharaoh's heart.—The moral difficulties considered.—The raising up of providential men.—Apparently natural, yet divine.—The hand of God in public affairs.—Some things not divine.—Israel's multiplication in Egypt.—What God does, and what He does not do.—Modern applications.—God "with" Israel and God not with Israel.—The difference illustrated.—Human effort useless without divine co-operation.—Wrong applications of the principle.—Man's part necessary to God's part, yet the accomplishment all of God.



THE ways of providence are plainly illustrated in several minor elements of the work of Moses. First, there is the man on the throne of Egypt at the time when Moses was instructed to demand the liberation of Israel. A good deal depended upon the character of this man. If he had been a reasonable, pliable man, he might have complied with the demand too soon for the work to be done. It was necessary that he should refuse, and that he should refuse obstinately many times, because the liberation of Israel was only one of several things that had to be accomplished by the work entrusted to the hand of Moses. Had the liberation of Israel been the only object aimed at, a single day's destroying judgment on

the Egyptians would have sufficed, after the example of Sennacherib's army decimated in a single night in the days of Hezekiah. But a higher object was aimed at, both as regarded Israel, the Egyptians, the world at large, and posterity. This object is clearly defined several times in the course of the narrative. It is plainly exhibited in this simple statement "THAT MY NAME MAY BE DECLARED THROUGHOUT ALL THE EARTH" —(Exodus ix. 16.) Israel was sunk in idolatry, as we have seen. If Israel was bad, the Egyptians were worse. The Canaanitish nations were reeking in iniquity, and the world at large lay in darkness. Left to itself, this state of things must have resulted in the establishment of incorrigible barbarism. The purpose of God (which was declared to Moses), that ultimately He would fill the earth with His glory (Numbers xiv. 21), required that a beginning should be made then, in the exhibition of His power in a way not to be mistaken. To allow of this exhibition, it was needful there should be a plain issue between God and man, and resistance on the part of man, and an ensuing struggle sufficiently prolonged and diversified to exclude the possibility of doubt as to the nature of the operations performed. God could have manifested His power by hurling the mountains from their base, or cleaving the earth with terrible chasms, or rending the air with deafening tempests of thunder, or filling the heavens with terrific conflagration. But this would not have got at the understanding of the people. It would have scared without instructing, and would have passed out of memory as a mere freak of nature.

It was necessary that intelligence should be manifestly at work, and this necessity could only be met by a situation that all could understand, and that would allow of the works of God being seen in intelligible relation thereto

It would not have been possible to have devised a more effective combination of circumstances for such a purpose than what existed when Moses was commanded to address himself to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The combination had been slowly developed for the purpose by the incidents of the previous three centuries. Israel, beloved for their fathers' sake, were enslaved, and not only enslaved, but enslaved in the midst of the most civilised nation of the world of that age. To demand their release was at once to raise a simple and powerful "question, and to fight such a question with Egypt was to conduct a struggle that would be visible to the eyes of all the world—much more so than if it had taken place with any other nation at that time in the world's history. But, for the effectual accomplishment of its object, it was needful that the government of Egypt should be firm in its opposition. This depended upon the character of the man in whom the government was vested. Is it a marvel, then, that the preparation of that man should be a divine work? Nay, would it not have been evidence of the absence of a divine supervision in the whole situation if the right sort of man had not been on the throne at such a time? The state of the case declared in the words divinely addressed to Pharaoh, through Moses, was in harmony with the requirements

of the situation: "*For this cause have I raised thee up,* FOR TO SHOW IN THEE MY POWER, and that My Name might be declared in all the earth." Not only was he "raised up" and specially fitted for the part he had to perform, but, during the performance of that part, he was operated on for its effectual performance. His heart was "hardened:" "I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. 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. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch forth My hand upon Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them."—(Exodus vii. 3-5.)

The difficulties that have been raised in connection with this matter are difficulties arising from wrong notions as to the nature of man, and from the want of an enlightened apprehension of the prerogatives of God in His relation to His works. If Pharaoh was immortal, and made liable by his heart-hardening to the dreadful destiny depicted in the hell-fire denunciations of orthodox sermonising, the divine work of raising him up and hardening his heart would at least be inscrutable, in the sense, that is, of being apparently inconsistent with what Jehovah had testified of His own character. But Pharaoh, being a piece of living clay, and all mankind in a state calling for some startling exhibition of the existence and authority of God, there is not only nothing difficult to understand, but a something to excite admiration in the

development of a man and the contrivance of a situation which should effectually ensure it. Any question of human right, as against God, is unanswerably disposed of by Paul in his famous argument: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?"—(Rom. ix. 19-22.)

The fact is beyond question that Pharaoh was raised up for the part he had to perform in connection with the work of Moses; and the usefulness of the fact arises from this, that no one living in Egypt during the thirty or forty years preceding the exodus would have been aware, from anything he saw or heard, that the ruler of the country was the subject of divine work one way or other. Had he watched him from the beginning—seen him nursed as a baby, noted him under tutorship, followed him through the ways of youth to maturity and manhood, he would have detected nothing indicative of divine selection and preparation. All was apparently in the order of nature. Yet the man was a divine work. It is easy, turning from the contemplation of such a picture, to realise that in our own day, such men as Louis Napoleon, Bismark, the Pope, the Emperor of Russia,

or such a woman as our own Queen, or any one having relation to the divine work of the latter days (Dr. Thomas for instance), may equally be a divine development and the subject of divine supervision, though every element in their lives superficially viewed is thoroughly natural. The "natural" in such cases is the form of the divine hand, or rather the tool used by it. The user of the tool is not visible in the work done, and the tool is only a tool. The tool is invisibly guided in a way that seems to themselves and others purely natural, yet the work done is divine work because divinely planned, and divinely supervised in its execution, though the agents are unconscious of the divine initiative. Such a view helps us to recognise the hand of God in current public affairs, where the natural man sees only the proximate agency. Such a view can of course be prostituted to the result of claiming divinity for things which have nothing divine in them. But wisdom will know where to draw the line. All things are not divine, but some are which are apparently natural. We need not assume divine initiative for any action in particular, either in public life or in our own lives, though God may have to do with both or neither. Our business is to conform in all modesty to what God has required of us; but it is our comfort at the same time to know that matters and men and results may be of God, even if apparently natural only. Our part is to commit our way to Him in faith. We are helped thus to count upon and recognize the direction of God, where to the natural eye it is not visible.

Next, we look at Israel in the time of Moses. The time of the promised liberation had come near; and accordingly "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land (of Egypt) was filled with them." "The more" the Egyptians "afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."—(Exodus i. 7, 12.) There was nothing manifestly divine in this. It was apparently a matter of natural fecundity, and nothing more. Yet it is testified it was a work of God. "He increased His people greatly (in Egypt), and made them stronger than their enemies."—(Psalms cv. 24.) By the word of God the heavens were made; and when this same word broods with prospering intent upon any people, the result is seen in the presence of a vigour apparently natural and really natural in its form and modes of development, yet superinduced by a divine volition at the roots. The presence of this volition is the difference between what God does and what He does not do. The exercise of it was manifest in the case of Israel in a debased state in Egypt, because the time for God's work with them had drawn near. May we not apply the fact to our own day? The time for the return of mercy to Zion has come: the time for God, who scattered Israel, to gather them, and see we nothing divine in the lively vigour and prolificness and growing prosperity of the Jews in every land? It is all apparently natural, but the hand of God is in it, and will shortly be made manifest to all nations when that hand is no longer hidden, but taken out of the bosom and uplifted,

in visible works of power before the eyes of all the nations.

Israel experienced the difference between God being with them and not being with them, when they attempted to make war against the Amorites contrary to the command of Moses after the report of the spies. It will be recollected that after hearing that report, they refused to invade the land, and became mutinous against Moses. They were then condemned to wander in the wilderness forty years, till the adult generation should die out of the congregation. On hearing this, they were filled with consternation, and clamorously offered to enter at once upon the work of invasion which they had declined. Moses would not give them permission: they persisted: "Moses said, wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? But it shall not prosper. Go not up, *for the Lord is not among you.*"—(Numbers xiv. 41.) But they disregarded this, and issued from the camp in military array. "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in the hill, and *smote them and discomfited them*, even unto Hormah."—(verse 45.) Had God been with them, the Amalekites would have quailed, and Israel would have stood firm to their work and gone forward victoriously; but, in God's absence, the case was reversed. The natural agency in the one case and in the other was the same, but when God is "with" the agency employed, that agency is supplemented with an invisible power of direction and efficiency that is lacking when God wills to work against it, and the agency, though feeble in itself,

will be powerful against all odds. This Asa, king of Judah, recognised when he said on the approach of the Ethiopian horde against Jerusalem ; “ Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, *whether with many or with them that have no power* ; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God ; let not man prevail against Thee.” “ And the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.”—(II. Chronicles xiv. 11.) On another occasion, later in his reign, Asa “ relied on the king of Syria, and not on the Lord his God,” which evoked this interrogatory from the prophet sent to him : “ Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host with very many chariots and horsemen ? Yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, He delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him. Herein thou hast done foolishly ; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.”—(xvi. 7-9.) This principle was recognised by Jonathan when he proposed to his armour-bearer a forlorn attempt against the Philistine garrison at Michmash : “ It may be that the Lord will work for us : for *there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.*”—(I. Samuel xiv. 6.) It was recognised by David when he went against Goliath : “ Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come unto thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied.

THIS day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that *the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's*, and He will give you into our hands.'—(I. Samuel xvii. 45 47) David gives frequent expression to the same principle in the Psalms "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God —(xx. 7) "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host a mighty man is not delivered by much strength an horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength'—(xxxiii. 16.) "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.'—(cxxxvii 1)

There might be a tendency to conclude that, in such a view of matters, human agency is superfluous, and indeed displaced, and that the only thing left for a man to do is just to do nothing but stand still and see what God will do. Such a view has, in fact, been acted on in many instances. It is a mistaken view altogether, as we have seen in previous chapters. It seems to result from one aspect of the matter, but we must not limit our view of any subject to one aspect of the matter. We must take all sides into account. The other side in this case is the revelation that in working with a man, God wills that that man should do his part humbly, faithfully, and diligently, and that God's part should come in as a supplement or addition to what man does. We might

pause with profit to consider the admirable wisdom of a principle of action which, while making effective results depend upon God, admits man to the pleasure of co-operation in the process by which they are worked out, and compels him to perform this advantage yielding part. Our aim, however, is not so much to discuss the philosophy of God's ways as to exhibit what they are.

Israel were made very distinctly to recognise that while they could do nothing if God were not with them, yet God could not, in a sense, do His part unless they did theirs. God said to Moses in the beginning of their enterprise "*I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, &c.*" (Exodus xxxiii. 2), from which it might have been concluded that there was nothing for Israel to do. The very reverse was the case. God meant to do His work *by them*. Moses told them "*Every place whereon the sole of your feet shall tread shall be yours. . . . There shall no man be able to stand before you, for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon as He hath said unto you* —(Deut xi 24, 25) The matter was made still plainer when Moses was dead. God then spoke to Joshua as follows "*Moses my servant is dead. Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your feet shall tread upon, THAT HAVE I GIVEN UNTO YOU, as I said unto Moses, . . . only be thou strong and very courageous.*" —(Joshua 1. 2, 7.)

In no plainer way could the principle have been enunciated, that God requires men to do their part as the condition and means of enabling Him to work out His purpose with and concerning them. It is a principle illustrated throughout the entire course of scripture, culminating in the command to work out our own salvation, coupled with the assurance that God works with and in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. It is a noble and beneficent principle, tending to keep back man from presumption, and to prevent him from abusing God's help to his own destruction. It preserves the place for faith and wholesome activity, while giving us the comfort of divine co-operation in all that we do according to His will.

Man is liable to run into extremes. The assurance to Israel that the occupation of the land was dependent upon their taking possession of it, was liable to inspire them with the idea that it was an affair of their own prowess, irrespective of God's co-operation. On more than one occasion there was a rude check to this misapplication of truth. In the days of Gideon, when the Midianites had to be vanquished, God commanded the thinning down of the host he had gathered, saying, "The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, MINE OWN HAND HATH SAVED ME."—(Judges vii. 2.) It will be remembered, also, that in the very beginning of Joshua's campaign against the Amorites, Israel were smitten at Ai, because God's commands had been disobeyed in an individual case in

the matter of the spoil, and God said to Joshua, "The children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, *because they were cursed*; NEITHER WILL I BE WITH YOU ANY MORE, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."—(Joshua vii. 12.) The whole congregation of Israel in the wilderness had fearful illustration of the effect, in a natural way, of God being not with them, but against them. At the end of their forty years' wanderings, we are informed that, among them all, "there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered" at the beginning of the period: "There was not left a man of them save Caleb, the son of Jephunnah, and Joshua, the son of Nun."—(Numb. xxvi. 64, 65.) Moses tells us "the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from among the host until they were consumed."—(Deut. ii. 15.) It must have been so, for, in the ordinary course, out of the thousands of young men over twenty who were in the congregation at the first numbering, many must have survived and lived years after the termination of the forty years' wandering. Yet, from day to day, while they were in the wilderness, nothing would be visible in the way of divine interference. They would drop off one by one in a natural way, just as they do in a great city to-day.

In these and numerous other such like ways, was Israel taught the lesson that while the performance of their part was necessary to the accomplishment of God's purpose with them, the accomplishment of the purpose was all of God. And so, though Joshua fought and Israel

conquered, David could write with emphatic truth, "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but Thy right hand, and Thine arm and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them."—(Psalms xlv. 3.) Let us beware of the modern mistake of forgetting that "these things were written for our admonition." God is the same to-day and for ever. We must do our part with all the wisdom and diligence we can command, but we must commit and commend all our matters in prayer and constant fear of God, who can prosper or frustrate the devices of men, or leave men altogether to their own devices like the regardless millions of the human race who are mostly like the cattle on a thousand hills.





CHAPTER XI.

The conquest of Bashan.—God gave the land, yet Israel had to conquer.—Modern application of the principle.—The message of Moses to Sihon.—A wise way of doing divine work.—The action of Moses.—A clue to the work of Christ at His coming.—Proposals to the nations before destruction.—God with Joshua after the death of Moses, yet success dependent on Joshua's measures.—Providence towards the nations.—The moral state of the Amorites a reason for Israel's destruction of them.—The principle in modern times.—God's use of the Gentile nations in carrying out His purposes.—God's own explanations in the prophets.—God at work when men often cannot discern.—Individual application.

WE have not exhausted the illustrations of the ways of providence to be found in connection with the journey of Israel to the land of promise under Moses and Joshua. There is an instructive incident in the conquest of Bashan. On approaching Heshbon, God said to Moses: "Behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon, the Amorite, the king of Heshbon, and his land."—(Deut. ii. 24.) On a superficial view, one might have reasoned that if this were the case—if God had given Heshbon and its king to Israel, Israel had nothing to do to obtain possession: that God would do all. Instead of this, the intimation that God had given Heshbon and its king to Israel, is accompanied by a direction that Israel should proceed to the work of

obtaining possession : " Begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle." Suppose Moses and Israel had not taken the steps to obtain possession, obviously things would have remained as they were—Heshbon and Sihon undelivered into the hand of Israel. This points a lesson already made abundantly evident—that in our expectations of divine co-operation, we must adopt the means which He has appointed as the way of getting at the results desired. Jesus said to the Philadelphian ecclesia, sixty years after His departure from the earth, " Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."—(Rev. iii. 8.) This was a very comforting assurance to the brethren at Philadelphia ; but supposing they had supinely sat down and made no effort to use the open door, of what advantage would it have been ? If God gives men opportunities, He expects them to discern and enterprisingly use them. This is His way of doing His work. He could do it all Himself : but then His sons would have no share in the results. They are " labourers together with God."—(I. Cor. iii. 9 ; II. Cor. vi. 1.) It is a co-partnership of divine appointment with this glorious result that at the last, " both he that soweth and he that reapeth may *rejoice together.*"—(John iv. 6.) God will finally admit us to His joy by requiring us first to take part in the work by which the joy will be wrought out.

A present application of the principle may be found in the matter of daily bread. We have a promise that what we need will be provided (Luke xii. 29-31), and that God will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. xiii. 5, 6) ; but

the realisation of this promise is as contingent as the obtaining of the land was on Israel's adoption of the needed measures. It is contingent on our obedient compliance with the will of the Father, as expressed in the commandment, to "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. xii. 17); to labour with our hands for the things needed (Eph. iv. 28); to be not slothful in business (Rom. xii. 11); a principle carried to this extent that where a man does not yield submission to it, he is not to be relieved.—(II. Thess. iii. 10.) So also when God-blessed industry secures what is needful, the continuance of the blessing depends upon our faithful use of results in the way directed, as good stewards of the substance of God.—(II. Cor. ix. 8-13; Psalms xli. 1-3; Acts xx. 34-35; Rom. xii. 13; Eph. iv. 28; I. Peter iv. 10.)

We may learn something also of discretion in the doing of divine work, from the way Moses proceeded to carry out the command to "begin to contend with Sihon in battle." An impulsive blunderhead would have gone straightly and abruptly to work. He would have issued orders to Israel to get into fighting form at once, and marching on Heshbon would have burst on Sihon without explanation or parley. Moses, in full view of what was pending, "sent messengers to Sihon with *words of peace,*" asking permission to march through his country, and offering to pay for whatever they might need. This was a dignified and a becoming way of bringing about the work. It had the advantage of putting Sihon in the wrong before beginning. God,

working with Moses, "hardened Sihon's spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into Israel's hand."—(Deut. 11. 30.) In the heat of an offended spirit, "Sihon came out against Israel and all his people to fight at Jahaz."—(Verse 32.) The result of the fighting was the destruction of the Heshbonites. Thus the result of Moses' tactics was to put the responsibility of the offensive upon Sihon, and to cause him to bring about his own destruction. The lesson is that a graceful wisdom is to be employed in reaching results divinely intended, and that we must never forget the truth expressed in the popular maxim—that God works by means.

The action of Moses in this case may throw some light on the work to be done by Christ at His coming. We know that the work to be done is to "break in pieces the nations like a potter's vessel;" to grind to powder the political image seen by Daniel, to tread the winepress of Jehovah's anger. But we may imagine from these vigorous figures of speech that the process will be prompt, rough, and hurried, after the manner of the tornado, without warning and without diplomacy. This would be a mistake. The first Moses illustrates the second. The scale of operations is larger, because the whole earth, instead of a single country, is in question; but the aims and the principles of action will be the same, for it is the same God, with the same objects at work, in both cases. There will be proposals to the governments of Europe, and the rejection of them, which the governments will follow up with a military initiative against

Christ, as in the case of Sihon against Moses. The proposals are indicated in Psalms *ii.* 10-12 ("Kiss the Son lest He be angry," &c.), and Rev. *xiv.* 3 ("Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment is come"); and the result in Rev. *xvii.* 14; *xix.* 19 ("These ten kings shall make war with the Lamb"). These Scriptures briefly sketch events involving time and much detail in their evolution, for a foreshadowing of which we may usefully consult the narrative of the conquest of the land of the Amorites.

When the time came for Moses to transfer the work to Joshua, he said to him, concerning the strong nations on the western side of the Jordan: "Ye shall not fear them, for the Lord your God, He shall fight for you."—(Deut. *iii.* 22) This comes under the same category of reflection as the statement of God to Moses that He had given Sihon into his hand. The words of Moses, superficially construed, would seem to justify inaction and uncarefulness on the part of Joshua, because if God was to fight for Israel, what need of Israel fighting? so it might have been asked. But Joshua did not so understand them. He took all necessary measures implied in the work assigned to him. When Moses was dead, God addressed to Joshua these inspiring words: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."—(Joshua *i.* 5.) Surely nothing was necessary on the part of Joshua in the face of this assurance! Did he not simply have to "stand still and see the salvation of

God?" Such a conclusion would have been a great mistake. There is a time to stand still, but not when God proposes to work by us. All that is said concerning Joshua in this declaration pre-supposes his active, diligent, courageous and care-taking co-operation. A clause is added expressly stipulating this, and to show that the fulfilment of the promise depended upon his faithful observance of the commandments "*Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do all the law which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, THAT THOU MAYEST PROSPER WHITHERSOEVER THOU GOEST. The book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein, for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success.*"—(Verses 7, 8) The imperative force of this specified condition was forced roughly home upon Joshua's attention in the repulse of Israel, which we noticed in Chapter X. The instruction of the case is manifest—that no man may presume upon God's co operation who does not faithfully observe the conditions implied in all the promises. The words addressed by Azariah the prophet to Asa, king of Judah, are applicable to every man: "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him: and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you. —(II. Chronicles xv. 2.)

A more indirect form of divine procedure—viz., His action towards nations (involving the political sphere),

is illustrated in the statement of Moses concerning the nations to be driven out by the armies of Israel: "For the wickedness of those nations, the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, nor for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land, but for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out before thee."—(Deut. xix. 4, 5.) The nations referred to were in a gross state of unrighteousness, and had been for centuries. In the days of Abraham, it was given as a reason for the apparent postponement of the promise concerning the occupation of the land by Abraham's seed, that "the iniquity of the Amorites is *not yet full*."—(Genesis xv. 16.) This implies that the cup was filling at that time—470 years before the arrival of the armed hosts of Israel on the borders of Moab. The enormity of their iniquity is amply indicated in Lev. xviii. After the prohibition of a variety of unnatural offences, there are these words at verse 24: "Defile not yourselves in any of these things, *for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you*. And the land is defiled. THEREFORE I DO VISIT THE INIQUITY THEREOF UPON IT.' So also with reference to other matters, Moses said to Israel, "All that do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee."—(Deut. xviii. 12.) From this it follows that not only was the providence of God at work among Israel for purposes connected with Israel, but the providence of God was at work through and by means of Israel

towards nations that had no recognition of His hand in the case one way or other. To the Amorite nations, the approaching host of Israel would appear a marauding swarm of robbers and murderers, bent on the destruction of their neighbours and the lawless appropriation of their lands, whom to oppose was a virtue of common patriotism. In point of fact, this menacing assembly of the Israelites was the arm of divine justice uplifted in vengeance over a cluster of nations who had forfeited all right to their lands, or right even to live, by centuries of godlessness and violence. From this picture it is not difficult to turn and recognise in many a rough-hewn confusion of events, a "divinity" shaping national "ends," where no divine element is recognised or even suspected. God is displeased with the wickedness of men now as He was then. He is not an indifferent spectator of the ways of nations, though He would appear so in this time of long-kept silence. It is the testimony of Daniel that "the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and appointeth over it whomsoever He will."—(Daniel v. 21.) Babylon was weighed in the balances and found wanting, and therefore the kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians.—(Verses 27, 28.) This was done by events with which, apparently, God had nothing to do—viz., the successful enterprise of Darius and Cyrus. So now national disasters do not come without divine intention and manipulation. A threatening army gathered on the frontiers of a country may be the hand of God for the visitation of justice.

But it may be said that such an idea is not exactly on a par with Israel's invasion of the land of the Amorites. It may be said that while it is easy to recognise a divine visitation in the operations of an army directly commissioned by divine authority, as Israel was, it is different with the case of an army acting without any divine authority whatever, but simply obeying the commands of an ambitious monarch, who goes to war to compass his own ends. The answer is to be found in the calamities threatened against Israel themselves in case of disobedience, considered in the light of the mode of their infliction and the divine explanations in connection therewith. Moses said to Israel in the case in question: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And *the Lord shall scatter you among the nations*, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you."—(Deut. iv. 20.) Again, he said: "*The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten* before thine enemies. Thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them, and shalt be removed into all kingdoms of the earth. . . . And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations *whither the Lord shall lead thee*. Thou shalt serve *thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee*, in hunger and in thirst, and in nakedness and in want of all things. . . . *The Lord shall*

bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth," &c.—(Deut. xxviii. 25, 37, 48, 49.)

Here we have a distinct intimation (which is repeated hundreds of times throughout the prophetic and other scriptures) that the events which should lead to Israel's downfall would be of divine initiation and guidance. Without understanding, we should imagine that the statements meant that God would send commands to the enemies of Israel to do these various things, in the same way as He gave command to Moses and Joshua to proceed against the Amorites. But, with understanding, we know that this was not meant; but that the meaning was that God would invisibly make use of Israel's enemies to do these various things without those enemies being aware that God had anything to do with their proceedings. This understanding comes in two ways—first, from a knowledge of how the threatened calamities came; and, secondly, from the express declarations of the God of Israel on the first point. Whether we take the inroads of the Amorites, Midianites, Philistines, &c., who repeatedly brought Israel into affliction because of their sins; or the formidable invasions of the Egyptian Necho or the Assyrian Shalmaneser and Sennacherib; or the conquest effected by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; or the final destruction of the Jewish polity by Vespasian and Titus of Rome; we know, as a matter of fact, that all these adversaries acted from an ordinary lust of spoil and military glory, and without any idea of carrying out the purposes of Jehovah. This is a matter of notoriety and need not be argued.

On the second point, God, by the prophets, several times explained, in love to Israel, that the triumph of the enemy, though brought about by Him, was a grief to Him, and unknown to the enemy in its real meaning. Thus we have a general intimation to this effect at the time of Judah's desolation: "I am very sorely displeased with the heathen that are at ease, for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."—(Zech. i. 15.) Then to Babylon, as a reason for judgment upon her, this is addressed: "I was wroth with My people; I have polluted Mine inheritance, and given them into their hand: thou didst show them no mercy: upon the ancient thou hast very heavily laid thy yoke."—(Isaiah xlvi. 6.) Again, although it was recognised that Nebuchadnezzar was Jehovah's servant (Jer. xliii. 10), and that he and his army had "wrought for Jehovah" (Ezek. xxix. 20), we have the following pathetic lament: "My people hath been lost sheep, . . . all that found them hath devoured them; and their adversaries said, We offend not because they have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice, even the Lord, the hope of their fathers. . . . So I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country. . . . And Chaldea shall be a spoil. All that spoil her shall be satisfied with the Lord, *because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O YE DESTROYERS OF MINE HERITAGE: because ye are grown fat as the heifers at grass, and bellow as bulls.* . . . Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about; all ye that bend the bow, shoot at her; spare no

arrows, for *she hath sinned against the Lord.* . . . Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven him away—first, the king of Assyria hath devoured him, and last, this Nebuchadnezzar hath broken his bones. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Behold *I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.*”—(Jer 1, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17.) Again, “Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunken . . . I will render unto Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea, all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the Lord. . . . As Babylon hath caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth . . . The Lord of recompenses shall surely requite.”—(Jer 11 7, 24, 49, 56)

In the case of Assyria, the information is very explicit, that the Assyrian, while made use of was only bent on his own evil designs, without any idea that God was accomplishing a purpose against Israel by him See Isaiah x 7 “Howbeit *he meaneth not so*, neither doth his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. . . . He saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it. . . . Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his high looks ”

There is a touching recognition of the same principle in the prophetic song that God, by Moses, put into the mouth of Israel, as a witness against them and for Him-

self throughout all their generations. Delineating the rebellious course that Israel would pursue, and the sore evils He would bring upon them by the hand of their enemies in consequence, He says (Deut. xxxii. 20), "I said I would scatter them into corners; I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men, *were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy*, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, *Our hand is high* the LORD HATH NOT DONE ALL THIS." This is a conclusive recognition of the fact that the calamities of Israel would apparently be due wholly to human power, and that those who would be instrumental in inflicting them would be tempted to claim them as the results of their own triumph, and to repudiate the idea that they were in any sense the doings of God. That this view of the case should be placed on record so long ago—over 3,000 years ago—actually before Israel had begun the conquest of the Amorites, gives it greatly increased force.

The evidence goes to show that God may be at work when men, as mere natural observers, see no evidence of it. This helps us in the discernment of the signs of the times, and will enable us to realise the individual application of the declaration of scripture: "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of the Lord."—(Prov. xxi. 30, 31.)



CHAPTER XII.

After the death of Moses — Joshua to be brave — Intrepidity required of the servants of God.—Jeremiah.—Ezekiel.—The need for courage in Joshua's case—The need in later times, as apostolically commended—Joshua's adoption of wise measures.—The spying of Jericho—The report of the spies.—The importance of casual information sometimes—The case of Gideon—Modern cases—The campaign after the fall of Jericho—The hardening of the hearts of the Canaanitish nations



BIDDING adieu to Moses in the nameless but honoured spot on the summit of Nebo, which received his sleeping form at divine hands, we follow Israel across the Jordan under Joshua, and mark the further illustrations we find of the ways of providence. No feature is more noteworthy than this, that though the whole enterprise was divine and divinely impelled and guided, the agent of its execution was constantly exhorted to sustain his part with courage: "Be strong and of a good courage:" "Only be thou strong and very courageous;" "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed." Such were some of the expressions by which the Lord strove to inspire Joshua with fortitude in the performance of the part assigned to him as leader of the people in the subjugation of the Amorites. At first sight, it would seem as if such exhortations were altogether superfluous. Of what importance (it might

have been asked) can the deportment of any human being be one way or other, in relation to a work of divine inception and guidance? The exhortations to Joshua show that it is not unimportant. The feature comes out in other cases. Jeremiah was addressed as follows in reference to the duty he had to fulfil as the prophet of the Lord: "Gird up thy loins and arise and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces lest I confound thee before them" — (Jeremiah 1. 17). Ezekiel was similarly exhorted. "Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their word, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their word, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, . . . be not thou rebellious." — (Ezekiel 11. 6).

In these cases, it is plainly shown to us that the attitude of the servants of God is not a matter of indifference to God in the carrying out of a work of God. God looks to them for that intrepidity and resolution which are so reasonable in the doing of anything God requires, and where the achievement of results contemplated by Him depends upon the instrument used, manifestly the behaviour of the instrument is a matter of first importance. Joshua was about to execute the divine mandate against the Amorites and to carry out the divine purpose in regard to Israel. The realization of both objects depended in some measure on his deportment. If he were fearful and faint, the circum-

stance would never arise in which God would have His opportunity, so to speak, of backing Israel's exertions for the accomplishment of the object in view. The circumstances were such as to make a man nervous : from which arose the need of exhortation. Joshua had only God's word as his warrant for the bloody enterprise on which he was about to enter. He was not in so good a position as we are : we know how affairs came out : and as we look back, we are liable to imagine that Joshua knew it all too, that it cost him no more trouble to do his part than it costs us to read about it : whereas the case was one of obvious difficulty, for there were before him seven strong nations embattled behind high walls and fortresses, and possessing large armies in the field. He was in command of a large body of men, but in great part undisciplined, and whose defeat meant utter perdition to the whole congregation. The position was one for faith : the natural surroundings were suggestive of fear, and God's pledged word was the only basis of action. Consequently much depended on the courage of Joshua.

It is not difficult to see some guidance for ourselves here. It is a way of providence to make use of men's courage and enterprise in the accomplishment of even divinely-purposed results, concerning themselves or others. God could accomplish His purpose another way ; but this is His way ; and if one man lacks courage in the work of God, another will be found who is "strong and very courageous, and fears not." Our surroundings may be fraught with elements causing fear ; it is ours

not only to exercise faith but to exercise the courage and resolution which such a relation to God justifies.

It may be suggested that this lesson is misapplied to us as drawn from the case of Joshua, or any other servant of God who had specific work to perform. In truth, the argument works the other way; because if ever there were a case in which personal energy and fortitude were immaterial, it might be imagined to be where the work to be done was clearly defined, and the divine pledge distinctly given. If Joshua required to be "strong and courageous," much more does it belong to us to be so, who have only general indications and assurances—not personal to ourselves. But the relation of the matter to us does not depend upon general arguments; the principle is visibly defined and distinctly applied in the New Testament in more ways than one. What are the seven messages to the churches in Asia but so many appeals to individual enterprise and fortitude in spiritual directions? Witness the constant promise "to him that overcometh." *EPHESUS* is commended because the brethren "could not bear them that are evil;" "had tried them that said they were apostles and were not, and had found them liars;" "for His Name's sake had laboured and not fainted." The brethren in *SMYRNA* are told to "fear none of those things that were to come upon them, but to be faithful unto death." *PERGAMOS* was commended for holding fast the name of Christ at the very headquarters of the Satanism of the first century. *THYATIRA* was approved for "works, charity, and service, and faith, and patience." What

are the excellencies thus calling forth the commendation of the Lord, but such as require the exercise of the qualities enjoined on Joshua—strength, courage, enterprise, fortitude? The promise “I will give to every one of you according to your works,” strongly points in the same direction.

In the apostolic letters, there are constant exhortations in the same sense: “Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”—(I. Cor. xiii. 16). “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girded about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.”—(Eph. vi. 10-14). “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.”—(Phil. iii. 2). “It was needful for me to write unto you to exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints.”—(Jude 3). Such are a few of the New Testament inculcations upon all believers of the spirit of courage, which was inculcated upon Joshua in the arduous work of the subjugation of the land of Canaan.

In the execution of the enterprise committed to him, Joshua evinced the circumspection exhibited by Moses in the cases considered last chapter. He was told at the outset that God had given Israel the land (Josh. i. 2-11). Instead of presuming upon the information and waiting passively for the divine performance, he set to work to adopt the means of bringing about what God had

promised. He sent spies over to Jericho to obtain needful information. He did not go to work with a blind confidence. He recognised that God's work in the case was to be performed through himself and Israel, and that God's co-operation would not be lacking if they did their part. In this we have a much needed lesson, that has already been frequently visible in the course of these examinations of the ways of providence. We ought never to neglect those reasonable measures which are calculated to bring about any result we may desire. When we have committed the matter to God, and taken care to avoid every element of wrong doing in our proceedings, we may go ahead with the assurance that God will prosper us, if the enterprise upon which we may be engaged is for our good in relation to Him. If we sit down supinely and act the part of the sluggard or the fool, our prayers will ascend to heaven unregarded as the lowing of oxen.

Having obtained the necessary information by means of the spies, Joshua went to work. The hand of the Lord was with him in an open miraculous manner at certain critical points, such as the crossing the Jordan, and the fall of Jericho. With these we do not at present concern ourselves, because of the absence of visible operation during these times of the Gentiles; but it is profitable to note the relation of these visible acts of power to the faithful and courageous performance of Joshua's part. In certain phases of the work of Joshua, the ways of providence in what we may call their natural form, are profitably visible. The two spies for example, heard

from the lips of their hostess that the country in general was in a state of great apprehension and feebleness, in relation to the Israelitish invasion. We read that before the spies were laid down, "she came unto them on the roof; and she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you; for we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came up out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed: and as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt because of you, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath."—(Joshua ii. 9). The spies, on their return, reported this piece of casual information, evidently with feelings of confidence and elation. They said unto Joshua "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land, for even all the inhabitants of the land do faint because of us." A communication like this could not fail to cheer and strengthen Joshua and all the people, in the enterprise in hand. How came the woman to make a communication with so important an effect? The only answer to be found is, in the fact that God was working with His faithful servants, and operated in such a way upon the woman's mind as to move her to unburden herself of information useful to them. A similar instance may be found in the case of

Gideon, who was called upon to address himself to a more formidable enterprise than that entrusted to Joshua. — (Judges vii.) With 300 men, he was required to break up an army of considerably over a hundred thousand men. He was faithfully endeavouring to summon the necessary courage; to help him in which, the Lord invited him to overhear a conversation in the enemies' camp. God said (verse 9), "Go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host, and thou shalt hear what they say, afterwards shall thy hand be strengthened to go down to the host." In obedience to this command, Gideon went down into the valley by stealth, and listened outside one of the soldier's tents, and heard one man express to the other a conviction that Gideon would overthrow the Midianitish host. Thus strengthened, he returned to his post and made the arrangements by which the enemy was overthrown. Now, these are among the things written for our instruction. A piece of conversation is ordinarily a very insignificant affair; yet, in special cases, it may be an important link in the working out of God's purpose with us. An enlightened view of the subject will teach us to regard nothing as necessarily outside the scope of divine supervision. God may touch the heart of friend or foe to speak certain words at a certain time, for good or evil, according to His own will. It is ours to commit ourselves to His hand. By this rule, David was able to say of Shimei's maledictions on the day that David fled from Jerusalem: "Let him curse, because the Lord hath sent him to curse David; who shall therefore say, Wherefore hast thou done so?"

In prosecuting the campaign after the fall of Jericho, Joshua showed a disposition in some instances to treat amicably with the hostile inhabitants. Had they met his advances in a reasonable way, it would probably have resulted that some of them, at least, would have been spared the destruction that came upon them. But this would have been contrary to the divine purpose and intent. It was effectually prevented by God's incitement of the Canaanites to oppose. We are told that "there was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the inhabitants of Gibeon. All others they took in the battle: *for it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle that He might destroy them, and that they might have no favour, but that He might destroy them as the Lord commanded Moses.*"

The Pagan maxim current in modern times that whom the gods intend to destroy they first dement, has its basis in a scriptural fact which has many other illustrations. No more signal illustration of it is to be found than in the temper of the Jewish nation before the destruction of the nation in the days of Vespasian. Josephus himself was struck with it. He says it seemed to him as if a frenzy from God was upon them, in that they would listen to no reasonable proposal which would have averted calamity, nor accept defeat when actually sustained, but fought and persisted like madmen to the bitter end, leaving the Romans no alternative but their utter destruction. The same principle is illustrated in the complete ascendancy of the Gentile Apostacy from

the apostolic faith. The Gentiles did not gladly and modestly enjoy the privilege brought to them by the ministry of the apostles, and Paul foretold that, for this cause, God would send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

The principle illustrated in this general and large way, is without doubt, of individual application. Where men despise the goodness of God, or arrogantly make use of the powers bestowed upon them, whether of faculty or of control of means, sooner or later, God may work against them and impel them into courses that will bring about their own destruction, after the example of the seven nations of Canaan, utterly destroyed by the sword of Joshua.





CHAPTER XIII.

Unfinished state of the Amorite conquest at the death of Joshua —The “chariots of iron” a difficulty to Judah, and why —The divine thwarting of Israel’s success for reasons specified —The process apparently natural —Causes of defeat and success —Providential cases and multitudes of non providential matters in newspaper records and daily life —European politics angelically regulated —The times of the Judges. —The divine strengthening of the adversary against Israel —The source of all efficiency —Human complacency and boasting irrational —The tragedy of Abimelech —Divine retribution rendered by natural means —An unstructive case —The particulars —The case of Samson

THE ways of providence are instructively illustrated in the history of Israel’s procedure subsequently to Joshua’s conquest of the Amorite kings of Canaan. It will be remembered that the subjugation was not completed with the finishing of the military operations. There was still much to be done even when Joshua’s end was come. It was said to Joshua, when war had ceased, and the land had rested a number of years, “Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth much land to be possessed.” —(Josh. xiii. 1.) We can easily understand how this would come to be the state of things. The military operations were advanced. organized resistance was no more offered to Israel in the field; but in outlying

districts, in nooks and corners, the original inhabitants were still in possession. The work of ousting these in detail had not been accomplished when Joshua died. The work had evidently been in contemplation, for when Joshua was dead, the question arose, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight?" When the answer had been obtained, "Judah shall go up," Judah took Simeon to his assistance, and went to work to clear his inheritance of the remaining inhabitants. In this work Judah and Simeon realised a large measure of success. The success, however, was not complete. We are informed that Judah "could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron." Here is something for inquiry and reflection. How came "chariots of iron" to be any obstruction to a people of whom it is testified, "the Lord was with them?"

To perceive the answer clearly, we have to look at the behaviour of the other tribes. Concerning Benjamin, we are told that "the children of Benjamin *did not drive out* the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem, until this day. . . . Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean, . . . Dor, . . . Ibleam, . . . Megiddo and their towns. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer." Neither did Zebulun, Asher, or Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of their respective portions. What is the meaning of this? How came the tribes to fail to do the work allotted to them? The

fact was primarily due to the difficulties of the case, without doubt, as in the case of Judah with the chariots of iron (Judges i. 19), and Dan with the robust opposition of the Amorites who "forced Dan into the mountains and would not suffer them to come down into the valley."—(verse 34.)

But there is a question which goes behind these difficulties. How came these difficulties to prevail against a people who had overcome far greater obstacles in the original conquest of the land? It was not altogether a question of difficulty: for we read that "when Israel was strong, they put the Canaanites under tribute and did not drive them out."—(verse 28.) This suggests that they had the power to drive them out and did not use it. That this was the case, and that for this reason their attempts against certain difficulties were failures, is made certain by the message they received from the Lord shortly afterwards: "I made you to go up out of Egypt, and I have brought you into the land which I swore unto your fathers, and I said I will never break My covenant with you: ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but *ye have not obeyed My voice*. Why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I WILL NOT DRIVE THEM OUT FROM BEFORE YOU: they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods a snare unto you."—(Judges ii. 1-3.) Here is the explanation of Israel's difficulties. God was with Israel in the overcoming of all obstacles while Israel was with Him, but when they forsook Him, then iron chariots baffled

Judah's valour ; and the stout opposition of the Amorites in their various districts proved too much for the other tribes. "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim, and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods—the gods of the people round about them and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. . . . And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers to spoil them, and sold them into the hands of their enemies, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies ; *whithersoever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil*, as the Lord had said and had sworn unto them, and they were greatly distressed."

The thing to think about in the picture thus placed before us is, that in the divine thwarting of Israel's success, there was nothing apparently divine in the circumstances. They were all obviously natural in their form. If we could have followed the different bands of Israel on their several expeditions, we should have found a uniform want of success, apparently due to natural causes. They did the right thing at the wrong time, or the wrong measure was adopted, or somebody's heart failed them in the critical operation that would have ensured success, or the enemy came upon them at an unexpected moment, or they were too late in starting, or the weather was unfavourable, &c. We should have always been able to account for the failure on natural principles. Clever

war correspondents of the Archibald Forbes type can always explain a disaster when it happens. They can always put their finger upon the circumstance or measure that has led to defeat. But this deals only with the surface of things. It does not touch the invisible causes of measures and circumstances. Why was such a measure thought the right thing to adopt? How came the defeat-causing circumstance to exist? Here correspondents shake their heads. They admit that this touches the inscrutable and the insoluble to human intellect. Yet here lies the root of all events which, while on the surface perfectly natural and spontaneous, may be the evolution of a secret will. Doubtless, there are myriads of events among men that have no such root, but are the mere outcome of the action and re-action of established conditions in themselves and around them. The ways of providence have no more to do with such events than in determining which cow in a herd shall be foremost, or which dog shall succeed in the scramble for a bone. Concerning nations at large, it is testified by Paul that God who had made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things therein, "in times past, *suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.*"—(Acts xiv. 16.) There is a large mass of human action with which God has nothing to do, including much that is written about by newspaper correspondents. But then, there are cases of another sort, in which results are due to divine initiation and guidance brought to bear angelically in the shape of interference with the causes of things.

In the case before us we have an instance: Israel was unprosperous because God worked against them in the manipulation of natural circumstances. The value of the instance is manifest to all who have become incorporate with Israel through the adoption of which obedient believers become subject in the obedience of the truth. Such are helped to recognise that evil, though perfectly natural, may be "of the Lord" for the punishment of sin (I. Cor. xi. 30, 32; Lament. iii. 39), or for that due chastisement which is necessary to make us partakers of His holiness.—(Heb. xii. 6-10.) They realise the conviction that "all things—absolutely all, evil (as it appears to us) as well as good—work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."—(Rom. viii. 28.)

The application of the same principle in political affairs is obvious. God "ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whom He will."—(Dan. iv. 17.) So it is testified, "that He putteth down one and setteth up another." In view of this, we are enabled to recognise a special providence in these political and military events that lead to changes in the governments of men. The movements of those governments stand related to the purpose He is working out in the earth. Therefore they are held in the lines and channels of His plan. The programme of their movements has been sketched in a rough and general way in the Apocalypse, for the information of His servants (see *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*). The execution of the programme has been entrusted to angelic hands. Consequently the events of

European politics are not the haphazard operations of human whim, nor the chance achievements of human prowess. They are the results of carefully manipulated natural causes. These causes are invisibly affected in their inception, and guided to the working out of intended effects. The results that come, in so far as they bear upon the divine purpose, are due to an invisible divine control. A recognition of this fact makes all the difference between the enlightenment imparted by the truth, and the scientific paganism of the natural men of modern civilization who are by no means so keen sighted or profound as they appear to the public eye.

God's expressed disapprobation of Israel's leniency to the Amorites and of their imitation of Amorite ways, had a great effect on the people. "When the angel of the Lord spake all these words unto all the children of Israel; the people lifted up their voice and wept." The spectacle was moving to divine pity. It is a divine maxim that if "the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous men their thoughts and turn to the Lord, He will have mercy upon them and abundantly pardon." Israel experienced the truth of this. "It repented the Lord because of their groanings, by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them."—(Judges ii. 18). Notice may be taken here, in passing, of the comfort and encouragement there is for all who humble themselves in true repentance before God. Under Moses, sacrifice was the appointed token and the accepted form of reconciliation and approach on the part of offenders. In our day,

the name of Christ taken upon us in baptism and invoked in prayer, will secure the divine attention and regard.

“When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s youngest brother; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel and went out to war, and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia into his hand, and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim, and the land had rest forty years.”—(Judges iii. 9.) At the end of these forty years, the enlightened views and resolutions produced by the preceding afflictions had all evaporated, so far as the multitude of Israel were concerned: “the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, *and the Lord strengthened Eglon king of Moab, against Israel*: and he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek and he went and smote Israel.”—(Judges iii. 12). Here is a divine strengthening of an idolatrous king, as an agent of punishment against Israel. Whether we take the strengthening as physical or political, it will strike the reflecting reader that Eglon would not be aware that his strength was of divine bestowal. He would feel himself to be strong and his surroundings to be efficient and prosperous: and pagan as he was, he would, like the civilized pagans of our own day, rejoice in his strength and make it the ground of arrogance and pride. He was an instrument in the hand of the Creator, and had no more right to glory in his strength than a hippopotamus or an elephant. It may be said there is

this difference, that a hippopotamus or an elephant is strong because it cannot be anything else; whereas a man's strength in whatever sense we may take it, is the result of conditions which he controls,—such as good habits, wise measures, &c. Ought not a man, it may be asked, to have credit for the results of the pains and precautions he takes? Within certain limits, God himself recognizes the affirmative answer here: but, in the bearing in which we are looking at the matter, the question does not go deep enough. If a man have wisdom enough to adopt wise measures, who is to have the credit of the wisdom—the man who has received or God who has given? The answer of Eternal Wisdom is of a force that cannot be evaded. “Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?”—(I. Cor. iv. 7). There is one legitimate and rational subject of “glorying.” We have special permission from the Creator himself to indulge it. The permission is conveyed in words which may seem childish to the smart superficialism of modern civilization, but which nevertheless embody profoundest wisdom. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom: let not the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness and judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things do I delight.”—(Jeremiah ix. 23).

God strengthened Eglon by moving him, unconsciously to himself, to the adoption of these measures necessary to develop the strength, whether political or physical. So in our day, when men prosper or are strong, if it be a divine result, it is none the less a divine result because it can be traced to the natural measures adopted in the case, but all the more so because the person prospered has been invisibly moved to those measures that have led to the prosperity, and of which, perhaps, he himself takes the credit.

Concerning the tragedy of Abimelech, we read (Judges ix. 56), "*Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren : and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal.*" The point deserving attention here, as bearing on the object of these chapters, is the mode in which a retribution came which is here said to have been the act of God. If it had been by the supernatural cleaving of the earth, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram : or if Abimelech had been struck dead like Ananias and Sapphira, the case would not have been suitable to the present purpose. The event in that case would have belonged to the past age of open visible divine work, shortly to be resumed in a more effective form at the return of Christ, but for the moment a matter of history only. As such, it would not have been so useful to us in our interpretations of the work of God in our own day and surroundings. Standing midway (yet not really midway because we are at the

end of the gap) between the past and the coming age of divine interposition, we naturally seek for guidance in those doings of God in the past which have a counterpart in our own experience. In this light, the case of Abimelech is valuable.

In what way did God render unto him according to his wickedness? The answer is to be obtained on a careful reading of the narrative contained in the lengthy ninth chapter of Judges. We recommend the earnest reader to give it an attentive perusal. We cannot do more than touch off the leading features.

Abimelech, the son of Gideon, exalted himself after his father's death, and with the assistance of the inhabitants of Shechem, laid violent hands on his seventy brothers, and with one exception, put them all to death that he himself might reign. The exception was that of Jotham who uttered an imprecation that proved a prophecy: "Let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Millo: and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Millo and devour Abimelech." For three years Abimelech enjoyed the fruits of his unrighteousness in peace. "Then God sent *an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.*" Here was the beginning of a retribution which afterwards destroyed both Abimelech and his friends in guilt—the stirring-up of discord between them. Had we been witnesses of what went on between them, we should not have discerned any visible intervention of God. We should have noticed, perhaps, an irritability and proneness to

take offence, which, if we had been asked the cause, we might have attributed to disordered liver. In this, perhaps, we should not have been wrong: but it might not have occurred to us that the disordered livers were due to a cause set in motion further back, for the purpose of making mischief between Abimelech and his friends. Such was the fact nevertheless. "God sent a spirit of evil." He impelled the men in question into the channel of bad temper and mutual animosity. "What!" someone exclaims: "God do evil?" Yes. "Shall there be evil in a city (in cases where God judicially interferes as in the cities of Israel referred to) and the Lord hath not done it?"—(Amos iii. 6.) "I make peace and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things."—(Isaiah xlv. 7.) A barbarised theology has thrown a mist over this point. It has assigned all evil to an imaginary demon, and attributed good only to God, in the face of the revealed and natural truth that evil is God's work in punishment of sin. Death and disease are in the world not by diabolical machination, but by the divine act and deed because of the disregard of His authority in the earth.

The evil spirit enkindled between Abimelech and his friends worked itself out in acts of mutual hostility, until they came to fighting, and in the fighting, Abimelech was slain and the men of Abimelech burnt to ashes in their own stronghold. It all came about in a perfectly natural manner, yet it was all of God, whence arises the obvious reflection that, as God has not deserted the earth, He works out retribution now

in special cases in a perfectly natural way. The unenlightened natural man sees only natural mischance in the case ; enlightenment discerns the hand of God.

An illustration in a different direction is to be found in the case of Samson. When Samson was born, Israel were subject to the Philistines who held them in a galling bondage. Samson's birth was for Israel's deliverance, as was explained by the angel to Samson's mother.—(Judges xiii.) When Samson grew up, he fell in love with a Philistine woman whom he met at Timnath. He declared his love to his father and mother, and asked them to get the woman for him. This displeased them, contrary as it was to the law. "Is there never a woman," they said "among the daughters of thy brethren or among all my people that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" It was a reasonable demur, but Samson was a special man, and this incident of his love was a link in a plan of providence for the overthrow of the Philistine dominion over Israel. This Samson's father and mother did not know. We are told "His father and mother knew not that *it was of the Lord* that he sought occasion against the Philistines." The point in the case lies in the statement, "It was of the Lord." We look at Samson subject to the fascination of this woman and we see a picture entirely according to nature, and learn that a perfectly natural influence may be "of the Lord." It all depends upon whether the Lord has anything to do with the matter that may be in question, and whether He has any purpose to serve. With some matters he

has to do: with a thousand matters he has nothing to do. "The Lord looked down from heaven, to see if any did seek after God." He hath "set apart him that is godly for Himself," and the affairs of such are subject to His manipulation by the hand of the angels. Such are not perplexed by the apparent impossibility of knowing when the Lord is at work and when He is not. They concern themselves not to know this in detail Their concern begins and ends with the desire and the aim to do the Lord's will in all things, committing their way to Him, in the determination to accept all things as from His hand, with the knowledge that the naturalness of a matter is no evidence it is not divine, but may be the mere outward form in which His providence is brought to bear in preparation for the unspeakable destiny that awaits the children of His education and choice at the coming of Christ.





CHAPTER XIV.

The case of Eli.—The divine destruction of his house in a natural way.—Samuel raised up of God, yet brought upon the scene through natural circumstances.—Israel's request for a king.—Samuel's grief.—God's directions to Samuel to comply.—The divine sending of Saul.—How he was sent.—The lost asses.—God at work sometimes in the most unlikely circumstances.—God not in every circumstance.—Saul trying to force providence.—David apparently retiring before it—An important lesson.—The choice of David.—His preparation beforehand an apparently natural work.



AS we follow the history of Israel from the time of the Judges along the times of the kings, we do not find the illustrations of the ways of providence grow fainter or less striking; on the contrary, they are more distinct and perhaps more numerous. We shall not, however, follow them all: first, because such a process would be too prolonged; and secondly, because the lessons yielded are in many cases the same and would lead to repetition. Indeed we already feel that the subject is practically exhausted, since all phases of the subject have in some form or other been exemplified in the illustrations passed under review. The only encouragement to proceed in view of this lies in the fact that "line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" is a

characteristic of the divine method of instruction, upon which improvement is impossible.

Eli, the immediate precursor of Samuel, judged Israel forty years. While faithful in his judgeship after a fashion, his zeal for the ark and the service, and for the welfare of Israel, seems to have been merely of the patriotic order; it was dedicated to these things with the sort of proximate human interest that every man feels in his people and his surroundings. It was not an enlightened zeal for the supremacy and honour of Jehovah. He had a liking for the right thing, but not of the enlightened, decided, and energetic and uncompromising type that pleases God. While he remonstrated with his sons who prostituted the functions of the priesthood, "he restrained them not."—(I. Samuel iii. 13.) He honoured his sons above Jehovah.—(ii. 29.) Consequently, there came to him a heavy message from the Lord: "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. . . . And I will raise Me up a faithful priest that shall do according to that which is within Mine heart."—(ii. 30, 31, 35.) By the infant Samuel, the message was repeated in this form: "I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin I will also make an end, for I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."—(iii. 12, 13.)

The feature of this matter calling for attention in illustration of the ways of providence, is to be found in *the way in which the divine purpose thus enunciated was carried into effect.* There are two points I., The cutting off of the house of Eli, and II, The raising up of a faithful successor to Eli. In reference to both, we have to note Jehovah's declaration, "I will do it. When we read the narrative of the circumstances by which both changes were brought about, we read the narrative of a divine work, and we notice that though the work was a divine work, the agents were entirely human and that the events effectuating it were to all appearances naturally superinduced events. The cutting off of Eli's house was brought about thus "Israel went out to battle against the Philistines and pitched beside Ebenezer. . . . And the Philistines fought and Israel was smitten and they fled every man into his tent; and there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. . . . And when Eli heard, . . . he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake and he died. —(iv. 1, 10, 11, 14, 18) In all this there was no appearance of divine operation. Yet we know by the testimony it was the work of God. The Philistines did their part from their own motives and with their own objects. With the impulses of natural men, they devastated the land and slew multitudes of Israel, but in addition to their aims and their acts, there was an overshadowing guidance which directed their

efforts unconsciously to them towards the accomplishment of a divine purpose—hence it follows that God may be at work in circumstances that are perfectly natural in their form and origin—not that the circumstances themselves are in such a case a divine evolution in the direct sense, but though humanly contrived, they are controlled in a way that makes the upshot of them a divine upshot, although on the surface of things the upshot is brought about by natural means

In the second point—the raising up of a faithful successor to Eli—the same lesson is evident. God was to raise up this faithful priest and prophet, yet note the facts. the barren wife of a Levite is taunted by a fruitful sister beyond the point of endurance. In the bitterness of her spirit, she makes the matter a subject of petition, and vowed a vow, saying, “O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me and not forget Thine handmaid, but will give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life.”—(I. Sam.

11). What is there in this but the natural result of a grieved and a desiring spirit? Apparently nothing: but what led to it? Want of fecundity and a sister's taunts. Who shall say that the first was not divinely caused and the second divinely stimulated with a view to that powerful exercise of Hannah's mind which would result in Samuel being first asked from and then lent to the Lord? The earnest prayer received its liberal answer. “The Lord remembered her,” and a man child being born, “she called his name Samuel, saying, Because I

have asked him of the Lord." Then when she had weaned him, she brought him, in fulfilment of her vow, to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, and handed over the child to Eli, with whom he was brought up in the service of the tabernacle. In process of time, "the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh," and "all Israel knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." When the appointed disaster befel the house of Eli, Samuel was ready to take Eli's place, and was duly manifested as the faithful priest raised up according to promise: a divine work gradually performed step by step, and apparently all by natural means except where revelation comes in.

When Samuel had judged Israel many years, a deputation from the tribes came to him, asking for the appointment of a king over them. The request was a complete surprise and grief to Samuel who knew that as a commonwealth, directly governed by divine authority tabernacled in their midst between the cherubim, Israel enjoyed the most perfect political constitution possible to man in an evil state, and that a merely human head was a calamity to any people. Samuel mourned the temper of the nation exceedingly, but God, whose own purpose was ultimately to give them a divine king, made use of the new phase of national feeling to open the way as it were, for the coming change. He instructed Samuel to comply with the people's request to anoint them a king, but to reprove them for the folly of their desires. But whom was Samuel to anoint? Was he to make his own

selection of a man? No. "*I will send thee a man* out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him captain over My people Israel."—(I. Samuel ix. 16.) The emphasis is to be laid on the intimation that God would send a man for Samuel to anoint. Here we strike a vein of providence illustrated. Narrowly construed, and without the narrative of how God did it, we should conclude that God meant to send word to a certain man to go to Samuel to be anointed king. God's ways are much more interesting than this. Saul was sent, yet Saul knew nothing about it. "The asses of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee and arise, go seek the asses. And he (Saul) passed through mount Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not. Then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not. And when they were come to the land of Zuph . . . Saul's servant said unto him, Behold now there is in this city a man of God who is an honourable man, and all that he saith cometh surely to pass. Now let us go thither, peradventure he can show us our way that we should go."—(I. Samuel ix. 3, 6.) The suggestion is acted on, and Saul and his servant call on Samuel. When Saul stands before Samuel, the Lord says to Samuel: "Behold the man whom I spake to thee of." When we turn back from this point, and contemplate the incidents that led Saul into the presence of Samuel, remembering that God said, "*I will send thee a man,*" it is impossible to fail to be struck with the reflection

that God may be at work in connection with the most unlikely circumstances. Here are animals straying: what more common and trifling incident could there be? Yet it was the divine drawing of Saul into the neighbourhood of the Lord's servant. Can we doubt, therefore, the animals in this case were acted on up to a certain point? They were taken sufficiently far out of the district to cause Saul's father to suggest a search expedition. When Saul and his servant started, they went the wrong way to find the missing animals. They chose the way that their feelings suggested, but their feelings were angelically biassed without their knowing it. They were inclined the way that led to Samuel, but of this they were ignorant. Desire to discover the straying animals was their ruling impulse, but this was used to draw them on and on till Saul, still enquiring after the asses, stood before Samuel, on the very day and hour spoken of to Samuel.—(I. Samuel ix. 16.) God sent Saul and he did not know. Ordinary incidents, producing natural effects, were so intertwined with the divine guidance as to turn a bootless expedition into a divine mission. Yet the two things were distinct and separable. The divine guidance withdrawn, there would have remained nothing but a common occurrence without significance or result—straying animals, two men seeking them, and not finding them.

God is not in every circumstance. So Saul found at a later stage in his history, when fired by jealous animosity against David, he sought to compass his destruction. Saul tried to force the hand of providence:

he contrived a dangerous enterprise for David against the Philistines, saying, "Let not mine hand be upon him but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him."—(I. Samuel xviii. 17.) David went the dangerous errand. "Saul thought," we are told, "to make David fall by the hands of the Philistines."—(verse 25.) But Saul's thought was not God's thought, and therefore the affair went well with David, and David returned in safety and increased triumph. Had the matter turned out differently—had David fallen in battle—Saul with much secret satisfaction would doubtless have bewailed David's fate as the inscrutable decree of providence. He would have put the responsibility on providence. He did not like to kill him himself, but he had no objection to providence doing it, and so he laid a trap for providence, but it would not work, because providence was against it, that is, God's will was otherwise than that David should fall, and therefore the natural chances set in motion by Saul's arrangements were all fenced off by the shadow of the divine protection, against which nothing can prevail.

We have a case in the very opposite direction in the case of these same two men with the parts reversed. Saul hunting David falls into David's power. A loose interpreter of providence would have said "Now is your opportunity, David: God works by means: he has put Saul in your power: slay him." In fact this very advice was given him. "The men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou

mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee." What was David's answer? "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord."—(xxiv. 6). Saul tried to force providence. Here we have David apparently retiring before it. What is this lesson? A very important one—that we must govern all our interpretations of the ways of providence by the prior question of righteousness. A good opportunity is no justification of doing a thing if that thing be wrong by any of the laws of God. God works by means but not by wrong means; and therefore in judging of his will in our affairs, we must always have Paul's question before our eyes: "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" We may be quite sure that it is not His will that we should in any situation or circumstance do what He has forbidden, or leave undone what He has commanded. Our safety therefore lies in making ourselves constantly familiar with His commandments. By this we shall be protected from false interpretations of "providence," and enabled to walk wisely in all the changing phases of life.

Saul's evil nature having finally manifested itself in acts of official disobedience, his rejection was proclaimed by the Lord to Samuel, who was directed to find a successor.

As in the case of Saul, so in the case of his successor, Samuel was not allowed to make his own selection. Samuel was directed to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, as to whom the Lord said, "I have

provided Me a king among his sons." This introduces us to David, whose life is replete with illustrations of the ways of providence. These lessons begin with the very fact just stated that God had provided a king among the sons of Jesse. Samuel went to the house of Jesse to find and anoint the new captain of the Lord's people. He was not made aware beforehand which of the sons it was. He was to be informed on the spot. He asked to see Jesse's family. According to custom, the eldest (Eliab) came first. He was a tall, well-made, good looking man; Samuel concluded he must be the man, "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature; because I have refused him, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but *the Lord looketh on the heart.*"—(I. Samuel xvi. 7.) Then the second was called—Abinadab: the divine comment was, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." Then Shammah was called, and four others one after the other, with the same result in each case; "The Lord hath not chosen this." This seemed to be the whole of the family, and Samuel for a moment was at a loss. God had told him he had provided a king among Jesse's sons; and lo, all of them apparently had been rejected. What was the meaning? "Are here all thy children?" was Samuel's question. The answer revealed the divine selection—a boy, supposed to be so entirely out of the question that he was not called. "There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold he keepeth the sheep." This was enough for Samuel. "Send and fetch him: we will not sit down

till he come hither." And David was brought—"a youth, ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and beautiful to look to." The Lord said, "Arise: anoint him: for this is he." And so David, the humanly-ignored, was declared the divinely-provided among Jesse's sons.

To see the full bearing of this on the ways of providence, we must look at David before this manifestation of him by the spirit-directed hand of Samuel. He was an apt and intelligent lad, dutifully addicted to the out-door service assigned to him in his father's house, and given to the study of the writings of Moses, as transpires abundantly afterwards. He was not particularly liked by his brothers, who regarded him with some jealousy of feeling as comes out on the day of the encounter with Goliath. In this, he resembled Joseph, and Jesus, the antitype of both. We look at the picture and see nothing in it obviously divine. It was all apparently natural: yet the boyhood of David was a divinely superintended development—the laying of the foundation of that coming "man after God's own heart," with whom the royal covenant of the kingdom was to be established for ever. The invisibly-regulated events of his youth were elements in that process of "providing a king" revealed to Samuel: whence we obtain a confirmation of the lesson we have learned from so many other sources, that although all natural evolutions are not of God, some may be so that apparently present no features to distinguish them from natural occurrences in general. This double fact has the double effect of

restraining presumption and encouraging faith towards God. We may not as a matter of natural discrimination be able with certainty to distinguish between what is providential (or truly of God) and what is not : but this we know, that the hand of God is at work, and that all who know and fear and truly love and obey Him, are the subjects of that guidance which constitutes the answer to the prayer : " Give us this day our daily bread ; . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."





CHAPTER XV.

Life of David.—Brimming with instruction in the ways of God — Divine deliverances accomplished in a natural way, and by means of David's own precautions —David's "subtlety" not inconsistent with his righteousness —The same principle in the case of Jesus and Paul —The combat with Goliath.—A providential introduction of David to Israel —The result of David's individual faith and courage —A valuable example for modern imitation —David's escape from Saul's menaces —Undignified flight according to some.— A sensible avoidance of peril in reality —Sensible expedients not faithless acts



IN no case are the ways of providence more signally illustrated than in the case of David. We have already glanced at his boyhood. We will now look at him as a man, following a public career full of incident, chequered by vicissitude, and clouded with frequent perils and fears. A life beginning in obscurity on the hillside among sheep, and ending on the throne, necessarily presents marked contrasts, bright lights and deep shadows, towering precipice and deep gorge. It was in all respects the opposite of a tame life: it was full of stirring scene and brimming with instruction in the ways of God.

To read the whole matter aright, let us ponder the key note struck by David in one of his last utterances. Speaking to Bathsheba, in his old age, concerning the succession of Solomon (for a moment placed in peril by

Adonijah's intrigue), he said, "As the Lord liveth that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even as I swore unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly th son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead, even so will I certainly do this day."—(I. Kings 1. 30.) Here David acknowledges God as his deliverer in all the troubles he had experienced in the course of his life. When therefore we read the account of those troubles and the way David escaped from them, we are to remember that the process of deliverance, whatever we find it to be, was God's process. The recollection of this will enable us to study David's life with profit, and save us from the shallow and unenlightened views of the work of God which are nursed by many sincere people of orthodox training. For example, one of the most conspicuous features of David's life is that noted in Saul's remark to the Ziphites who came to Saul to report a place of David's concealment: "Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there *for it is told me that HE DEALETH VERY SUBTILLY.* See therefore and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself."—(I. Samuel xxiii. 22.) David's life certainly justified this report. He was distinguished by a ready resort to shift and ingenuity and stratagem, for the accomplishment of his ends. The lesson of this lies here. David's reliance on God did not, in David's estimation, release David from the use of what means and measures were at his disposal for the bringing about of what he might desire. And

David, be it ever remembered, was "a man after God's own heart." Furthermore, David's contribution to the achievement of results by the exercise of personal vigilance and wisdom did not, in David's estimation, in the least interfere with his indebtedness to God for those results. whence there arises an obvious teaching of wisdom. First, if a man is indolent and supine because he trusts God, he is not making an enlightened use of his trust, because he is neglecting a part of the plan of wisdom, and he may have to learn his folly in the sharp thrusts of adversity. God is one in all His ways, and while He asks us to lean on Him, He desires us to employ to the full the means placed in our hands for the accomplishment of what is needful. Secondly, when a man by the utmost use of skill and energy has secured any result he may aim at, the door is shut against personal pride or boast, because of the fact brought under Belshazzar's notice by Daniel when he said, "God thou hast not glorified, in whose hand thy breath is and *whose are all thy ways.*" An able successful man acts the part of a barbarian when he carries himself with arrogance and unmercifulness. Modesty, mercy to the lowly, and thanksgiving, are not only ornamental to prosperity, but they are the inevitable outcome of common reason. David was distinguished by all these in the midst of his highest successes, and in this respect is an example constantly to be studied.

It may be thought that David's resort to "subtlety" detracts somewhat from the dignity that always attaches to simplicity and directness of procedure. This

impression will be dissipated on a consideration of the means employed in the light of the objects aimed at. These may be discerned at a glance in Christ's exhortation to his disciples, to be "wise as serpents, harmless as doves." This was the character of all David's movements. He was a merciful and just man. He did not scheme for other people's destruction as Saul did; he schemed only for his own extrication from evil, and in this he employed "subtlety," or serpentness. Both Jesus and Paul have exemplified the same thing. When the Scribes and Pharisees sought to entangle Jesus in an avowal which would have given them a ground of action against him, he created a pretext for refusal to answer them by an adroit question about John's baptism (Luke xx. 1, 8), and in another case, by a question about a penny which left the principle in quest on untouched—(Luke xx. 24, 26) So Paul, when he perceived that his enemies could be divided by a party cry, proclaimed himself a Pharisee.—(Acts xxiii. 6.) Guileless artifice in fending off the assaults of evil is not inconsistent with the state of mind which God esteems righteous. Honour and truth are not sacrificed by measures designed only to catch a fish or scare a beast of prey. It is the wolf in sheep's clothing that is to be execrated. A sheep may don the wolf skin occasionally without the same subversion of principle. The Lamb of God as the Lion of the tribe of Judah will be the true benefactor of mankind, though the world at first will tremble at his roars.

David's first public appearance was as the assailant of Goliath. There can be no doubt that this was an entirely providential affair. We are too much accustomed to taking it as a matter of course. Let us realise the circumstances connected with it. David had been some time previously anointed by Samuel in private as the coming king of Israel. But how was David to be introduced to Israel? How was the way to be paved for David's kingship becoming a matter of fact? David was a herd boy in one of the vales of Judea. He was in as complete an obscurity as any agricultural lad on a Devonshire farm at the present moment. God had purposed making him the head of His people Israel, and as this was to be accomplished by the consent of the people (II. Samuel v. 1, 3), it was impossible the purpose could be carried out without "bringing out" David in some notable way before the people. How effectually this was done by the incident in question. War breaks out between Israel and the Philistines. The two armies meet in the valley of Elah. They each entrench themselves on a mountain with a valley between. In this secure position, little progress is made on either side. They face each other a good many days. The Philistines have a big man among them who daily offers to stake the result of the conflict upon an individual encounter between himself and any Israelite who may come forward. None of the Israelites dare encounter a man of ten feet, mailed from head to foot. David's brothers are in the Israelitish army. David had been left at home to look after the sheep. By and bye his father getting anxious

about his absent sons, sends David to see how they are and to take some acceptable contribution to the commissariat. On David's arrival, the champion of the other camp sallies forth with his daily challenge. David had no command on the subject; but he listened with amazement to the unrepelled defiance of the God of Israel by an uncircumcised creature of pride. He asks if there is no one ready to go to meet him. Finding none, he finds himself inspired with the idea of offering himself. Saul expresses surprise that a youth should venture upon a conflict with an armed man. David's answer reveals the secret of David's apparently rash courage, and exhibits the class of feelings that prompted him to a course so opposed to natural considerations of prudence, and calculated at the same time to effect the very purpose which God was beginning to work out by him. The answer shows it was not mere courage that impelled him, but an intelligent recognition of God's relation to the house of Israel; in a word, faith. "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went out after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth, and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. . . . The Lord that delivered me out of the mouth of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine."—(I. Samuel xvii. 34.) His speech to

Goliath himself is of the same order: "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand; and I will smite thee and take thine head from thee, and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hand."

Doubtless much of the zest of this prophetic speech was due to the Spirit of the Lord which came upon David on the day of his anointing, and abode with him from that day forward.—(I. Sam. xvi. 13.) Still David did not act mechanically in the case. He came forward with a faithful individual courage and acted with heroic initiative in the circumstances to which he was providentially introduced by his father's orders to visit his brothers in the army. He came and found God defied, and his zeal for God flamed up, and led him to dare great things. The Lord worked with David, but a working David was up and doing to be worked with. David's faith-generated impulse was supplemented by the guidance of the Spirit and the co-operation of the divine hand, but if there had been no zealous enterprising God believing David, there would have been no faith-generated impulse to supplement. The result introduced David to the notice of Israel and established

him in their confidence and admiration at a single blow. Goliath falls before a skilfully slung pebble of the brook, Goliath's own sword, in the hands of a supple God directed lad, severs Goliath's head from his prostrate body. and the astonished Philistines, first stunned, then panic-struck, flee at sight of the bloody head of their champion held up in their presence by the radiant ruddy youth, whom but a moment before they had scorned, whom David's brothers despised in envy, whom all Israel pitied as they saw him sally forth to the unequal conflict, but whom now they praise in ecstatic songs which awoke even the jealousy of Saul. "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." In this way God in his providence led David towards the position designed for him, but suppose David had been chicken hearted and backward to avail himself of the opportunity brought within his reach of doing valiantly for God, how different the upshot would have been !

People look back at the case of such as David, and tacitly assume that it all came out in a miraculous matter of course way. They usually fail to realize how much of it depended upon the faith and courage of the individual men, and by what a natural concatenation of providential circumstances the divine purpose with them was accomplished. The application of these considerations to our own day is obvious. We must cultivate individual enterprise in the ways of God. While committing our way to God, and praying to Him to open our way and direct our steps, let us see to it that we are not lacking in measures of wisdom and deeds of

courage. Do not let us sit down supinely like the Turks, and wait for God to do what He will never do. He brings things to a certain point and leaves men to do the rest. God works in His own way, and it is for us to find it out. Get into the groove of this, and God will work with us and prosper our endeavours if it seems good to Him so to do. And an enlightened man will not wait till he can do a great thing. If a man waits till he can do a great thing, he will never do anything. Do the little things faithfully and these may grow to great. Things that are considered great are made up of many littles, and the man who scorns the little will never reach the great. It is like learning a trade: we must do apprentice work and make mistakes before we can reach proficiency. The man who will not put his hand to watchmaking until he can make a watch, will never make a watch at all. The comparison is scarcely applicable, still it contains the same principle to a certain extent. A man persevering in the way of duty will reach results unattainable to the slothful: first, because of the natural effect of keeping at it; and secondly, because God draws nigh to those who draw nigh to Him, and supplements their labour with His special assistance and direction.

Saul's jealousy of David grew to a pitch that threatened David's life. Michal, Saul's daughter, David's wife, apprised David of his danger which had become very imminent, for Saul had posted his emissaries outside David's house during the night with instructions to kill him as he should be leaving the house in the morning. What did David do? If he had been the

artificial David of modern theological discourse, he would have sublimely appealed to heaven for protection, seated himself in heroic posture, and passively waited the issue of events with calm resignation. Instead of that, we see David in the undignified act of clambering through a window to get away (I. Sam. xix. 12)—undignified only according to Gentile standards, for it is never undignified to do a sensible thing. It was a sensible and a godly thing to flee before danger. It is what Christ Himself recommended. "When they persecute you in one city, flee to another." It is what Paul did when environed with deadly foes at Damascus. "Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped."—(II. Cor. xi. 33.) The lesson is that true men of God are men of sensible expedients. By a narrow way of looking at the subject, sensible expedients are made to appear as faithless acts. We have already glanced at this fallacy. David trusted in God and yet adapted his movements to the exigencies of the hour. Some say—Where is faith in such a case? Where is God's guidance? The answer is, a man of faith interprets God's intentions in providence by the facts surrounding him. We do not know from hour to hour what the will of God may be as regards particular circumstances. We have to act with wisdom towards them all as they arise. If escape is impossible, a man of faith resigns himself, and says, "The will of the Lord be done;" but if, on the contrary, the way of escape is open, a wise man escapes, and thanks the Lord that escape was possible. God's purpose in such

things is so interwoven with and wrought out by surrounding circumstances, that a man of God—committing his whole way to God in prayer, thanksgiving, and obedience—takes the circumstances as the interpretation of the purpose, and acts freely within the latitude the law of God may allow in the given circumstances of each case. It is always lawful to escape from danger if we can do so without the sacrifice of duty. Indeed it would be foolhardy and criminal to remain in it, in such a case. Nothing could be more censurable on this head than the rage for martyrdom that carried thousands voluntarily to the stake in the first and second centuries, through the false teaching of such weak and vain men as Ignatius. David by no means belonged to this class. He escaped danger when he could, and he was the type of the order of men that will surround his glorified son in the day of the establishment of his throne.





CHAPTER XVI.

The days of David's exile — Bitter adversity "good for" him — God's dispensation, yet in a natural form — A preparation for exaltation — Important discernment of the ways of providence — David at Keilah — Divine statements sometimes qualified by unexpressed conditions — The case of Nineveh — Paul's shipwreck. — David's elevation to the throne — The natural elements in the process — David's prudential measures — David's dilemma — His answer from the Lord — The present, a day of divine silence, and why? — The gradualness and naturalness of David's elevation — Patience and faith



THE last chapter brought us to David's escape into exile. His life in exile, as a hunted fugitive among the fastnesses of Israel's mountains, would be very interesting and profitable to follow. It would be inconsistent, however, with the aim of these chapters to indulge in the tempting pursuit. We are not dealing with the life of David in a biographical sense. We merely look at it, as at the life of others, for reliable lessons on the ways of providence. We have already seen several.

We pass over the days of his exile with a single reflection as to these days as a whole. Why was David subjected to exile at all? They were dreadful days to David. They were days of discomfort, days of hardship, days of despair. He did not hope to emerge in

safety from them. He said: "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul."—(I. Sam. xxvii. 1.) In the light of what came after—deliverance out of all trouble and promotion to the highest honour and wealth—we probably fail to estimate correctly the darkness and bitterness of the preceding years to David in the absence of any certainty on his part as to how events would come out. Some of the most sorrowful of the Psalms were doubtless written at this time, and owe their character doubtless, in the first instance, to the circumstances of the moment. For example: "Be merciful unto me, O God, for man would swallow me up: he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for they be many that fight against me, O thou Most High."—(Psalm lvi.) "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me."—(lv. 4.) "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God; defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin. They run and prepare themselves without my fault. awake to help me, and behold."—(lix.) "I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head."—(lxix.)

Though these words are intended by the Spirit in David as a foreshadowing of the sufferings of David's greater son, they are unquestionably the expression of

David's own strong feelings in the first place, and reflect to us the bitterness of the time he spent in the wilderness of Ziph and other desert regions in Judah, while "driven out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord."—(I. Samuel xxviii. 19.) The question for consideration is, Why was "a man after God's own heart" subjected to this rough experience? Why was the possession of the crown, so solemnly guaranteed by the hand of Samuel, the Lord's prophet, preceded by a season of such cruel banishment from the dwellings of men, and of the bitterest humiliation it was in the power of Saul to inflict? The answer is to be found in David's own words: "It is *good for me* that I have been afflicted." Experience is necessary to ripen goodness of character: and to be a ripening experience, it must be an evil experience. Prosperity enfeebles: adversity braces up and purifies. This is a lesson a man almost learns for himself, but it wants the addition of divine instruction to see it rightly and clearly. It is only up to a certain point that adversity acts beneficially. When is that point reached, and how is adversity then to be arrested? Natural discernment can throw no light here. That God knows and that God regulates the operation, we could never know as natural men. We require to be told it. We have been told it. The thing told has been written, and we may read it in the Scriptures in many and divers forms.

The thing revealed to us is this, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" (Heb. xii. 6), and that in such cases He "will not suffer us to be tempted above that

we are able to bear, but will with the temptation also provide a way of escape that we may be able to bear it."—(I. Cor. x. 13.) This lesson is conveyed to us, not only in the form of express declaration, but in the form of illustration in many signal instances. Joseph and Moses have been before us as signal examples : now it is David. What we have to realize in his case is, that it was of God that he was suddenly driven from a position of honour and comfort while yet a very young man, and sent out among the rigours of an outlawed life, for the perfecting of his character, for his preparation for the unbounded exaltation and blessedness that awaited him as a victorious wearer of Israel's crown. Yet though of God, *it was brought about in a perfectly natural way.* This is the point of the case. Saul became jealous of him ; and after intriguing against him, threw off the mask and gave open effect to his enmity, and compelled David to flee for his life, and remain in concealment among the mountains.

The lesson is obvious (and the study of scriptural matters is vain if it bring not with it a lesson that is "good and profitable unto men"): our troubles may come about in a perfectly natural way, and yet may be of God who knows how to regulate human speech and action (without interfering with human will), as to bring about results that shall be His own contrivance, while apparently the issue of human purpose merely. In this there is comfort for all who may be in distress, who fear God and do His commandments. There is no more important discernment of the ways of providence than this.

One incident, bearing in another direction, deserves notice, before passing on to the consideration of David's uprising to prosperity. In the course of his wanderings before the face of Saul, David came with his men to Keilah. It was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. Saul rejoiced at the fact, considering that after long eluding pursuit, David had at last put himself in a trap by taking refuge in a walled town. Saul prepared to go and surround Keilah and catch David. David heard of Saul's preparations and of his intentions. The question was, What should David do? Should he remain in Keilah or make off into the open? This depended upon whether Saul would really come, and whether if he came, the men of Keilah would stand by him or give him up to Saul. By the hand of Abimelech, the priest, David made enquiry of God on the subject. David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake; will Saul come down as Thy servant hath heard? And the Lord said, *He will come down.* Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up."—(I. Samuel xxiii. 10-12.) On receiving this information, David left the place with all speed; "And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah, and *he forbore to go forth.*"—(verse 13). The noticeable feature lies in the fact that Saul did not go down to Keilah after David had been divinely informed he would do so. This might appear contradictory if it were not recognized in its true character as an illus-

tration of the reasonable nature of all divine statements. According to some popular conceptions on the subject, the answer "He (Saul) will come down," was the inflexible fiat of destiny which nothing in heaven or earth could interfere with. People in general would treat it as an absolute statement—that the coming down of Saul was a matter of fixed futurity—whereas it is evident that like many statements we hear, it contained an unexpressed condition, taken for granted as a matter of course. "He will come down"—*if you stay here*. "The men of Keilah will deliver you up"—*if they have the chance*.

There is more than one illustration of this in the Scriptures. "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed," Jonah was made to say: but the Ninevites humbled themselves, and Nineveh was not destroyed at the end of forty days, though Jonah patiently waited out the time to see the event. An unexpressed condition was bound up in the proclamation: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed"—*if they repent not*. So in Paul's shipwreck (Acts xxviii.), though angelically assured of the safety of every man in the ship (22-24), Paul told the centurion that if the sailors deserted the ship, the lives of the rest could not be saved (31); from which it follows that Paul understood the divine intimation that he had to be subject to the employment of the right means: "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee"—*if proper measures be adopted*. This association of implied condition with apparently positive statement is expressly enunciated in Jeremiah xviii. 7:

“At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

We must now look at David as he steps from adversity to the throne. We watch the process in the light of the following intimation subsequently addressed to David: “I (Jehovah) gave thee the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”—(II. Samuel xii. 18.) The bestowal of the throne on David was a divine act. Therefore in observing the circumstances by which David passed to that position, we observe a divine procedure, and learn a lesson in the ways of providence. Some of those circumstances we have already looked at. It remains for us to note him at Ziklag, to which he and his men had been assigned by Achish, king of Gath. They hear that war is on the point of breaking out between Israel and the Philistines. They repair to the scene of coming conflict in the character of a Philistine contingent—with what purpose (whether to fight against Israel or the Philistines) is not stated, though the Philistines suspected the latter. Achish, who had also mustered to the fray, forced David to return to Ziklag, and take no part in the battle. On arriving back at Ziklag, David and his 600 men who were expecting to join their families where they had left them, found Ziklag in ashes, and not a living soul in the place. A band of Amalekites had attacked and burnt the place in their absence. They gave themselves up to a transport of grief—each man for his wife and family.—

(I. Samuel xxx. 6.) Looking upon David as the indirect cause of their misfortune, "they spake of stoning him," "but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Never were David's prospects darker than at this moment. Yet he was on the verge of day-break. When the power of weeping had been exhausted, the question what was to be done pressed itself. Pursuit of the marauding band was suggested by David and sanctioned by God. Pursuit resulted in capture and in the recovery of the stolen families. David's troubles were nearing an end. In the midst of the joy of domestic reunion, tidings came of the battle between Israel and the Philistines, the discomfiture of the former, and the death of Saul and his sons in battle. When the mourning natural to such news was over, the question presented itself, What was the wisest thing next to be done in the circumstances? David had adopted the prudent measure of conciliating the heads of the tribe of Judah. He had sent them a present out of the stuff taken from the Amalekites who had burnt Ziklag, during his subsequent pursuit of them, saying, "Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." Quite a long list is given of the places to which these presents were sent.—(I. Samuel xxx. 27-31.) This was a discreet paving of the way—not in the nature of bribery, but a legitimate though politic predisposing of the situation for what had been divinely appointed and was evidently impending—the choice of David as Saul's successor. It is an instance of what Saul referred to when he said he was told that David dealt "very subtilly."

The way was not quite open though Saul was dead, for Saul had left a son—Ishbosheth—whom Abner, Saul's commander in chief, proclaimed king in his stead. The course to be pursued must have been a hard problem for David to decide. Should he remain in the enforced exile with the practical freedom and independence of a minor chieftain's life? or should he attempt to return to his country at the peril of his head under Saul's successor? He asked counsel of the Lord. Here David enjoyed a privilege denied to our day. It may be said we have as much liberty to ask the Lord's direction as David had. Ay, but what about the receiving of an answer? here is where the difference lies. Saul "enquired of the Lord," but "*the Lord answered him not*, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."—(I Samuel xxviii 6). We ask, but we do not receive an answer in the direct and satisfactory way David did. "David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up" (a short reply—two words: but of what value compared with a whole volume of human disquisition) "And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron." Two words again, but what a world of strength and comfort in them to David. Of what unspeakable consequences a single word of recognition and guidance would be to us in our dark and deserted day. Have we no guidance then? Yes, but not of this sort. God has not changed. the testimony remains true that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and that His ears are open to their cry: that our

heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of, and will direct our steps in the attainment of them in the way best suited to our needs as His children. But the day of open communication was suspended for a time, when, after the final word by the hand of the Lord Jesus, the apostacy came in like a flood and submerged the light in darkness. It was a day spoken of beforehand, that it would come when there would be a famine, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, *but of hearing the words of the Lord,*" when men should run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord and should not find it (Amos viii. 11, 12); when there should be "no answer from God."—(Micah iii. 7.) If it be said that in this God has changed,—that whereas He answered before, now He answers not; the objector has only to be reminded that before David was born, there had been a similar period of silence because of Israel's sins. It is testified that in the days of Samuel's childhood, "The word of the Lord was precious in those days: *there was no open vision.*"—(I. Samuel iii. 1.) For everything there is a season and a time. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent. This is true of God as well as man. He has spoken much in times past, "at sundry times and divers manners:" now He is silent, and His very silence is indicative of His estimate of the state of things at present prevailing on earth. Before sin entered into this world, intercourse with Him, though the medium of His glorious angelic representatives, was a daily occurrence. After sin had entered, Adam was expelled from this privileged relation, and could

only approach Him suppliantly through sacrifice before the austere cherubic symbol. From that day to this is a long stride in the development of godlessness upon earth, and explains the dead silence characteristic of these times of "darkness covering the earth and gross darkness the people." In the day of restoration, the tabernacle of God will be with men, and He shall be their God and they shall be His people. Joy and honour, and light and gladness will accompany this communion with God. Meanwhile, it is ours only to pray, and in faith commit our way to Him who seeth in secret; it is not our privilege to receive the direct and explicit guidance that David received in the case before us. It is cruelty to ourselves to imagine what is not. Our wisdom is to recognize the exact measure of our privileges; embrace them and walk up to them in full, but not to assume that we are in David's position and get answers where we get none.

It may be suggested that David's privilege in this respect precludes our use of him as illustrating the ways of providence. In truth the opposite view is the more logical one. If we find that in the case of the man after God's own heart, who enjoyed almost the honour of Moses, in speaking face to face with the Almighty One of Jacob, David had to act his part in the process by which God accomplished His purpose concerning him, and that God accomplished that purpose by working with David in a perfectly natural way, obviously it is much more binding on us (if there be any difference) to act with a similar practical wisdom in our ways, and to

recognize that God does not act toward us independently of natural circumstances, but by means of, or in co-operation with them, when they are used in the spirit of fear before Him, faith in Him, and submission to all His revealed requirements.

Having received so direct an answer as to which city of Judah he should repair to, "David went up thither to Hebron." Arrived there, the men of Judah, whom David had propitiated in the way already referred to, "came and anointed David king over the house of Judah."—(II. Sam. ii. 5). His jurisdiction at first was very circumscribed in comparison to the position promised to him as "captain over Israel"—the whole twelve tribes. He was but king of Judah only, while Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was "king over Gilead and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel."—(II. Sam. ii. 9). Here we have to ponder the gradualness of the divine operations, and the faith required of those who are the subject of them. David had been anointed by Samuel as king over the whole house of Israel. It would not have been an unnatural view of this anointing to suppose that it meant the instantaneous installation of David, when the moment arrived for giving it effect, into the full possession of the throne of Saul. Instead of that, David was first the popular head of the army, then the king's son-in-law, next an exile under royal disfavour, next a mountain chieftain, next a Philistine auxiliary, then the accepted monarch of a small section of the kingdom of Israel, before the full development

of the divine purpose was reached. And each step in the process was the natural outcome of David's action in the one going before. This ought to give us an enlarged view of the ways of God in all matters,—whether as to our own individual affairs, or as to the development of the glorious purpose of God upon earth at the coming of Christ. As Dr. Thomas used to say “God is never in a hurry: He has plenty of time.” There is nothing of the flash-of-lightning order in His works in the past, and this is the lesson for the future.

David's patience was tried, and David's faith was rewarded. His star rose steadily in the eastern sky, shining with a brilliancy increasing every moment: “David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker,” until at last the kingdom of Saul collapsed, and David's authority was established in all the land.





CHAPTER XVII.

The consolidation of David's power.—The covenant made with him concerning Christ.—The circumstances leading to the covenant.—David's own faithfulness the cause of it.—Other instances of the same thing.—The lesson for modern times.—David's sin "in the matter of Uriah."—Its providential punishment.—Its notoriety in the day of judgment.—Its retribution on David in David's lifetime.—Troubles in his family.—Absalom's revolt.—David's flight.—Shimei's curse.—The Philistine's invasions.—Adonijah's treason.—All apparently natural, yet divinely caused.—David's recognition of the fact.—Double-sidedness of events affecting the chosen of God.—The closing scene.



DAVID reigned forty years after his divinely-directed arrival in Hebron. The various events that led to the extension and consolidation of his power from the time of his arrival till the day he sat enthroned in Jerusalem, undisputed monarch of the whole country from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, would be interesting to follow: but they would not be sufficiently relevant to the object of these chapters. As a fact, they would illustrate the ways of providence with David, but they would not enunciate them in that positive definite way which we aim to attain. There are several features of his reign that do so. The first is not so direct as others, but still useful to consider. We refer to the circumstances leading to the covenant made with David

This covenant occupies a prominent and important place in the economy of the divine purpose. David referred to it, in his last words, as affording the groundwork of "all his salvation and all his desire."—(II. Sam. xxiii. 5.) Jehovah sheds importance upon it by offering to extend it to every one who submits to Him, saying "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure (or covenanted) mercies of David."—(Isaiah lv. 3.) He refers impressively to it thus: "My covenant will I not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David: his seed shall endure for ever and his throne as the sun before me."—(Psalm lxxxix. 34-36.) Peter also refers to it in his address on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 29); and Paul indirectly alludes to it in speaking of "the *covenants of promise*" to which the Gentiles are by nature strangers.—(Eph. ii. 12.)

Now the striking fact in the case, as illustrative of the ways of providence, is, that this covenant with David—(one of the leading pillars, as we may say, of the city having foundations)—was brought about, so far as David was concerned, by David's own natural spontaneous meditations and intentions concerning the work of God. We are told that the Lord having given David rest from all his enemies, he began to grow uneasy at the fact that while he dwelt in a palace, the ark of God was under a tent. He mentioned his feelings to Nathan the prophet, as much as to intimate that he begrudged his own personal comforts and enjoyments while the things of God were less well appointed; and

that he would like to put up a substantial edifice for the divine service and honour. Nathan encouraged David in his view: "Go, do all that is in thy heart, for the Lord is with thee."—(II. Samuel vii. 3.) But that night, a different light was put upon the subject by the message that came to Nathan. David was forbidden to build the contemplated temple. Having shed much blood, he was declared unsuitable, in the divine fitness of things, for undertaking a work of worship and peace. He was commended for entertaining the idea. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart to build an house to My name. Nevertheless, thou shalt not build the house."—(I. Kings viii. 18), "Also, the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thine own bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. . . . Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever."—(II. Sam. vii. 11-16). This, doubtless, had reference to Solomon, in whom also it had a preliminary fulfilment but we have the authority of the Spirit of God, both in the prophets and the apostles, for giving it a much remoter, larger, and more glorious application to the "greater than Solomon," the Son, the Lord of David, the antitype and substance of all the allegories contained in the first covenant and its surroundings. What is worthy of special consideration is, that this

important institute of the kingdom of God should have found the occasion of its introduction in David's own faithfulness, working in quite a natural way.

There are several illustrations of the same thing. The glorious vision of Daniel 11.—revealing the course of human affairs from the days of Babylon to the setting up of the kingdom of God in the latter days—was communicated in answer to Daniel's faithful prayer for deliverance from impending peril. Who knows if such a revelation would ever have taken place if Daniel, instead of having earnestly “desired mercies of the God of heaven,” had supinely cowered in God forgetting concealment? The appearance of John the Baptist, though a matter of God's deliberate and prophetically-enunciated purpose, coincided in the same way with the entreaties of a man and woman who were “both righteous before God, walking in all commandments of the Lord, blameless.”—(Luke 1. 6.) The angel who announced John's coming birth to Zecharias, gives us to understand this. “Fear not, Zecharias, for *thy prayer is heard*, and thy wife Elizabeth (who was “barren and well-stricken in years”) shall bear thee a son.” So also the call of the Gentiles began with a man to whom the angel could say, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up *for a memorial before God.*”

The illustrations would point to this conclusion that more depends upon our attitude towards God than is commonly imagined. People think that the work of God is independent of man: so it is in a sense. They think it will come to pass quite irrespective of human

disposition or human action. So in a sense it will. His great and mighty purposes conceived and executed "after the counsel of His own will" will be accomplished, whoever might fail or try to hinder. At the same time, his work, in its individual application, is evidently affected by individual conditions. The words are not idle words which are uttered by James, "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." David by the Spirit, declares the truth when he says, "With the merciful man *thou wilt show Thyself merciful*, . . . to the froward thou wilt show thyself froward."—(Psalm. xviii. 25.) Jesus intimates the same thing in saying, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The effect of such doctrine is to make us take heed to our ways, and strive to preserve always towards God, a tender, willing, and obedient heart. Who can tell what blessings will come to us in this attitude, which would otherwise never arise? The restoration of Babylon found a Daniel praying for the fulfilment of God's purpose, announced to Jeremiah long before, concerning seventy years of which Daniel had come to have understanding "by books." Does not the current ending of the times of the Gentiles witness the earnest strivings and cryings of many watchmen whom Jehovah has figuratively set on Zion's walls, and who can give Him no rest day nor night, till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth? Thus are the ways of God interlaced with the ways of apparently mere nature, illustrative of and constituting the "ways of providence." But to return to David.

In the height of his success and his glory, David sinned grievously "in the matter of Uriah." The prophet Nathan told him that "by this deed" he had "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."—(II. Samuel xii. 14.) The jeers of a hundred generations have since attested the truth of this declaration. At the present moment, there is nothing more cutting and withering in the way of infidel opposition to the Bible, than the taunts inspired by David's sin. Is there nothing, touching the ways of providence, in the fact that David's sin should be punished by the open exhibition of it to all generations, 'n the full and unvarnished narrative written in the Scriptures? When David stands before "the great white throne" in the day of the judgment of the living and the dead, he finds that every individual in the mighty assembly is informed of his disgrace, and that the world has in every age resounded with the bitter taunt of the scoffer, shouting and execrating his name. But David was "a man after God's own heart" notwithstanding,—his broken-hearted submission and abasement in this matter being witness. In the day of recompences, his, not less than the holiest of the sons of God (and who is without sin?) will be the song: "Thou hast loved us and hast washed us from our sins in Thine own blood."

David, confronted with his guilt in adroit parable, by Nathan, said, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said "The Lord also *hath put away thy sin*: thou shalt not die." Notwithstanding that David's sin

was put away, it was judged needful that he should suffer for it—and suffer heavily: “The sword shall never depart from thy house: because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. . . . Thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.”—(II. Samuel xii. 10.)

In the working out of this sentence, we are face to face with a plain and signal and unmistakable illustration of the ways of providence. The evils to come upon David were to be the work of God—“*I will raise up evil,*” “*I will do this thing,*” “The sword shall never depart.” We trace the operation of the thing and we see only men at work so far as appearances and their motives go. David’s domestic peace is interrupted by his son Amnon’s behaviour to his daughter Tamar. The cloud brought on David’s house by this incident is immeasurably deepened by the murder of Amnon in the revenge of Tamar by command of his brother Absalom. A gap is made in the king’s domestic circle by the flight of Absalom consequent on this event. Absalom brought back after a three years’ exile, forms treasonable designs, and by artifice steals the heart of the people, and finally seizes the ripe occasion to have himself proclaimed king in the place of his father. David flees: civil war ensues, which, though ending successfully for David, does so at the cost of Absalom’s life, to the king’s unbearable grief, and the lives of many thousands of Israel. A second revolt on the king’s return, is headed by Sheba, the son

of Bichri, and is only put down by a military expedition. Then there is a famine, at the close of which the Philistines make war against Israel, and David is nearly slain in battle. Then David, numbering Israel with wrong motives, comes under the divine lash and has to accept a three days' ravage of the pestilence. Finally, his last hours are disturbed by a treasonable effort on the part of Adonijah, and he dies giving directions for the judicial retribution of the sins of Joab, Shimei, and others.

In this brief outline of events, we have the practical illustration of God's intimation to David: "I will raise up evil, . . . the sword shall never depart." Apparently, God had nothing to do with it; for in the contemplation of all the events that fulfilled these sayings, nothing is seen but the play of human passion and human lust of power. Yet the evidence is before us that the whole trouble so developed was divinely caused by those angelic manipulations of human affairs which we had to consider early in these chapters, which are unseen by men and which are conducted without any interference with the freedom of human volition. Some have a difficulty in reconciling the two things; but the difficulty must come from want of reflection. When we consider how much depends, both in public and private matters, upon the moods and desires of particular individuals, and how easy it is for divine power to affect those moods without the person being aware of the cause, or that any cause at all is in operation, it is easy to realise how God can raise trouble or give peace, without any apparent interference with the order of

nature. A man has not yet learnt the ways of God thoroughly, who does not recognise that most of His dealings with the children of men in the present state of racial alienation, are performed with gloved hand, and from within the veil so to speak, by means of regulated natural circumstances which are none the less the work of God because under a mask

David gives us a lesson on the subject which is very impressive. During his melancholy flight from Jerusalem, from the presence of Absalom's successful conspiracy—(the whole land "weeping with loud voice"—II. Samuel xv 23)—Shimei, a man of the house of Saul, of violent temper, seized upon the fallen fortunes of the king, as he supposed, to pour public insult upon him. Following the king's path, on the opposite side of the valley, he threw stones at the king's company, and poured forth volleys of imprecations "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial. The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son. Behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man." Some of David's supporters implored the king's permission to go over and despatch the insolent fellow, who made all the king's friends ashamed. David's rejoinder to this proposal is one of the best recognitions of the ways of providence to be found in the scriptures. "Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, wherefore hast thou done so? . . . Behold, my

son who came forth out of my bowels, seeketh my life : how much more now may this Benjamite do it ? Let him alone let him curse ; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction and that the Lord will requite me good for the cursing this day.”—(II. Samuel xvi. 10 12) That God had not, in the specific sense, commissioned Shimei to curse David, is evident from the fact that on David’s return, Shimei made a very servile apology, and confessed having sinned in the matter. His words were : “ Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart For thy servant doth know that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph, to go down to meet my lord the king If Shimei’s anathema of David had been in compliance with a divine command, it would have been no sin and Shimei would not have taken this attitude in the matter. David afterwards indicated the true nature of Shimei’s procedure so far as Shimei’s personal objects were concerned. He said to Solomon : “ Behold thou hast with thee Shimei, the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse, in the day when I went to Mahanaim. . . . Now, therefore, hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him : but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.”—(I. Kings 11. 8-9.) David would never have given such directions against Shimei if Shimei’s

action had been the obedience of a divine commandment. And yet David accepted it as from God at the time, saying, as we have seen, "Let him alone, God hath said unto him, Curse David," from which it follows that the apparently contradictory proposition may be true, that a thing may be of God and not of God at one and the same time. This is not hard to receive, where the two sides of an action are taken into account. Those who recognise only man in the case, will doubtless, find it impossible to receive it, but where a man sees the two actors,—man with his objects, and God using and overruling man's action with other objects altogether, the proposition seems simplicity itself.

There are many illustrations of it in the Scriptures. Let us take but two. The crucifixion of Christ, so far as man was concerned, was a deed of pure wickedness. It is always set forth in this light.—(Acts i. 23, vii. 52, xiii. 27-29) Yet, it was a matter of divine arrangement and execution, as is still more plainly and frequently declared—(Acts iv. 27-28, Rom. iii. 25.) The afflictions of the Jewish race are referable on the human side to human malice and rapacity, as everyone knows by experience and as the Scriptures declare.—(Zech. i. 1-15, Obadiah 10-16.) On the divine side, they were the designed punishment of Israel's iniquities.

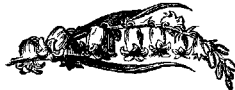
This double-sidedness of events will be found running through the whole course of scriptural narrative. Considering that these things were "written for our instruction," the value of this fact is apparent. It helps us rightly to interpret our experience if we be of those

who commit their way to God in well doing and constant prayer. It enables us to take suffering from the hand of God even when nothing but a human cause is discernible to the natural eye. Successful malice and pitiless disaster are thus deprived of half their sting. We can say of the Shimeis, "Let them alone: God has sent them;" or of the prevailing trouble, "It is of the Lord" "It may be the Lord will look on my affliction and bring me again to His habitation.' We do not get to this point all at once; but the study of the ways of providence will bring us to it, step by step, and day by day.

No case will help us more than the case of David. The lesson only ceases with his life. It comes out in the last incidents as well as the first. When he had the choice of three punishments from God placed before him, for vaingloriously numbering the people, he was asked: "Wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies?"—(II. Samuel xxiv. 13.) How simply and naturally the triumph of the enemy is here assumed to be of God. Had David chosen this, we should have seen a human picture to all intents and purposes—David in flight and his enemies active and successful, yet God would have been in it, distributing the weakness and the strength.

The closing scene of David's life contains one of the most magnificent recognitions of the principle to be found in all the scriptures. We cannot do better than conclude the case of David with the citation of it. Though not permitted to build the temple, he was allowed to prepare the materials for Solomon to use. In

formally dedicating the immense and costly accumulation in the presence of the heads of Israel, he made use of the following words, in which he plainly acknowledges the divine participation in the process that had enabled him to come to great possessions: "Both riches and honour come of Thee and Thou reignest over all. And in Thy hand is power and might, and in Thy hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all. Now therefore our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given Thee.
O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thy holy name, cometh of Thine hand and is all Thine own."





CHAPTER XVIII.

Solomon.—His recognition of the ways of providence in his dedicatory prayer.—Modern misapplications.—Solomon's prayer and its answer.—The threatened destruction of Israel to be God's work, yet natural in the form in which it was effected.—Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar divine instruments without knowing it, being at the same time self-serving individualities.—Their self-willions regulated.—Solomon's apostacy.—The punishment.—The rending of the kingdom.—A divine act yet human in form.—The same with regard to the uprising of various adversaries.—Consoling modern application.



SOLOMON naturally engages our attention after David. There is comparatively little in the life of Solomon that bears upon the ways of providence so far as that striking enunciation and illustration of them is concerned which it is the object of these chapters to elucidate. There is actual providence or divine intro-natural working in his case in fact; but his case as a whole is not remarkable for the obvious exemplification of it. There are just one or two points, and at these we will look.

First, there is his own recognition of the ways of providence throughout the prayer in which he opened

the temple for the purpose for which it was built.—(I. Kings viii.) He supposes the case of Israel being “smitten down before the enemy,” and admits that such an eventuality would be “because they had sinned against him (Jehovah)” —(verse 33). Now the triumph of the enemy would proximately be a natural affair; but Solomon allows that God would participate in the event by allowing it, in punishment of the sins of His people. He supposes also the withholding of the rain for a similar reason (verse 35); and therefore teaches that nature's operations may be so affected by the divine volition as to become a direct expression of His mind towards those affected. He anticipates the prayers that would be addressed towards the temple of Jehovah's pavilion in their midst, and requests that by whomsoever presented, whether by one man or all the people, or by the stranger from a far country, Jehovah would “hear and forgive, and do (according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for), *and give to every man according to his ways,*” “knowing, as He only knows, the hearts of all the children of men.”—(verse 39). In this he recognises the providential dealings of God with men, in the ordinary occurrences of life. He supposes the case of Israel going out to battle against their enemies, the prayer that Jehovah would “maintain their cause” indicating a recognition of the principle that God may incline the scale of natural events without appearing to do so and lead to issues that would not otherwise come.

There is doubtless a great deal of misapplication of these principles in our times. Two countries at war

may each ostentatiously invoke the divine blessing and help, when probably both are beyond the sphere of His recognition. Events in private life may be loudly trumpeted as "providential" which God has not affected at all, but which are the natural juxtapositions of fortuitous occurrence. Nevertheless, there is a providential control, though all circumstances are not controlled. We must not be scared or discouraged out of a recognition of the true by the vast mass of the spurious. Where God is feared, His promises believed and His commandments obeyed, there is a providence at work, shaping natural circumstances from behind, to give them an appointed issue for good though the road travelled may be apparently evil. "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous : His ears are open to their cry."

Next, there is the answer that was given to Solomon's prayer and the conclusions involved in the statements made when considered in the light of the events to which they referred : " I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before Me. I have hallowed this house which thou hast built. If ye shall at all turn from following Me, ye or your children, and will not keep My commandments, . . . then *will I cut off Israel* out of the land which I have given them, and *this house* which I have hallowed for My name, *will I cast out of My sight*. . . . And they shall say, why hath *the Lord done this* unto this land and to this house ? And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord their God, . . . therefore hath

the Lord brought upon them all this evil."—(I. Kings ix. 3-9.) The points in this declaration are obvious. In case of disobedience, the overthrow of Israel, the rejection of the temple, the subjection of the nation to evil, were all to be *the work of God*. Jehovah himself declares this. Apart from the history of the matter, we should have concluded that there was to be a miraculous interposition; that Jehovah would openly and manifestly destroy Israel as He did the Sodomites; or overthrow the temple as He did the god Dagon; or subject them directly to evil as He did the Egyptians in the ten plagues.

The history of the matter shows us the employment of a perfectly natural agency, in which there was nothing apparently divine at all. First one, and then another Gentile neighbour invaded and devastated the land with the objects common to all invaders. Take Sennacherib for example. He came "up against all the defenced cities of Judah and took them."—(Isaiah xxxvi. 1.) He then set his face towards Jerusalem in which Hezekiah fortified himself in sorrow and apprehension. He heard that Hezekiah trusted to God to deliver him out of the hands of Sennacherib. He then sent this defiant message: "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee. . . . Behold, thou hast heard what *the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by DESTROYING THEM UTTERLY*, and shalt thou be delivered?"—(xxxvii 10.) It was true, the Assyrians had prevailed by military prowess in a wonderful manner, as the Romans did after them: but what is the fact that transpires concerning this? That they were divinely used and

strengthened as the instrument of divine purposes. So Jehovah himself declares: "I BROUGHT IT TO PASS that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. *Therefore their inhabitants were of small power*: they were dismayed and confounded."—(verses 26-27.) Did Sennacherib therefore know Jehovah, because he was divinely appointed? On the contrary, Jehovah here declares "By thy servants thou hast reproached the Lord. . . . I know thy rage against Me." He speaks of him as an axe or saw exalting itself against the man using it (Isaiah x. 15,) and decrees His purpose against him thus: "It shall come to pass when the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. The Lord of Hosts shall send among his fat ones leanness, and under his glory He shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire."—(verses 12-17.)

So with Nebuchadnezzar, he acted from motives of ambition and lust of spoil and military glory: yet the fact on the inner side of it was this: Israel "mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people until there was no remedy. *Therefore HE BROUGHT UPON THEM THE KING OF THE CHALDEES*, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age: He gave them all into his hand."—(II. Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17.)

“*Surely at the command of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight.*”—(II. Kings xxiv. 3.)

The most striking illustration of the ways of providence afforded by the case of Solomon is that occurring in connection with the close of his reign. Solomon, we are told (I. Kings xi. 9-11) “did evil in the sight of the Lord and went not fully after the Lord as did David his father. . . . Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, *I will surely rend the kingdom from thee* and will give it to thy servant.” Here is a plain intimation of a divine work to be done, calculated to excite the expectation of direct and visible interference. When we consider the mode in which the purpose was carried out, we see, as in the other cases, a process apparently all natural. Solomon dies: the tribes assemble to appoint his son Rehoboam king in his stead. Before proceeding to the ceremony, they petition the heir-expectant for some mitigation of the burdens which Solomon had imposed upon them in the latter days of his reign. Rehoboam, unable to make up his mind of himself what answer to give, asked advice of those around him: first of the old men who had formed Solomon’s court, and then of the young men brought up with him. By the former he was advised to answer amicably and give in to the wishes of the people. But by the counsel of the others, he adopted a tyrannical tone, and sent the people away with a rebuff. What

was the result? It was a perfectly natural one. "When all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, *Israel rebelled against the house of David.*"—(I. Kings xii. 16-19.) What caused the effect? The king's impolitic speech. What caused the speech? The answer is this: "The king hearkened not unto the people, for *the cause was from the Lord* that He might perform His saying which He spake by Ahijah the Shilonite."—(verse 15.) This is not merely the opinion of the instrumental writer of Kings: it is the view avowed by Jehovah Himself under circumstances leaving no mistake as to its meaning. Rehoboam gathered an army from Judah and Benjamin, to force the ten tribes back to their allegiance. "But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the Lord, ye shall not go up nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: **FOR THIS THING IS DONE OF ME.**"—(II. Chron. xi. 1-4.) Here, then, we have the case of a divine work being carried out by a direct causation of which the subject was perfectly unaware. Rehoboam acted under advice that he felt to be agreeable: yet the agreeableness of that advice and the hearty effect he gave to it in the speech addressed to the people, were due to a divine predisposition of which he was unconscious.

We have also to notice that before Solomon actually passed off the scene, a variety of enemies were astir with plots against him. Hadad, of the seed royal of Edom,

an exile in David's days, returned to his country from Egypt and exerted himself in hostility against Solomon, who maintained the jurisdiction established by David his father, over Edom. Rezon, a courtier of the dethroned king of Zobah, "gathered men unto him and became captain over a band, . . . and he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, besides the mischief that Hadad did, and he abhorred Israel and reigned over Syria." Also Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Solomon's servant, "even he lifted up his hand against the king." Concerning these, we are informed (I. Kings xi.) that the Lord "stirred them up." The statement is an illustration of the subject in hand. The men themselves were not aware that the Lord "stirred them up." They simply found themselves the subject of a propensity to be active and enterprising in the promotion of their own interest in an antagonism to Solomon. They were instruments in the hands of God for the punishment of Solomon.

The application of all these cases to our own times will be obvious. God has not changed. He has not abandoned the earth. By the hand of the Lord Jesus and the angels, He is working out a work in it, both as regards nations and individuals, Jews and Gentiles. It matters not that we cannot see the divine hand in visible operation. The fact is attested in too many ways to admit of doubt. The fact is consoling in private life, to such as fear God and commit their way to Him, helping them to realise that very commonplace and unlikely occurrences may be the Lord's hand leading and guiding

to an appointed end, for blessing or punishment as His unerring wisdom sees fit; while as regards political occurrences, we are enabled to feel that they are no empty words that are written in Daniel iv. 17: "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."





CHAPTER XIX.

The divided house of Israel.—First, the Ten Tribes.—Jeroboam, their first king.—His great opportunity.—His misuse of it.—A low prudence.—Running into the very destruction he feared.—Baasha's sedition.—The destruction coming about in a perfectly natural way, yet divinely caused.—The principle in its modern form.—Smiting of the Ten Tribes.—Jehovah's work, yet apparently natural.—The nature of a divine "command" to the unwitting instrument in such a case.—Elijah's maintenance.—The command to the widow.—Other instances.—The only drawback to the application of the principle now.—Ahab and Jehu.—Necessity of human co-operation with the plans of providence.—Explanation of this at first sight extraordinary fact.



IN the history of the two sections into which the kingdom of Solomon was divided at the beginning of the reign of Rehoboam (as alluded to in the last chapter)—the house of Israel and the house of Judah,—there are many scattered illustrations of the ways of providence, on which we may rely as implicitly as on any, because of their occurrences in a divinely authorised record of events. If it could be maintained that Kings and Chronicles were not inspired, their value would be gone ; but this cannot be maintained in the face of Christ's endorsement of " the Scriptures " as a compilation of which they formed a part : not to speak of other evidences of their divinity. We propose

to gather the principal of the scattered illustrations referred to, taking first the history of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, and secondly that of the Two. The latter history is the larger, and brings us down to the days of the crucifixion. This looks like a yet extensive programme. It will be found, however, that the materials will not spread over a very large ground, and that in a very few more chapters, we may hope to reach the end of the subject as far as these chapters are concerned.

Jeroboam was the leader of the national deputation to Rehoboam, on the death of Solomon, to obtain a remission of the national burdens. We have seen Rehoboam's answer, and its effects in the revolt of the Ten Tribes from the house of David. We follow the Ten Tribes in their revolt, and find them elect this same Jeroboam king over them, in accordance with what Ahijah the prophet had said to him. Jeroboam had a splendid opportunity before him. He was head of the principal part of the house of Israel: and he had only to govern wisely to secure a great and established position. Of this he had been assured by divine message as follows:—"It shall be if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways and do that is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments as David My servant did, that I will be with thee and build thee a sure house as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee."

How did Jeroboam use his position? In the worst way. He acted with a certain kind of prudence, but of a low order. He acted from natural fear and not from a

perception of right. He did not give himself to the obedience of the law of Moses. He looked at things as a mere politician, and fearing the effect of Israel's continued observance of the feasts at Jerusalem, he appointed institutions of his own, in opposition to the law of Moses. "If this people go up to sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah." He ought to have argued the other way, in view of the divine guarantee he enjoyed. He ought to have said, "So long as I guide this people to walk obediently to the commands of Jehovah, and send them to do sacrifice at the place where He has placed His name, my position will be safe." But he evidently lacked faith in the word of Jehovah to him, and was not concerned to be subject to the commandments. Distrusting the effect of obedience, "he made two calves of gold, and said unto the people, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." "And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And he made an house of high priests, and made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi."

Expediency instead of principle is a poor rule of action. So Jeroboam found. His departure from the commandments of the Lord led to the very destruction of his house which he feared might result from an

obedient course. Ahijah the prophet was instructed as follows : "Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee : and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes ; but hast done evil above all that were before thee. . . . Therefore, behold *I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam.* . . . Moreover *the Lord shall raise Him up a king* over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam." The history of the fulfilment of this denunciation reveals or illustrates the ways of providence—ways in which God works without appearing to work—in which human actors impelled by human motives, under an invisible guidance, work out results that are divinely-caused results, though apparently results due to chance and human caprice.

Jeroboam dies : his son Nadab succeeds him. In his second year, Nadab undertakes a military expedition against the Philistines, and while engaged in the siege of Gibbethon, one of Nadab's captains gets up a conspiracy against him, and seizing a favourable moment, assassinates him, and gets proclaimed king in his place. Baasha, the successful conspirator, then performed the part against the house of Jeroboam thus recorded : "It came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam : he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the

saying of the Lord, which He spake by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel to sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger."

The point in the case lies in the fact that a divine purpose was executed by the hand of an unwitting military conspirator, and that what this conspirator did, Jehovah says, "I did." Baasha promoted himself by his own conspiracy against Jeroboam; yet thus was fulfilled the intimation, "THE LORD SHALL RAISE HIM UP *a king which shall destroy the house of Jeroboam.*" And the perfectly natural agency was not considered inconsistent with the following message afterwards to Baasha himself: "*I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people*" (I. Kings xvi. 2); whence we learn that the events in contemporary history, such as the *coup d'état* of a Louis Napoleon, or the Zulu massacre of his son, are not excluded from the category of divinely-caused events by the circumstance that they are humanly explicable in their occurrence. The perfect naturalness of an event, and its perfect obviousness as to its cause is not inconsistent with an occult regulation of that cause, which may impart to a natural event a divine character as regards the divine object aimed at in the result. It does not follow that all human events are divinely caused: very few are. On the contrary the bulk of human action may be classified under the statement, that "God in times past *suffered all nations to walk* IN THEIR OWN WAYS" (Acts xiv. 16),

and that the common run of men are "filled with the fruit of their own devices."—(Proverbs i. 31.) Still, there are events that are divinely caused, though apparently having only a human origin, and the perception of this fact enables us to commit our way to God, and accept natural occurrences as the guiding of His hand.

Another of the results of Jeroboam's disobedience yields a further illustration of the same principle. Ahijah had said in denouncing Jeroboam's transgression, "*The Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and HE SHALL root up Israel out of this good land, which He gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river.*"—(I. Kings xiv. 15.) This was the Lord's message to Ahijah, in which it is declared the smiting of the Ten Tribes and their deportation to trans-Euphratean countries, would be Jehovah's work. So it was. The calamity came in due course, but let the form of it be observed. "In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, came Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria. . . . In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria and placed them in Halah and Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. . . . Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them

out of His sight. . . . The Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and *delivered them into the hands of spoilers.*—(II. Kings xv. 29; xvii. 6, 7, 18, 20.)

When a natural event is divinely used as the instrument of a divine purpose, the thing done is said to have been commanded of Jehovah, even when the doer of the work has received no known command. This peculiarity of divine language is signally illustrated in the case of Elijah. Famine had prevailed for a time, and the brook Cherith, by which the prophet had been sustained, having dried up, he was ordered to remove to another place, where he would be provided for. "The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, *I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.*" Superficially read, we should conclude from this that a message had been sent to the widow woman on the subject of supporting Elijah. It transpires, however, that nothing of the sort had taken place. When Elijah went to Zarephath, he found the woman in the depth of want from the famine, and arranging for a last meal with her son.—(I. Kings xvii. 12.) How comes it then that Jehovah should say, "I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee," when in the ordinary sense He had not done so? Because of another sense, more powerful than the ordinary sense. The ordinary sense is to give orders by word of mouth, written or pronounced: this is the only mode in which one man can cause another to carry out his wishes. But

with God there is another mode, which is as high above the human mode as heaven is high above the earth. Speaking of the creation, David says, "He spake and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast." If we ask, how? we are informed, "By His Spirit." What He wills, He accomplishes by His Spirit. For this reason, the fiat of His will executing itself by the Spirit is described as His word—His command. What God wills or appoints, He can say, "I have commanded." He had arranged that this widow of Zarephath should sustain Elijah. Therefore, in divine language, He commanded her, though she knew nothing about it. In the same way, the God-hating Assyrian had received a charge against Israel, though he knew nothing of it.—(Isaiah x. 6, 7, 13-16.) In the same way, Cyrus had been called, surnamed, and guided, and addressed by Jehovah, although it is expressly testified that Cyrus knew not Jehovah.—(Isaiah xlv. 1-5.) In the same sense, the Lord is said in special cases to command the sword (Amos ix. 4), the serpent (verse 3), the clouds, &c.—(Isaiah v. 6). Causation and command are equivalent ideas in relation to God.

The only drawback to the practical application of this in our own lives, lies in our ignorance of when a matter may be of divine causation or otherwise. But this is largely offset by the testimony that "*all things* work together for good to them that love God," and that if we commend our way to the Lord, He will direct our steps.—(Romans viii. 28; Proverbs iii. 6.) These two assurances of the word will enable us, if we make an

enlightened use of them, to take our whole experience from God, and to patiently wait the evolution of events for the discernment of the divine purpose, ever remembering that that purpose has reference more to our standing in the kingdom of God when it comes than to present results.

I. Kings xx. 13—("Hast thou (Ahab) seen all this great multitude? Behold *I will deliver it into thine hand* this day") is another instance of human action being divinely influenced. The matter in question was approaching battle, which proximately is a contest of natural force in which the stronger prevails. Battle ensued, and the Syrians fled: they did their best, but they could not succeed because of the paralyzing effect of the divine purpose operating upon them. But there was a singular and suggestive exception. The king of Syria surrendering to Ahab and taking a very suppliant attitude, was spared by Ahab and dismissed with a treaty. In reference to this, he received the following message: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man *whom I appointed to utter destruction*, therefore thy life shall go for his life and thy people for his people."—(I. Kings xx. 42.) Here is an apparent frustration of the ways of providence through human weakness. God meant the destruction of the king of Syria, and he escapes through Ahab's misplaced lenity. The case reveals the fact that there is no mechanical coercion of the human will in the working out of the divine purpose by means of men; co-operation of man in such a case is necessary, and that where the result aimed at is not attained through the

failure of that co-operation, the purpose will be accomplished by another instrument, for divine purposes will never ultimately fail.

A case in the opposite direction—a case of thorough co-operation with the divine intentions, eliciting divine approbation—is to be found in the reign of Jehu, the executioner of divine vengeance on Ahab's house. Jehu's mission was to extirpate the house of Ahab. He received express instructions to that effect. "Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab, thy master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel."—(II. Kings ix. 7.) And right thoroughly he carried out the programme. Let the dreadful narrative be perused in chapters ix. and x. It is condensed into the statement that "Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining, . . . and when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria." See also the account of his slaughter of the worshippers of Baal after drawing them into a trap. What was the divine comment on these proceedings? "Because *thou hast done well* in executing that which is right in Mine eyes and hast done unto the house of Ahab *according to all that was in Mine heart*, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."—(II. Kings x. 30.)

Here was a case of God's purpose being thoroughly carried out by the instrument selected. The idea that anything else is possible—the idea that a divine purpose

can be humanly opposed and delayed, may seem anomalous and impossible; but the fact is beyond question. The case already cited of Ahab's release of the doomed king, is conclusive proof. It is further illustrated in the angel's words to Daniel: "The prince of the kingdom of Persia *withstood me one-and-twenty days*: but lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to *help me*; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand, . . . and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come."—(Daniel x. 13, 20.) The explanation of this, at first sight, extraordinary fact—that man can antagonise the divine purpose in the hands of the angels, "who execute His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word," is probably to be found in the nature of the process by which that work has to be carried out. Human rulers, to whom the angels are unknown and invisible, have to be led by them into certain courses of action, without any interference with that law of intelligent volition which distinguishes intelligent from merely physical life. Men, whose actions the angels have to guide, are allowed the unfettered exercise of their wills, and the angels have to influence them to exercise those wills in a given direction, by regulating the circumstances around them. If you set fire to a house, you cause all its inmates to leave, without interfering with their free wills. It is the exercise of their free wills that leads them to endeavour to escape the fire. So the angels, by disposing of circumstances, can influence

men to act in a certain way without interfering with their volitions. Such a mode of carrying out the work entrusted to them makes their work a delicate and interesting one, and provides scope for the possibility of that kind of human antagonism which requires careful and persistent arrangement to overcome, as in the case of the Persian emperor, who unwittingly was fighting against an angel in the particular policy he pursued.





CHAPTER XX.

Ahab in Naboth's vineyard — God's message by Elijah — The prophecy that his blood should be licked by the dogs in the same place as Naboth's — How it came to pass — The same prophecy as to the eating of Jezebel by the dogs — The incidents of its fulfilment, showing a human work divinely superintended — The mode of Ahab's death — The bow drawn at a venture — The divinely-guided arrow — Providence affected and diverted by human action. — Ahab's repentance — The siege of Samaria — Famine inside and the unexpected relief — King Joash's visit to Elisha's dying bedside — The arrows and the prophecy — The removal of the Ten Tribes



DURSUING the history of the Ten Tribes in so far as it affords illustration of the ways of providence, notice must be taken of the message delivered by Elijah to Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, as interpreted by the events in which it was afterwards fulfilled. Ahab had taken possession of another man's vineyard after effecting the owner's destruction, or concurring in his wife Jezebel's measures to bring that destruction about. Elijah, by divine command, met Ahab in the vineyard and in the very act of taking possession of it, and addressed the following words to him: "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed and also taken possession? . . . In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy

blood, even thine. . . . Behold *I will bring evil upon thee, &c.*”—(I. Kings xxi. 9-13.) Here was an intimation of a divine work of retribution—a retribution which God would cause, and which should comprise the apparently trifling detail, that Ahab’s blood should be licked by dogs on the very spot where the murdered man’s blood was shed. This was one of those details that could not be humanly arranged for, and yet which though divinely caused, came about in a perfectly natural way. Ahab, wounded in battle, is put in his chariot, which receives on the floor of it a large quantity of the blood issuing from his wound. He dies, and is driven home dead in his chariot. Afterwards the chariot is washed by a man servant, it is taken to the pool of Samaria for the purpose. The spot is the spot where Naboth was murdered. The water swills the blood upon the stones, the sniffing dogs gathering around lick it up. The finger of God is not visible at any part of the transaction, and yet the transaction was subject to a divine guidance. Apart from this, there were many contingencies that might easily have interfered with the fulfilment of the blood-licking prediction. In the first place, as the battle in which Ahab was wounded was a defeat for Israel, it might easily have happened that the chariot was captured, and the wounded king in it, in which case the blood would never have been washed on to the flags of the pool of Samaria. In the second place, there was a long distance between Ramoth-gilead and the pool of Samaria, and it might easily have happened (and would have been natural) that the chariot should be wiped out for the

honour of the dead long before the end of the journey. In the third place, arrived at home, it would have been no marvel for the chariot to have been washed privately in the king's stables, or in some other convenient spot where the blood of Ahab would never have been brought into contact with the spot that witnessed Naboth's murder. But the word of the Lord had decreed, and, therefore, the chariot safely arrived home, with the blood unremoved from the floor of it, and was duly taken to the very right spot where also the dogs were available for their part of the appointed retribution. This incident was subject to divine control. Nobody would be conscious of it. Everybody would act a natural and unconstrained part, and yet the whole matter invisibly kept in a certain groove. The man who took the chariot to the pool of Samaria would simply feel that that was the handiest place to give it a thorough washing. He would be caused to feel this, but would be conscious only of the feeling and not of its cause.

An incident of the same description pertains to Jezebel. She also, as the leading spirit in the plot to murder Naboth, was included in the message of retribution: "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."—(I. Kings xxi. 23.) This was worse than the sentence on Ahab, as the case demanded. Though Ahab's blood was to be licked, he himself was to be buried, but Jezebel was to be eaten by the dogs—a very unlikely thing to happen to a queen in actual authority to the last moment of her life—a thing to be divinely caused, and yet which was brought about in a perfectly natural way. Jezebel

survived Ahab fifteen years as queen-mother during the reigns of her sons Ahaziah and Joram. At length the moment arrived for the fulfilment of the prophecy. Jehu, one of her military captains, rebelled against her son and was proclaimed king in his stead. After his proclamation, he proceeded to destroy the entire family and relations of Ahab. Having, in the execution of this work, killed Joram, the king, and the king's cousin, Ahaziah, king of Judah, he came to Jezreel, where Jezebel was. Jezebel hearing of his arrival, dressed herself specially well, and as Jehu entered the gate of the palace where she was, she stood at an open window and greeted him with taunts. Jehu, looking up to the window, demanded with loud voice who of the inmates was on his side. On this, several eunuchs presented themselves at the windows. "Throw her down" was his order concerning Jezebel. The order was obeyed, and down she was thrown, falling on the ground among the feet of Jehu's horses, by which she was trampled to death: Jehu then went into the palace, leaving Jezebel dead on the ground. Having partaken of a repast with his captains, he be-thinks himself of the rank of the dead woman, and, as "a king's daughter," orders her to be buried. But those who went to carry out the order, could not find the king's daughter to bury. "They found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands."—(II. Kings ix. 35.) Jezebel had been eaten by the dogs outside, while Jehu and his companions were eating and making merry inside. Thus had been fulfilled "the word of the Lord, which He spake by His servant

Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel." It had come about in a perfectly natural way, yet it was a divinely-caused occurrence. Though men were used to bring it about, men had not helped to bring it about as a matter of recognized programme. They had not performed their part wittingly. Jehu, it is true, understood that he was executing a divine purpose in the extirpation of the house of Ahab; but even he had forgotten all about this prophecy about the dogs eating Jezebel, and was struck when those who went to bury her by his command, came back and told him she had been eaten by the dogs. He then remembered that was what Elijah had foretold. How easily, as in the case of Ahab's blood, it might have turned out otherwise. How unlikely to the last moment that dogs should eat the queen. Jehu's readiness to respect her rank in the matter of interment, shows that even the instrument employed to execute the vengeance had to be momentarily blinded to give the dogs their chance.

The mode of Ahab's death was an illustration of the same thing. It happened (as will be recollected) on the occasion of an expedition against Ramoth-gilead, in which Ahab was joined by Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Before starting out on this expedition, Ahab had consulted the prophets of Baal—the clergy who enjoyed Jezebel's favour, from whom he received unqualified encouragement to proceed. At the request of Jehoshaphat, who was not satisfied, another prophet, the prophet of Jehovah—Micaiah—was sent for. His answer to the

question whether they should prosper in their expedition against Ramoth-gilead was not soothing to Ahab. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace." The two went to Ramoth-gilead, nevertheless. Ahab professed to disregard Micaiah's foreboding, but he was manifestly uneasy. He said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes." He thought thus to elude the danger. In point of fact he ran into it. We cannot escape from God. The king of Syria, against whom they were fighting for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, had strangely instructed his captains to fight neither with small nor great but only with Ahab. Whatever may have been the motive of this order—(perhaps it was the effect of a divine predisposition on the king of Syria's part to bring about the destruction of Ahab in a direct manner)—the result was that the armies did not come into close quarters at the outset. The Syrian captains sought for Ahab, but could not find him, because of the disguise in which he had concealed himself. They therefore held off their troops from the onset. But one man could not be restrained: "A certain man drew a bow at a venture." The arrow thus sent without human orders had a divine mission. It sped towards Ahab in the ranks, and, with unerring aim, penetrated between the joints of his armour and inflicted the wound of which he died before the day was over. Then a proclamation issued to the host, dismissing every man to his home; and the picture

was seen which Micaiah had sketched beforehand: all Israel scattered upon the hill as sheep that have no shepherd. Now, the man who fired the arrow fired it because he felt inclined to do it. It seemed a perfectly natural act to him and to those who witnessed it but it was an act divinely impelled and divinely guided, as the sequel, in the light of Micaiah's prophecy, showed: whence we derive the conclusion that an action without any higher apparent origin than human caprice, may have a divine character, though nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand have no such character. It all depends on whether the action come within the compass of a divine purpose, and of this we cannot definitely judge. It is sufficient to realise that an action being natural does not exclude it from the category of divinity. The value of the reflection will be felt in the experience of all who commit their way to God in the confidence that all things work together, because made to work together, for the good of such.

A case of providence being affected and diverted by human action was furnished in the life of Ahab before he came to the unhappy end just considered. He appears to have been deeply impressed with Elijah's having denounced his appropriation of the vineyard of Naboth. It is written that "When Ahab heard those words, he rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went softly." It is the result of this attitude on Ahab's part that constitutes the case in question. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth

himself before Me? *Because he humbleth himself before Me, I WILL NOT BRING THE EVIL IN HIS DAYS* but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.' — (I. Kings xxi. 27.) If the repentant and humble attitude of a man like Ahab warded off an intended visitation of providential evil, we may learn the wisdom of that emendation of evil ways which is the constant inculcation of the Spirit of God calling to the sons of men in the scriptures. We should never despair, but, confessing our sins and forsaking them, seek that mercy at the Father's hand which at the last moment may defer appointed punishment.

Unexpected and improbable deliverances are sometimes characteristic of the ways of providence when sufficient reason exists for them. An illustration of this is found in the reign of Ahab's second successor. Samaria, the capital of the Ten Tribes, was besieged by the Syrians under Benhadad. In the continuance of the siege, famine prevailed in the city so greatly that two women agreed to boil and eat their sons. The first having carried out her part of the covenant, the second, with the pangs of hunger allayed by the horrible repast, hid her son. The first then complained to the king, who was shocked beyond measure at the whole case, and ignorantly attributed the evil case of the city to the machinations of Elisha the prophet who was also in the city. He sent messages to take Elisha that he might be slain. Elisha met the menace by a welcome but incredible intimation: "Thus saith the Lord, to-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for

a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." A more apparently impossible deliverance could not have been propounded. It was a natural remark that was made by one of the king's nobles when he heard of it: "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing might be." The scepticism thus evinced was severely rebuked. No marvel. It was an insult to Jehovah who had given so many proofs of His speaking by Elisha. It brought upon the perpetrator a prompt sentence of exclusion from the benefit. "Behold thou shalt see it with thine eyes but shalt not eat thereof." To-morrow came, and with it the occurrence of the seemingly impossible. The investing army having become the subject of a panic, broke up and fled, leaving all their stores behind them. The inhabitants of the beleaguered city issued forth and found themselves in possession of plenty, with the result of bringing down prices to the point predicted in Elisha's statement. And how did the unbelieving nobleman fare? Was he miraculously struck dead? No. This part of the prophecy was fulfilled also in a natural way. Having charge of one of the gates, he was trampled to death by the crowding and excited people who in their hunger could not be restrained from getting out to help themselves. The whole situation was invisibly controlled by the angels who, in a way that appeared perfectly natural, did a work that was in reality a work of God. "And are they not ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"—(Hebrew i. 14). They are: and con-

sequently if we are earnest believers of the gospel and faithful performers of the will of God, our affairs which on the surface may be all natural in their evolutions and combinations, will be divinely regulated for our good. It is a matter of promise: and faith appropriates the promise, knowing that God has not and cannot change. The times of the Gentiles do not interfere with God's love of His own, and His power and willingness to take care of them. He may give them bitterness in the cup, and they may seem forsaken, as in the case both of David (I. Samuel xxvii. 1) and "great David's greater son" (Matt. xxvii. 46): but they will find in the progress of time and experience that well-being and joy are the sequel and even the result of all the evil to which God may subject His children in this time of the night.

In the reign of Joash, there is a remarkable incident touching the ascendancy which Syria had obtained over the land of Israel. Though not directly in the channel of the ways of providence, it is collaterally related to the subject. It is connected with Elisha's last illness and the king's visit to the dying prophet. Joash wept at the prospect of Elisha's death: and no wonder, for the Syrians had prevailed, and in the death of Elisha, who had practically co-operated with Israel for many years, sending word where the Syrian camp was pitched (II. Kings vi. 9), it would seem to the king as if they were to be forsaken of God. Elisha told the king to get bow and arrows. He then told him to open the window and hold the bow in shooting position, which he did.

Elisha then placed his hands in juxtaposition with the king's hands and told the king to shoot, and the king shot. And the prophet said, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria." In this symbolic transaction, there was a prophecy that Israel should be delivered from the severity of the Syrian yoke by the hands of Joash. The performance was not altogether a performance of Elisha's volition. The Spirit of God, which had dwelt so abundantly with Elisha, was moulding the actions of the men in miniature resemblance to coming events. This was shown by the next part of the incident. Elisha told the king to take the arrows and strike the ground with them, without telling him how often to do it. The king did what the prophet told, but struck the ground only three times. Elisha was angry, saying he should have smitten the ground five or six times, in which case, he would have smitten the Syrians till they were brought under, whereas he would only beat them three times, and leave them still in the field. In the prophet's anger we see the prophet's personal solicitude for Israel's welfare. In the king's arrested action and the prophet's commentary thereon, we see the guiding presence of the Spirit of God, protecting the purpose of God from the interference of the will of man. Elisha would have willed the total overthrow of the Syrians, but God willed otherwise. Though He purposed that Israel should not be exterminated (II. Kings xiv. 27), and though He willed a measure of relief from Syrian oppression, He also purposed the ultimate triumph of the enemy for a long time because

of Israel's sins, a purpose with which the total consumption of Syria by Joash would have been inconsistent. Consequently, he interfered with Elisha's personal wishes, as he did Isaac's in the blessing of Jacob, and with Joseph's in the blessing of Ephraim. We may wonder what connection there could be between the actions of Joash in Elisha's death-chamber, and the issue of public events afterwards. What difference could it make the number of times he might strike the floor? When we come to be able (as we shall be able if we attain the great honour of divine acceptance and change) to penetrate the secret and invisible laws which govern the evolution of events, we may be able to see that the number of times the floor was struck was not a matter of indifference in a case where the Spirit of God was, so to speak, laying the foundation of future occurrences. At all events, however this may be, it could not be a matter of indifference what should occur in an enacted prophecy. As a matter of fact, afterwards, "three times did Joash beat Benhadad, and recovered the cities of Israel."—(II. Kings xii. 25.) This was what was coming, unknown to Elisha, who naturally desired a more thorough triumph. Therefore, though it angered him, it was necessary that Joash in the symbolical striking of the floor should be stopped at the third blow.

The last illustration of the ways of providence, calling for notice in the history of the Ten Tribes, is that to be found in their removal from the land of their inheritance to regions beyond the Euphrates, from which in a

national sense, they have never returned to the present day. The nature of that removal, as regards its outside appearance, is known to all the world. It was the termination of a long series of national disasters, coming on Israel in an apparently perfectly natural way during a period of more than one generation. Invasion after invasion on the part of the Syrians and Assyrians broke Israel's power, until "in the ninth year of Hoshea (the last of Ephraim's kings) the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."—(II. Kings xvii. 6.) Proximately, Israel's calamities were of purely human origin: but how stands the case from the divine point of view? They were divine doings by human agency. This is testified so abundantly and emphatically that there can be no mistake about the matter. First by Moses God forewarned them when they came out of Egypt: "If ye will not hearken unto Me and will not do all these commandments, *I will bring a sword against you* that shall avenge the quarrel of My covenant, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you."—(Lev. xxvi. 14-25.) Then by the prophet Ahijah, in the reign of Jeroboam who first led the Ten Tribes astray, the following message was delivered: "*The Lord shall root up Israel out of this good land* which He gave to their fathers, *and shall scatter them* beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger."—(I. Kings xiv. 15.) And finally, the

divine record of these prophecies fulfilled is in the following terms: "So it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. . . . Therefore *the Lord was angry* with Israel, . . . *and removed Israel out of His sight*, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. *So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria* unto this day."—(II. Kings xvii. 7, 18, 23.)

Thus by perfectly natural means, a great work of God was done in the reign of Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, 2,500 years ago. It is written: "He that scattered Israel will gather them." The scattering was done by natural means, and so may the gathering be in its first stages. It is this which imparts such interest to the many schemes and motions abroad in the earth at the present time, touching the return of Israel to their own land.





CHAPTER XXI.

History of the kingdom of Judah — Rehoboam's departure from God and consequent punishment "by the hand of Shishak," an unwitting instrument — The reign of Asa — Vexations and adversity to Judah from God because of disobedience — The rule not universal — God's providence in well marked and narrow channels only — Israel's experience, a lesson for the saints — Jehoshaphat's goodness, and "no war" — The opposite with Jehoram, his successor — The days of Amaziah — Instructive incidents — A prophet's interpretation of the ways of providence — The reign of Uzziah — Military intruders unconsciously doing the work of God — Hezekiah — His prayer and his wise precaution — A valuable lesson



THE next look at a few illustrations of the ways of providence in the history of the kingdom of Judah. They are not numerous, but they are distinct and yield the lesson plainly read in the history of the Ten Tribes and of Israel before the division. We have already noticed the case of Rehoboam at the rupture of Solomon's kingdom into two—how an unwise speech was "of the Lord" that there might be brought about the division determined on as a punishment of Solomon's sins. We now look at an incident that occurred in Rehoboam's reign.

We read that "when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, *he forsook the law of the Lord*, and all Israel with him."—(II. Chron. xii. 1.) The result was that so early as the fifth year of his reign, "Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, . . . and he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah and came to Jerusalem." The explanation of this calamitous occurrence was not long in coming. It came by the hand of the prophet Shemaiah, who, addressing himself to the king and the crowd of princes and influential men whom the fear of Shishak had driven from the open country for refuge to Jerusalem, saith "Thus said the Lord, Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have *I also left you in the hand of Shishak.*"—(verse 5.) This representation of the matter appears to have made a deep impression on the aristocratic auditory of the prophet. We are informed (verse 6) that "they humbled themselves and said, The Lord is righteous." The result of this attitude on their part is most interesting and instructive, and brings out the point illustrative of the ways of providence: "When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves: therefore *will I not destroy them*, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall *not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.*"—(verse 7.) From this, it follows that Shishak's movements were divinely directed, though unknown to him, and further, that repentance and humiliation avail to avert the divine displeasure.

Rehoboam does not appear to have permanently benefited by this most interesting episode. We are informed that during his reign of seventeen years, he "did evil," and "prepared not his heart to seek the Lord," in probable consequence of which, "there were wars continually between Rehoboam and Jeroboam."—(verse 15.) So much for Rehoboam. We will look at a few of his successors, taking them in chronological order, but not going through every reign.

In the reign of Asa, the second king after Rehoboam, we have this description of the state of things that had prevailed for a considerable time before, and of the results that came of it. The description is by "the Spirit of God," which "came on Azariah, the son of Obed."—(II. Chron. xv. 1.) It may, therefore, receive our unqualified confidence. It is this: "For a long season Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. . . . And in those times, there was no peace to him that went out or to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries; and nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city, *for God did vex them with all adversity.*" No peace, and much vexation, and mutual hurt: the people would not be aware that God was complicating their affairs, that God was "distributing sorrows in His anger."—(Job xxi. 17.) They would simply feel irritations and exasperations that would appear natural and justifiable in the circumstances. It was the incipient fulfilment of what God told them by Moses when they came out of Egypt: "If thou wilt not

hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, . . .
the Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and
rebuke in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do.
. . . A trembling heart and failing of eyes, and
sorrow of mind, and thy life shall hang in doubt before
thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have
none assurance of thy life.”—(Deut. xxviii. 15, 20, 65.)

It may occur to some that if we are to read providence thus, we have strangely difficult problems to deal with in a world where the wicked are on high and in peace, and the righteous seeking, “through much tribulation,” to enter into the kingdom of God. The explanation is to be found in the fact that God’s providences run in certain well-marked and narrow channels only. Thus, of Israel it is said, “You only have I known of the families of the earth; *therefore, will I punish you* for all your iniquities” (Amos iii. 2); whereas, of the Gentiles in general, Paul’s testimony is, that God had “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.”—(Acts xiv. 16.) The mass of mankind are as the beasts that perish.—(Psalm xlix. 12-20.) God chose Israel for Himself, and made them a kingdom under a divine administration. Therefore, a relapse from obedience was directly visited with evil consequences. The Gentile nations were left with the little regulation of their affairs that belongs to limited responsibility. If it be said that this renders the lessons of Israel’s experience valueless to us, the answer is that every obedient believer of the gospel is in the circle of Israel’s privileges in their highest form. Gentiles adopted through Christ are “no longer strangers and

foreigners.”—(Eph. ii. 19.) They are fellow-citizens. They are brought within the channel of divine dealings.—(Heb. xii. 7.) All things are made to work together for their good.—(Rom. viii. 28 ; Heb. i. 14.) The lessons of Israel’s experience are most valuable to them. They were expressly recorded for their benefit: so Paul says (Rom. x. 11), consequently, we have to be on our guard. Our sins may bring upon us chastisement to save us from “condemnation with the world.”—(I. Cor. xi. 32.)

Of Jehoshaphat (fourth from Rehoboam), we read that “He sought to the Lord God of his father and walked in His commandments, and not after the ways of Israel.” With what result, we read this, as illustrative of the ways of providence: “*the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the land* that were round about Judah, so THAT THEY MADE NO WAR AGAINST JEHOSEPHAT. Also of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and tribute silver and the Arabians brought him flocks.”—(II. Chron. xvii. 4, 10, 11.)

A case in the opposite direction is found in Jehoshaphat’s successor, Jehoram, of whom it is testified “He wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord,” with this result, “*The Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and of the Arabians* that were near the Ethiopians, and they came up into Judah and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king’s house, and his sons also and his wives, so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this the Lord smote him in the bowels with an incurable

disease. And it came to pass that in the process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases.”—(II. Chron. xxi. 6, 16-19.)

In the days of Amaziah, the eighth from Rehoboam, there was an instructive incident. The king set himself to strengthen his army. In carrying out this work, he not only made something like a general conscription of Judah, but “He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel (the Ten Tribes) for an hundred talents of silver.” A prophet sought to deter him from this part of the enterprise. He said, “O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee.” What objection to the soldiers of the Ten Tribes? “The Lord is not with Israel—to wit, with all the children of Ephraim.”—(II. Chron. xxv. 7.) But the king had paid the money for which the soldiers were to be hired. This was a great difficulty with the king, as it would be to most people: in fact it would be considered a fatal objection in any question of duty that might be raised. “What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?” The prophet’s answer was not a practical one as men think. “The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.” Did the king require a final argument? “If thou wilt go (with the Ten Tribe soldiers), do it: be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for *God hath power to help and to cast down.*” Amaziah gave in to the force of this argument which has a strong bearing on the whole question of the ways of providence.

There was a further illustration of the ways of providence in the later days of Amaziah's reign—an illustration not so creditable to him as the first recorded.—(II. Chron. xxv.) He had invaded and subdued Edom, and amongst the spoils brought home the gods of the country whom with extraordinary blindness “he set up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them and burned incense unto them.” A prophet was sent to him to expostulate against the madness, but the king repulsed the prophet, who said, “*I know that God hath determined to destroy thee because thou hast done this and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.*” A man's unwisdom may be divinely supplemented and employed as an instrument of destruction. It was so at last with the whole house of Israel, upon whom God poured the spirit of slumber and inspired with a frenzied perversity, which brought about their destruction at the hands of the Romans. So also on the Gentiles, He sent strong delusion that they might believe a lie, because they received not the truth in the love of it when given to them by the ministration of the Spirit in the apostolic age.—(II. Thess. ii. 10 12.) Amaziah, on this principle, was moved to get up a military expedition against a neighbouring monarch. This neighbouring monarch endeavoured to dissuade him by sensible advice; but it is written, “*Amaziah would not hear, for it came of God that he might deliver them (Judah) into the hand of their enemies because they sought after the gods of Edom.*” An unwise decision may be “of God:” the case of Amaziah proves it. When it is for punishment

it is a terrible thing, for who so helpless as the man who is divinely impelled to his own destruction, and who thinks all the while that he is carrying out only his own masterful will? This view gives peculiar point to the exhortation of Peter, that we should "commit the keeping of our souls to God in well doing as unto a faithful Creator."

A similar lesson is taught in the case of Uzziah (Amaziah's successor), of whom it is recorded that "as long as he sought the Lord, the Lord made him to prosper. . . . But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction."—(II. Chronicles xxvi. 15, 16.) The reign of Ahaz, the second after Uzziah, yields instruction on the general subject. In this reign, it is testified, "*the Lord began to send against Judah, Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remahah.*"—(II. Kings xv. 37) These military intruders would not be aware they were fulfilling a divine work. In this reign also, the Ten Tribes got the upper hand of Judah very wonderfully. The reason was thus explained to the representatives of the Ten Tribes, who contemplated a barbarous use of their advantage. "Because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, *He hath delivered them into your hand*, and ye have slain them with a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you. But are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God? Now, hear me, therefore, and deliver the captives again which

ye have taken captive of your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you." When those thus addressed realised that their victory over Judah was God's dispensation of bitterness to Judah because of their sins, it modified their feelings greatly, and led to one of the most extraordinary incidents in the history of war. They "took the captives and with the spoil clothed all them that were naked among them, and arrayed them and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them and carried all the feeble upon asses, and brought them to their brethren." Thus excellent are the dispositions of men when swayed by reason and the fear of God. The time will come when all men shall thus be animated. How pleasant a place will the earth then be to live in, and how interesting and delightful the race of mankind everywhere! The song of the angels will yet become the true description of affairs on earth. The enchanting performance in the still air of night on Bethlehem's plains, will not for ever be mocked by the triumph of folly in all earth's valleys and mountains. When the babe, whose birth they celebrated, reigns omnipotent head of all the kingdoms of the world, the glory of Jehovah will be in the ascendant, and peace and goodwill prevail to the utmost bounds.

The destruction of Sennacherib's army in the reign of Hezekiah, the successor of Ahaz, belongs to the category of miracle rather than to the ways of providence. Nevertheless, these ways receive incidental illustration in some of the things said and done in connection with

that event. First Hezekiah's own course is worthy of notice. Having received a threatening written summons to submit to Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, "he went up into the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord, and Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said, O Lord God of Israel, who dwellest between the cherubim, Thou art the God, even Thou alone of all the kingdoms of the earth: Thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down Thine ear and hear; open, Lord, Thine eyes and see, and hear the words of Sennacherib who hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands (of which Sennacherib had boasted in his letter), and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee save Thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only." Here we have Hezekiah in his distress taking refuge in prayer. This is the first thing to be noted by such as desire to learn the lessons of true wisdom from those numerous examples and precepts furnished in the written word. All men of God were like Hezekiah in this: and there is no difference in the family likeness, as time rolls on, though it may be hard to discover it in the unpraying myriads who surround us in this late hour of the Gentile day. The next point is that though Hezekiah prayed this earnest prayer, (oh, how impressive in its simplicity, yea, how sublime!) he had not left the whole

work to God. He had not sat down supinely and done nothing. He had taken wise precautions. When he saw the first indications of Sennacherib's hostile purpose, "He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were outside the city, saying . . . Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?" — (II. Chron. xxxii 3.) Here also we have a lesson. Submit our troubles to God, but do the best we can, and wait the result with readiness to accept whatever He may appoint. This course in Hezekiah's case resulted in signal interposition. A message came by Isaiah to Hezekiah assuring him of deliverance, which was accomplished almost immediately, in the miraculous destruction of the bulk of the Assyrian host by night. In the course of the message, there are several allusions illustrative of the ways of providence. Sennacherib boasted of his prowess and rejoiced in his greatness, like Nebuchadnezzar, after him, as if they had been the attributes of his own strength. God's words on this point are these. "Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? *Now have I brought it to pass THAT THOU SHOLDEST BE TO LAY WASTE FENCED CITIES INTO RUINOUS HEAPS. Therefore, their inhabitants were of small power.*" — (II. Kings xiv. 25.) Sennacherib was thus informed that his military capacities were of divine institution, for divine purposes. Sennacherib was thus exhibited in the light of a divine instrument for the working out of divine ends, though contemplating only ends of his own.

Though a servant of Jehovah in fact, he was by intention an enemy to Him, as Jehovah testifies: "I know thy rage against Me (verse 27), which is a clear illustration of what we have often seen in the course of these chapters, that men, while acting under their own thoughts and feelings, as they imagine, may carry out a purpose of God of which they have no knowledge and less sympathy; and that a perfectly natural work, to all appearance, may in reality be of divine contrivance and purpose—a lesson valuable in the reading of the Signs of the Times and the interpretation of our own lives.





CHAPTER XXII.

Reign of Josiah—Preservation of the scriptures—A work of providence—Josiah's enquiry and God's answer—Coming judgment by the hand of the enemy—Josiah's cleansing of the land.—His visit to Bethel—The graves of the idolatrous priests—His "turning himself"—The fulfilment of a prophecy uttered 300 years before—The evil that came on Judah "at the commandment of the Lord"—The nature of it from a human point of view—Nebuchadnezzar's invasion—Providence illustrated—The wicked the sword of the Lord, but none the less wicked for that—End of the seventy years' captivity—Daniel and Cyrus—Of the edict of restoration—Bearing of the case on these latter days and the coming restoration



HERE remains but little more for us to notice in the history of the kingdom of Judah in illustration of the ways of providence. The reign of Josiah presents an interesting feature or two before we consider the work of God by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in breaking up the kingdom and planting a remnant of the Two Tribes in captivity by the rivers of Babylon. He was a child when he began to reign. The two reigns before him had been marked by departure from the law. Josiah's bent was in the right direction, but naturally did not manifest itself with public effect until he was of age. At twenty six, he ordered the repair and renovation of the

temple which had fallen into disuse through the corruption of the times. While engaged in this work, the priests found a copy of the law, which they took to Josiah and read to him, with the effect of causing him great distress at the discovery he thereby made of how far Israel had gone astray, and to what terrible judgments they had exposed themselves by their disobedience. The written law had evidently become a rare and little known thing in high places in Israel, through the neglect and apostasies of former kings. To this probably Isaiah refers a little over two generations before Josiah's day: "Their root shall be as rottenness and their blossom shall go up as dust, because *they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts*, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people and He hath stretched forth His hand against them and smitten them."—(Isaiah v. 24-25.) But though buried away as a piece of lumber in the temple and unknown in the palaces of the kings, it does not follow that it was unknown to everyone in Judah. Even among the Ten Tribes, in the days of Ahab's deepest revolt, God informed Elijah that He had reserved to Himself seven thousand men who had not compromised themselves in the prevailing idolatry. How much more probable that in Judah there was a remnant who were faithful and who mourned in secret the corruptions of the times. Indeed, their existence is plainly recognised in the following message by Isaiah: "Hear the word of the Lord, *ye that tremble at His word*: your brethren that hated you and that cast you out for My

Name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified, but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed."—(lxvi 5.) And still more plainly in the word by Ezekiel, a generation after Josiah. "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of *the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*"—(Ezekiel ix. 4.)

Consequently, though among those surrounding the court in Jerusalem, the written law was a forgotten thing, copies of it were doubtless multiplied among the private servants of Jehovah scattered among the hills and valleys of Judah, among whom faithfulness was thus preserved. But it was necessary to preserve the sacred writings among the leaders of the nation for the sake of its transmission to succeeding times. Copies in private possession were not in the channel of public preservation. The vicissitudes of the times made their destruction or disappearance a matter of certainty in a short time. In the copy stowed away in the recesses of the temple, and discovered after a long slumber among the dust and cobwebs, the hand of God is visible, as it has been in all generations since, in the preservation of His marvellous word from destruction, often attempted with formidable method and power. By one providential agency and another, the most ancient book and the most ancient people are extant in the earth at the present day, when their enemies, great in ancient power and name, have passed out of recollection in the land of the living. The Greeks and Egyptians under Antiochus tried to extirpate the Hebrew scriptures

some generations before Christ. The Hebrew scriptures fill the land of modern culture : and where is Antiochus ? Pagan Rome, 300 years after Christ, made the same attempt, including in her imperial edict, issued by Diocletian, the writings of the apostles. These writings are the most venerated throughout the civilized world : and where is Diocletian ? Where Roman Paganism ? Rome of the hated popes has been guilty of the same insane endeavour. The curling flames have devoured thousands of copies by her command, and consumed the bones of readers and believers : but the hated book lives still, and is sold in thousands under the very walls of the Vatican. The providence of God has operated to the protection of His greatest gift to man, from man's own satanic malice and hostility.

When Josiah became aware, through the recovered book of the law, of the terrible position of things in Israel, he charged a deputation of priests thus : " Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found : for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book to do according to all that which is written concerning us.' The message received in answer to this, by the hand of Huldah, the prophetess, was as follows : " Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold *I will bring evil upon this place* and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read, because they

have forsaken Me. . . . My wrath shall be kindled against this place and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and hast rent thy clothes and has wept before Me, I also have heard thee; *thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.*”—(II. Kings xxii. 15.) The bearing of this on the ways of providence will be obvious: first, the evil that was coming upon Judah because of their insubjection to the law of Moses, was to be of *divine bringing* though the instruments of its infliction would not be aware of the fact; and secondly, Josiah's individual conformity to righteousness secured for him a personal immunity from the evils that were coming,—an immunity that was naturally brought about, but a divine arrangement, notwithstanding. Josiah fell in battle, which in a moment removed him from the scene years before the captivity of Judah began.

During his reign, an incident occurred which formed a pointed illustration of the ways of providence. Encouraged by the comforting assurance he had received, he set to work to purge the land from all the defilements of idolatry. He first convened the people and read to them the book which had moved himself so greatly, and imposed upon them a covenant that they would do what it required of them, “with all their heart and all their soul.” He then ordered the removal of all idola-

trous utensils from the precincts of the temple ; deposed the idolatrous priests ; demolished the buildings used in connection with the idolatrous service ; burnt the idolatrous chariots ; rased the idolatrous altars in the environs of Jerusalem ; and desecrated in as complete a manner as he could devise, all the graves and places consecrated to the idols of the surrounding nations. Having purged Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, he extended his attention to districts beyond. Bethel, the head-quarters of the idol-worship established by Jeroboam, the first king of the Ten Tribes (now included in the jurisdiction of Judah), received an indignant visit. There was at Bethel "the altar and the high place which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made." The hour had arrived for the fulfilment of a prophecy uttered at Bethel concerning the altar over three hundred years before the time of Josiah. The prophecy is recorded in the account of the reign of Jeroboam.—(I. Kings xiii. 2.) "Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name : and upon thee, O altar (erected by Jeroboam) shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." The notable feature of the case lies here, that the fulfilment of this prophecy appeared to come about by accident. Josiah visited Bethel at the time under our notice, for the purpose of breaking down the altar and the high place erected by Jeroboam. Arrived at Bethel for the purpose, he surveys the altar, and we read that "*as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount.*"

These sepulchres contained the bones of the priests who for several generations had ministered at this altar of idolatry. But Josiah had evidently not thought of them in any way: a casual change of posture brought them under his notice, and it occurred to him to make a desecration of this idolatrous structure complete by first burning the bones of its priestly attendants on the altar before breaking it down. Accordingly "he sent and took the bones out of the sepulchres and burnt them upon the altar and polluted it." Now to what are we to attribute the thought that led Josiah in this apparently fortuitous manner to fulfil a prophecy? It was without doubt a divine impulse. Josiah's attention was divinely directed to those sepulchres "as he turned himself." But he would not be aware of the fact. He would only be conscious of a sudden thought such as we all feel occasionally—a thought, however, in harmony with his mood—a thought natural to the feelings of the moment—a thought which he would be unable to distinguish from the general zeal which inspired him against the idolatrous institution of the land.

After Josiah's death, the days drew near for the bringing of that evil spoken of in answer to his enquiry of Huldah the prophetess. That evil took the shape so constantly illustrated in the course of these chapters—an evil apparently due only to human causes—an evil with which on the face of things, God had nothing to do, and yet an evil which we have God's own authority for regarding as due to His direct organization and infliction. "Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah"

—(II. Kings xxiv. 3): so reads the divinely supervised record. And if possible more explicit is the following divine commentary on the events after they were accomplished:—"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah, and behold, this day they are a desolation and no man dwelleth therein. Because of their wickedness, which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods, whom they know not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit, I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate. But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore My fury and Mine anger was poured forth and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, and they are wasted and desolate as at this day."—(Jeremiah xliv. 2-6.)

Here, the evil plight to which Judah and Jerusalem were brought, is expressly alleged to be "the evil that God brought upon them." Now in what form did it come? Did it come by miracle or in any evidently divine manner? Those can answer who are acquainted with Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and subjugation of the land. That invasion was not the result of any divine command addressed to Nebuchadnezzar. The occasion for it was created in a perfectly natural manner by the events of former reigns. In the wars between Egypt and Babylon,

Judah had come under the power of Babylon. The heir to the throne—a boy of eight—was taken to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and Zedekiah, his uncle, had accepted the throne at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar as a vassal. Having reigned on this footing for nine years, he endeavoured to throw off the yoke, which brought Nebuchadnezzar and his army into Judah. “It came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it and built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled and went forth out of the city by night, . . . and they went by the way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him.” Then follows the account of the killing of the king’s sons, the putting out of Zedekiah’s eyes, the pillage and burning of the city, and the conveyance of a drove of captives to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar had no more idea he was doing a divine work than Titus had 600 years later. He was doing a divine work, notwithstanding, as we have seen. The fact, however, has to be taken with certain qualifications. Though he was doing a divine work, it was no merit in him, but the reverse. He was a mere tool so

far as he was concerned—that is, so far as his aims and objects were concerned, he acted the part of a robber and a murderer, and his real objects are recognized when the time came for dealing with Babylon according to her deserts. When this time arrived, Jehovah addresses the Babylonian magnates as “Ye destroyers of Mine heritage” (Jer. l. 11), and deprecates the fact that “this Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, hath broken Israel’s bones” (verse 17); adding, “Therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, *I will punish the king of Babylon and his land. . . .* As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord: so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.”

In this, we have the clearest illustration of the fact which has been manifest at every point in our enquiry, that though God overrules the movements of men for the accomplishment of His own purposes, there is no interference with the moral freedom of men, and no interference with their moral relation to the acts they perform. God may use the wicked as His sword, yet are they none the less wicked, and accountable for the deeds they perform. These deeds are divine in their bearing upon those against whom they operate, but so far as those who perform them are concerned, the character of the deed is determinable by the motive which prompts them. The only deeds acceptable with God as a matter of individual well-pleasing, are those that are performed in the fear of His own name, and in

the spirit of enlightenment and loving obedience to His commandments. All deeds so rendered are acceptable, even if they miss their mark as regards men. If a man for Christ's sake give to the undeserving, his service is accepted none the less because of unworthiness of the object. On the other hand, if we minister to Christ's servants or do Christ's work, in the spirit of pleasing men, the act will not be reckoned, though in the providence of God it may be a part of His means of accomplishing real work of ministration. In these facts lies the cogency of the exhortation, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men."—(Col. iii. 23.) This is the practical application of the fact that though God brought Nebuchadnezzar upon Jerusalem and Judah, Nebuchadnezzar was none the less a thief and a robber—a beast of prey let loose for a purpose, the accomplishment of which was no credit to him.

We follow the weary captives to Babylon and remain with them seventy years, and note further illustration of the ways of providence in the events that at the end of that time led to their return. This return had been promised. While they were at Babylon, a letter arrived to them from Jeremiah, dictated by the Creator of heaven and earth—(a wonderful letter to receive): "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon, Build ye houses and dwell in them and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them. . . . After seventy

years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you in causing you to return to this place.”—(Jer. xxix. 1, 4, 10.) When the end of seventy years arrived, the way for return was opened, but by perfectly natural means. Babylon was overthrown by the Medes and Persians as had been predicted.—(Jer. li. 11.) Cyrus came to the throne, whose part as the deliverer of Israel from Babylonish oppression, had also been foretold nearly three hundred years before by Isaiah.—(Isaiah xlv. 28; xlv. 1-4.) When Cyrus arrived at that position, he found Daniel prime minister of Babylon, and (acting with Darius) retained him in that high position. This Daniel was acquainted with the prophets and given to the study of them.—(Daniel ix. 2.) What more natural than that in his position of confidential adviser of the emperor, he should call his attention to what was written in the prophets concerning himself: “That saith of Cyrus, he is My shepherd and shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid. . . . For Jacob My servant’s sake and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, *though thou hast not known Me.*”—(Isaiah xlv. 4.) It must be to this that Cyrus alludes in the proclamation he immediately issued: “The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and *He hath charged me to build Him an house* at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him and let him go up into

Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is the God) which is in Jerusalem."—(Ezra i. 2, 3.)

Here is an imperial edict due to a providential combination of circumstances designed to bring about the promised return of favour to Jerusalem after the seventy years' captivity in Babylon. The edict had its effect. "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests of the Levites with all them whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."—(Ezra i. 5.) A large company went up to Judah armed with imperial authority, to levy assistance to the enterprise on the officers of state. They proceeded in a perfectly natural way. It was not accomplished all at once though it started so distinctly. The reading of Ezra and Nehemiah will show that the Samaritan neighbours of the returned exiles became jealous of their proceedings and resorted to plots and intrigues to stop them—intrigues which, owing to the death of Cyrus, were successful for a while and apparently frustrated the execution of a divine purpose. The foundation laid by the decree of Cyrus, could not, however, be finally overturned, and the work, after various hindrances and delays, went on and came to a prosperous finish years afterwards in the days of Nehemiah. The account of the work as contained in the two books mentioned, is the account of a natural work to all outward appearance, yet a work confessedly divine in purpose and execution, and therefore not the least of the many scriptural illustrations of the ways of providence.

This particular illustration is of special interest at the present time when the day has once more arrived for the divine favour to Zion. It helps us to read aright the various movements we see in progress with this tendency. What if these movements are all apparently natural? The lesson of the past will enable us to recognize the hand of God in events of proximately human conception. The Turkish firman in 1856, allowing Jews to acquire possession of the soil in Palestine, removed one barrier of many ages duration. The exhaustion of the Ottoman Empire has loosened the Turkish hold on Syria, which is now ready to drop into British hands, as appointed. The Anglo-Turkish convention has laid the foundation of the British right of protectorate and reform in these regions. A vigorous anti-Turkish government has come to power in England, whose first act has been to invite the European powers to insist on the Turkish performance of the obligations undertaken under that instrument and the Treaty of Berlin, at the peril of the continuance of the already nearly dead empire Turkey. Concurrently with these tendencies, it is impossible the attentive observer can fail to note the activity of various schemes for the regeneration of the Holy Land, by agricultural colonization and railway building, &c. All things combine to tell us that the hour is hastening when the great latter-day re-building of the tabernacle of David will commence. The re-builder is Jesus, who has promised

to return for the work.—(Matt. xix. 28; Acts iii. 19-22). This is outside what is understood as the ways of providence. Nevertheless it is the glorious consummation to which many ways of providence are leading up, with no uncertain significance.





CHAPTER XXIII.

From the Babylonish captivity to Christ.—The providential in the case of Christ.—Place of His birth.—The difficulty as to the visit to Egypt.—The part performed by John the Baptist.—Christ's maintenance during His ministry.—The pre-eminently providential character of the crucifixion.—Divinely pre-arranged and required, yet brought about in a perfectly natural manner.—A work of God, yet a crime of man.—Providential feature of the apostolic age.—Pentecost.—Persecution.—Education of Paul.—John in Patmos.—A tendency of the contemplation of the ways of providence.—A corrective found in the visible hand of God.



IN the interval between the return from Babylonish captivity and the appearing of Christ, there were many ways of providence. The eleventh chapter of Daniel's book is a prophetic sketch of the principal of them, the most striking perhaps being those relating to the faithful class of the Maccabean era, who are spoken of (verse 33) as "they that understand among the people," of whom it is also said, "they shall fall, *to try them, and to purge, and to make them white*, even to the time of the end." The falling in the case is defined as "falling by the sword, and by flame, and by captivity, and by spoil many days" (verse 33), so that we have here a case of calamity divinely permitted to faithful men for the accomplishment of certain moral results with reference to God's ultimate purpose with them in time of the end. This is a

principle of very frequent illustration throughout the scriptures. It is condensed into the saying "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." As this chastening is by means of evil, it follows that circumstances of an utterly vexatious and apparently fortuitous character may be of God, though His voice and hand may be unmanifest, and worse—hid in storm. We shall not in all things be able to read present experience aright till we can look upon it from the serene atmosphere of the kingdom of God.

But our purpose is not to linger in the interval from the Babylonish captivity to Christ, in which we would find only an oft-read lesson, already illustrated at sufficient length. We propose in this chapter rather to glance at the case of Christ, in certain features of it that afford striking indication of the fact that events human on their surface may be divine in a very special sense. The case of Christ is so largely miraculous in every way that it may not seem to come at all into the category of providential operation. It does not come so much within that category as other cases: nevertheless, there is more of the providential in it than might at first be supposed possible.

The first point is the place of his birth—Bethlehem. This had been foretold.—(Micah v. 2.) It was a point upon which all were agreed in their discussions as to whether Jesus were the Christ or no. "Hath not the scriptures said, that Christ cometh . . . out of the town of Bethlehem?"—(John vii. 42.) This seemed

to require that Jesus should be born of parents resident in Bethlehem. But when the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy came, both Joseph the husband of Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus, lived at Nazareth.—(Luke 1 26; 11. 4) Here was a position of things calling for divine interposition. It is the form that this interposition took that constitutes the illustration of the ways of providence in the case. There was no miracle or open act. A measure of the authorities sufficed to bring matters into harmony with the necessities of the prophecy. “In those days, there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled,” with a view to a taxation which was first carried into effect when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. The issue of this decree necessitated a visit to Bethlehem on the part of Joseph, “because he was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 11. 4), to be enrolled with Mary, who for the same reason required to accompany him, though not at all in a condition favourable for travelling (verse 5). Arrived in Bethlehem, “So it was that *while they were there*, the days were accomplished that Mary should be delivered: and she brought forth her firstborn son.’ Joseph and Mary were brought there for a short time only. A few days one way or the other would have caused a misfit, but the watchfulness of providence secured their presence in Bethlehem just at the right time, so that the scripture was fulfilled, and the angels were able to announce to the shepherds on Bethlehem’s plains. “Unto you is born this day *in the city of David*, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.”

In due course, the child Jesus, having been circumcised, was taken to Jerusalem and presented in the temple according to the law of Moses. And here it may be advantageous to glance at a point of difficulty made much of by the foes of the Bible. Luke says that his parents then returned into Galilee to their own city, Nazareth.—(ii. 39). Matthew seems to intimate that they went at once from Bethlehem to Egypt, going to Nazareth afterwards.—(Matt. ii. 1-14.) No explanation of this discrepancy is apparent on the face of the narratives: but the two accounts are not irreconcilable if we suppose they refer to two visits to Bethlehem about the same time. This supposition is necessitated by the narratives themselves, for while Luke's narrative applies to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, it is evident that Matthew refers to a stage later on. I. Because Christ had been born some time when the wise men arrived at Jerusalem: how long before does not appear, but it must have been a considerable time, for his birth had occurred before they started on their journey "from the east." II. Because Herod, in issuing the decree for the destruction of the babyhood of Bethlehem, thought it necessary to allow a margin of *two years*, to cover the time of the Lord's birth "according to the time he had diligently enquired of the wise men."—(Matt. ii. 16.) In the state of facts, it is easily conceivable that after the incidents recorded by Luke—and therefore after Joseph and Mary's return to Nazareth—Joseph and Mary were called back again to Bethlehem in connection with perhaps the incompleting business of

the enrolling, and while there the second time, received the visit of the wise men, and the divine direction which led them to depart to Egypt, where they remained till the death of Herod, on which they came again to Nazareth. This possible state of the case—(and the narratives themselves involve something of the sort) would admit of both accounts being consistent one with another. The histories of the Bible are all of that concise and fragmentary character that easily admit of occasional appearances of discrepancy which the investigation of loving candour will dispel.

There was something providential in the part performed by John the Baptist in preparing for the work of Christ. We read that "John did no miracle" (John x. 41), and yet he was the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, sent before His face to level mountainous obstructions, and fill the hollows, and smooth the rough places for the effective (initial) manifestation of the glory of the Lord. The mission expressed by these figures of speech was to create a situation of things, and a state of mind among the people of Judea, favourable to the Lord's obtaining on short notice that public attention, and that clustering around Him of right-minded disciples which His work—His short work—required. How was this done? Not by miracle, but by the effect of John's preaching upon the minds of the people. This effect was the combined result of the manner of the preacher, the nature of his preaching, and the locality of its occurrence. Attracted by the appearance of a weird, stern, dogmatic, abstemious,

strange-looking young man, on the banks of the Jordan, "all Jerusalem and Judea went out to be baptized of him, confessing their sins." They "mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ or no."—(Luke iii. 15.) John strove to put them right on that point. He told them he was not the Christ, but was sent to prepare the way before Him (John i. 20, 27), and that the Christ was actually in the land, but unmanifested—unknown to John himself, who was awaiting his promised identification of the Spirit for which he was waiting.—(Verses 31-33.) Such teaching for three years and a half naturally collected the right sort of men about John—the God-fearing of the house of Israel—and that state of eager curiosity on their part, which made the Lord's introduction to them easy and effective. The moment arrived when Jesus stepped from the crowd to be baptized like the others.—(Luke iii. 21.) His baptism accomplished, the visible effusion of the Spirit, accompanied by an audible voice from heaven, proclaimed Him the Son of God, and rivetted on Him the attention of the people prepared, to whom John said, "This is He of whom I spoke." "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Thus was a great work of God accomplished by means which, while having the miraculous at their foundation, were largely compounded of natural circumstances providentially regulated.

The maintenance of Christ during His mortal life illustrates the same principle. He was not allowed to use the miraculous power bestowed upon Him, for the provision of His personal wants, though He fed a crowd

of 5,000 persons with a few loaves and fishes. Yet He had to live. He was a poor man. His own account of Himself was "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."—(Luke ix. 58). How was He provided for? The providence of God was visible in the raising up of friends "*who ministered unto Him of their substance.*"—(Luke viii. 3.) It is the principle observable in the case of Paul, who writes to the Philippians, "Ye sent once and again unto my necessity." These manifestations are human in their form but divine in their origination, though not obviously so. Yet the persons made use of do not act mechanically. They do the work of God: at the same time their work will be rewarded as, in a proximate sense, their own work, as it is written: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love which ye have shown towards His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister; and we desire that everyone of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end."—(Heb. vi. 10.)

But the circumstance in the life of Christ which above all others illustrated the operations of providence—the performance of a work of God by means which seemed so intensely human as to leave no place for the hand of God—was His crucifixion. This we know in many ways was a matter of divine pre-arrangement and accomplishment. We have first the prophetic foreshadowing of it in all the forms of the law, particularly in the slaying of animals in connection with approaches to God; pointing

to the fact, apart from the reason of the fact, that in man's position of alienation God could not be acceptably approached without the shedding of blood. Next, we have the clear intimations by the prophets that God would put Jesus to grief, that He would "make His soul an offering for sin" (Isaiah liii. 10); that the Messiah would be cut off in the act of making reconciliation for iniquity, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness —(Dan. ix. 24, 26). Lastly, we have the express declaration of the apostles, speaking by the Spirit, that He was given up to die "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts ii. 23); that thus, "those things which God had shown by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He had so fulfilled" (iii. 18): that the combination against Him of Jews and Gentiles, was (unknown to them), "to do whatsoever God had determined before to be done."—(iv. 28.)

Jesus himself testifies that He had received commandment from the Father to lay down His life.—(John x. 18). Paul, alluding to this feature of the case, says that He (Jesus) was "*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*"—(Phil. ii. 8). And he makes the act the Father's act in saying, "He that *spared not His own son*, but DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"—(Rom. viii. 32): and again, "*God hath set Him forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.*"—(iii. 25) The breaking of bread brings the whole idea to a focus. Jesus asks us to recognise in the emblems the memorials of His body given for His brethren.

In view of these unmistakable facts and testimonies, the lesson yielded on the ways of providence is to be learnt in the contemplation of the perfectly natural manner, to all appearance, in which the death of Christ came about. His teaching stirred up the anger of the ruling class among the Jews.—(Matt. xxiii. 13.) They laid traps for Him that they might hand Him over to the Roman authorities.—(Luke xx. 20.) “They urged Him vehemently, and to provoke Him to speak of many things, laying wait for Him and seeking to catch something out of His mouth that they might accuse Him.”—(Luke xi. 53.) They sought to destroy Him but could not find what they might do, for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.—(xix. 48.) At last, a faithless disciple, in the absence of the multitude, put Him in the power of His enemies for thirty pieces of silver, by showing them His whereabouts in the quiet of night. He was apprehended by torchlight by a band of legal rowdies, and led away as a prisoner. He was arraigned before the Jewish council, and then brought before the Roman governor and accused of treason on the ground of His doctrine that “He Himself was Christ a King”—(Luke xxiii. 2.) On this ground He was condemned (John xix. 12, 13), and His accusation was officially affixed to His cross. He died a victim of Jewish malice and Gentile power.

It was all a perfectly natural transaction on the face of it, and yet God was in it as we have seen. No more signal illustration exists in the whole course of the scriptures, of the fact that the work of God may be done

by perfectly natural agents, who yet do their own will and give effect to their own wicked aims. Judas is not shielded from the enormity of his crime by the fact that he was an accessory to one of the highest works of God on earth. The solemn words of Jesus remain in their unabated force: "Good were it for that man if he had not been born." The Jews have not enjoyed any exemption from the effects of their blasphemous opposition to the Son of God from the circumstances that they were instruments in the execution of a divine work. His blood has been none the less on them and on their children. It was from no desire to do the work of God that they gave effect to their envious antagonism to an holy one. Therefore they reaped as they sowed. Cooped up within the walls of the very city that resounded with their hellish yells of repudiation of Christ, they had to swelter and seethe in the horrors of famine, anarchy and civil war, and behold the awful spectacle of a ring of crucifixes round the doomed city, placed outside the walls by the Romans who would have released Christ, holding aloft the transfixed and writhing forms of Jewish prisoners who had sought in vain to find refuge in the Roman camp from the horrors of the siege. And from that day to this, they have wandered,

Outcasts from God, and scattered wide
Through every nation under heaven;
Blaspheming Him they crucified;
Unsaved, unpitying, unforgiven.
Branded like Cain they bear their load
Abhorred of men and curs'd of God.

The lesson of the case is the lesson of all the cases we have had under review. God may and does in many cases—(in all cases standing related to His work and purpose) work unseen and unfelt behind natural circumstances, and by human action accomplishes ends of His own which men have no intention of bringing about; and the idea of bringing about which they would repudiate with the utmost scorn if suggested to them; that at the same time there is no interference with the free volition and moral results of human action; that He holds men responsible for what they intend and aim at accomplishing, and judges these intentions without any reference to the actual results that may come out of their action in the operation of His providence. The effect of this doctrine, where sincerely believed, must be to lead men to keep watch over their hearts in the inception and effectuation of their thoughts; and in all things to commit their way to God in the confidence of that direction of their steps in all the complexities of human life which has been promised.

The apostolic age furnishes several exemplifications of the ways of providence, with the brief notice of which we must leave the domain of scripture narrative, and reserve to the last a general and finishing summary of the whole. Pentecost stands first and most prominent. The out-pouring of the Spirit on the apostles “not many days hence” was promised by Christ before His departure. Its object was not merely to comfort and instruct the disciples, but to “convince the world” of the things of Christ, and to bear witness to His resurrection. To

accomplish this effectually, the concourse of many people, from various parts of the world, was necessary. Behold the condition secured by the natural operation of the feast of Pentecost. "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven," were brought to Jerusalem by the recurrence of that feast; and at such a moment, just ten days after the ascension of Jesus, the overpowering effusion and manifestation of the Spirit exhibited a convincing testimony for Christ before assembled thousands of the right type, who afterwards, on their return home to all points of the compass, took with them far and wide the seeds of "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." A similar result was afterwards produced in another way by the great persecution which arose about Stephen, when the believers, in thousands, were "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts viii. 1), and when they who were so scattered, "travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word; . . . and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord."—(xi. 19-21). The persecution was a providential diffusion of the word, though doubtless very unwelcome to the brethren. Many unwelcome circumstances may transpire in our own experience which, in a way perhaps not visible at the time, accomplishes the work of God.


The providence of God is further seen in the preparation of such a man as Paul against the time when he was needed as a servant of Christ. Jesus said to

Ananias, of Damascus, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me" (Acts ix. 15), and Paul himself alludes to his having been set apart from childhood (Gal. i. 15); could, therefore, we have been witnesses of Paul's early life, we should have seen nothing manifestly divine in them. We should have seen an ardent, energetic, earnest young student of the law of Moses distinguishing himself by his zeal and industry, but not exhibiting anything in his life or surroundings that would have struck the observer as out of the common. We should have seen a young man on whom Christ's eyes were fixed; but we should not have known it. A study of the leading circumstances of his apostolic career will yield the same result. It will show that the framework of his natural life was divinely moulded with a view to the work he had to do as a witness of Christ's resurrection throughout the Roman habitable.

John's banishment to the solitude of Patmos we must rank among the same class of circumstances. It came upon him as an evil, and apparently only as an evil. It would be very unacceptable to an ardent lover of God and man, like John; but it provided the suitable occasion for Christ's last communication to His brethren—the Apocalypse, so wonderfully opened to our understanding by another agency in these latter days.

The emphasis laid on the naturalness of the circumstances exhibited to view in these chapters on the ways of providence, has a tendency in some cases which it

may be desirable to correct in a similar book to this on "Miracles, Signs and Wonders." That tendency, which some have felt, may be expressed by the question, "If all these circumstances are so obviously natural, what evidence exists that they have a divine element in them at all?" There is a powerful answer to this question, which it will be the business of another effort to make manifest. The object of these chapters, now drawing to a close, has been to illustrate a phase of divine operation at work in our own day, for the purpose of enabling us to recognise the hand of God in our lives, and in the affairs of the nations. The absence of visible token and audible message has a tendency to close our eyes to the fact that God works, though the age of the open vision is not resumed. This closing of the eye is apt to weaken the hand and discourage the heart. Hence, the profitableness of a line of study which enables us to see, despite popular exaggerations and misrepresentations, that there is such a thing as providence, and that we have only to come into harmony with the Worker of it, as revealed to us in the scriptures of truth, to get the benefit of that direction of our steps during these days of evil, which will guide us at the last into the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.





CHAPTER XXIV.

The overthrow of the Jewish state by the Romans.—A divine catastrophe foretold, though not recorded in the scriptures.—Josephus, the providential recorder.—Christ's allusions to the impending calamity.—Its relation to His own disciples.—Its bearing on our own day.—A summary of Josephus's narrative.—Disorders commencing A.D. 40.—Tumults and factions.—The Sicarii.—The Egyptian prophet.—Florus, the Roman governor, exasperates the Jews and incites them to revolt.—The Jews in Jerusalem rise.—Cestius marches against them and is defeated.



THE survey of the ways of providence would be incomplete without something more than a glance at the events attending the overthrow of Jerusalem and disruption of the Jewish polity over thirty-five years after Christ left the earth. At first sight, it might seem as if this were outside the scope of a work which aims at the illustration of the subject from Biblical narrative alone. On a further consideration, however, the matter must appear otherwise. Although we have no scriptural narrative of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, yet we have much scriptural forecast of that terrible event, and therefore the particulars of the event are the particulars of a divine work. So long before as the days of Moses, before Israel had entered the land, it was written "The Lord shall bring a nation against

thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth, a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand, . . . and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land, and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land which the Lord thy God hath given thee, and thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body—the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee. . . . The Lord will rejoice over you to bring you to nought : and ye shall be plucked off the land whither thou goest to possess it, and the Lord shall scatter thee among all people.”—(Deut. xxviii. 49, 50, 52, 53, 63, 64.)

The Roman invasion and the horrors attendant upon it, although illustrating, in fulfilment of these words, a lesson many times exhibited in preceding pages, viz., that a public calamity, perfectly human in all its causes and particulars, may be an occurrence of divine origin,—is nevertheless of more interest to the majority of living men on account of its nearness to our own age. For one thing, it is more fully recorded than any other event so distinctly in the category of divine transactions. By what itself seems a striking providence, Josephus, a contemporary and eye-witness of the dreadful scenes in question, in many of which he took a personal part, has left a wonderfully complete account of them—so complete and minute as to resemble the letters of a modern war correspondent more than anything in ancient literature. It

is on every ground important that the reader should be acquainted with the narrative of these events. They were not only foretold by the prophets, but referred to several times by Jesus while He was on the earth. Most notably, He spoke of them in a plain discourse (Luke xxi. ; Matt. xxiv.), delivered to His disciples while they were seated on the Mount of Olives, and overlooking the city and temple which lay at their feet. On that occasion He told them that within that generation—(at what particular day and hour He could not tell them)—the “days of vengeance” written of in the prophets, would arrive ; that there would be great distress in the land and wrath among the people ; that Jerusalem would be surrounded with armies, and laid in ashes, and the temple utterly demolished ; and the nation destroyed by the edge of the sword.

These things had a strong personal interest for the disciples and the generation of believers then alive. The national catastrophe might involve them in destruction. Jesus told them to flee to the mountains when they should see “Jerusalem compassed with armies,” assuring them that its overthrow and desolation were nigh at hand.

Thus there were “signs of the times,” eighteen hundred years ago. The “signs” consisted of natural occurrences of a calamitous nature, which would slowly gather over the Jewish nation. The process extended over thirty years. It began in apparently trifling incidents which, one after another, exasperated the public mind and gradually brought on the tempest which engulfed the nation. Disciples of the faithful class would observe

the tokens and keep themselves in harmony with the work to be done, others would say they saw nothing divine in the public affairs of the time, but the mere natural workings of things as they had always been. The watching class would point to the drift of things as antagonistic to the Jews; the others would have it in their power to point to cases in which the Jews got the upper hand—particularly as the great crisis itself approached, when Cestius, the Roman general, was overpowered and driven out of the country, and the whole nation rose in a war of independence.

In this respect, the signs of the times of eighteen hundred years ago presented features analogous to those of our own time. It is instructive to look back and see how amid all the vicissitudes of public affairs, the day of vengeance slowly crept over Israel by natural means, and at last broke into destructive fury and obliterated almost the very existence of Israel from the earth. We shall only attempt a summary of Josephus's narrative, and that more particularly for the benefit of those who may find Josephus' diction too heavy and elaborate.

The "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" was first visible in the sky about A.D. 40—in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, when Cumanus was appointed Procurator of Judea. Under him a tumult was occasioned in Jerusalem, at the Passover Feast, by a Roman soldier making a contemptuous gesture at the exercises of the Jews. A collision ensued between the Jews and the Roman soldiery, in which many Jews were slain. Afterwards a number of Jews out of Galilee, going up to Jerusalem

to the Feast of Tabernacles were molested by the Samaritans, and one of the Jews slain. The Jews appealed to Cumanus for the punishment of the murderer without success. The affair becoming known at Jerusalem during the feast, caused great excitement, and a band of Jews marched to Samaria, under Eleazar, and burned several villages and slew the inhabitants. Cumanus arrived with a troop of horsemen from Cæsarea, and dispersed the Jewish band, which, however, though scattered, betook themselves to acts of violence throughout the country. In several conflicts a great number of Jews were captured and crucified. A new class of troublers succeeded them, the Sicardii, who concealed daggers under their garments, with which to stab in the crowds at the feasts. Jonathan, the High Priest, fell a victim to them. Many others were slain, and great public fear was established. Another faction made its appearance among the people, pretending inspiration, and allured numbers of the Jews into the wilderness. Troubles were increased by the uprise of an Egyptian who pretended to be a prophet, and gathered as many as thirty thousand to him, and attempted to break into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. The attempt was defeated by the Roman soldiers, and the army of the Egyptian dispersed. But after a short interval, numbers of these scattered marauders combined to agitate for Jewish independence. They incited the Jews to revolt against the Romans. Not succeeding with the respectable part of the nation, they broke up into bands and ravaged the country in all directions, plundering and murdering and burning.

Festus (after Cumanus and Felix) addressed himself to the pacification of the country, capturing and killing the insurgents in all directions. He was soon, however, superseded by Albinus, who was not actuated by any desire to promote the public welfare. He not only embezzled the revenue, but sold to others the license to steal and plunder. He liberated all kinds of prisoners for money, and gave authority to the insurgent ringleaders in Jerusalem to do as they liked for the same consideration. These ringleaders forgot their politics and turned common robbers, who put the whole city in fear. Those who were robbed kept silence for fear of their lives, and those who escaped flattered the robbers for fear of being robbed.

Troubles were aggravated by the appointment of Gessius Florus to the governorship. This man made no sort of dissimulation of his corruptions, but openly proclaimed that any one had liberty to turn robber who shared the spoils with him. The result naturally was the desolation of whole districts. In fear of being accused before Cæsar, he deliberately sought to goad the nation into revolt against Rome. He demanded seventeen thousand talents out of the treasury on the plea that Cæsar wanted them. The people in tumultuous assembly decided to appeal to Cæsar against Florus, on hearing which, Florus marched an army to Jerusalem. The people were cowed, and Florus ordered his soldiers to plunder the upper market place. Three thousand six hundred Jews, with their wives and children, were, in consequence, slain in the streets and

houses. Many of the quiet inhabitants were brought before Florus, who had them scourged and then crucified in his presence. The principal men among the Jews advised submission to stave off further calamities, and Florus fearing their advice would be taken by the Jews, and that there would be no rebellion, commanded the people next day to go out and salute the Roman soldiers, instructing the soldiers beforehand not to return the salute. The people went out and saluted the soldiers, who made no answer. The impatient among the Jews gave vent to their feelings, and the soldiers attacked the crowd. The crowd fled, and in getting in at the gate, the crush was so great that vast numbers were suffocated and trampled to pieces. The Jews in the city rallied and beat back the soldiers by missiles from the tops of the houses.

Florus then sent word to Cestius Gallus, President of Syria, that the Jews had revolted. The violent of the people made an attack upon the fortress Masada, and slew the Roman garrison. The High Priest and the Pharisees met and resolved to suppress the revolt, but their efforts were overborne by the violence of the people. The High Priest and the Pharisees then sent for Roman soldiers to suppress the sedition before it should become hopeless. Agrippa sent three thousand horse. By this time, the lower city and the temple were in the power of the insurgents. On the arrival of the Roman horse outside the walls, the party of the High Priest and Pharisees, desiring peace with Rome, seized the upper city to help the Romans. Seven days' fighting ensued, ending in

the triumph of the insurgents, who set fire to the High Priest's house and the Palace of Agrippa and Bernice in Jerusalem. Manahem, the son of Judas the Galilean, became leader of the revolt, and broke open the Roman armoury in the city and distributed arms among the people. They then laid siege to the tower of Masada, (in the city) which capitulated after several days. The Roman garrison, who were promised their lives, were slain after giving up their arms. The High Priest Ananias, who was with the Roman party, was found concealed in an aqueduct and slain.

Tidings of these events reaching Cæsarea, the entire Jewish community in that city numbering twenty thousand, were put to the sword by the Romans. Hearing of this, the whole nation became enraged, and the insurrection became general. Bands of Jews ravaged the country, and put immense numbers of the Syrians and Roman colonists to death. The disorder became terrible through all Syria. Every city was divided into a Jewish party and a Roman party, who slew each other in the day-time, and spent the night in fear. It became common to see whole cities filled with dead bodies lying unburied; women, old men and infants, forming a large proportion of the slain.

Cestius Gallus, seeing the Jews everywhere in arms, got together a large body of troops, and marched it to Ptolemais. Here he was joined by auxiliaries from various parts of the country. Cestius marched hastily to the city of Zebulon, the inhabitants of which fled to the mountains at his approach. He gave over the city

to plunder, and then set fire to it. He overran and devastated the surrounding country, then returned to Ptolemais; thence he marched to Cæsarea, from which a division of his army was sent to Joppa. Joppa, taken by surprise and attacked on both sides, fell an easy prey to the Roman soldiers, who fell upon the Jewish inhabitants, and exterminated old and young, to the number of eight thousand four hundred. Narbatene next fell a prey to the Romans, who destroyed the bulk of its inhabitants, and laid waste the surrounding country.

Having overpowered resistance in Galilee, Cestius marched to Antipatris, where, at Aphek, the Jewish insurgents were in force. The Jews fled before the Romans, and the Romans burnt their camp and the surrounding villages. Cestius then marched to Lydda. He found the city empty of men, the male population having gone up to Jerusalem to the feast of Tabernacles. Cestius burnt the city, and marched towards Jerusalem. He encamped within six miles of the city. The Jews, hearing of his approach, broke up the feast, and marched in enormous numbers to the Roman camp, and attacked the Romans. The Romans repulsed them, but the Jews seized the heights overlooking the Roman army, and resolved to resist the march of Cestius to Jerusalem. The Romans tried to negotiate a retreat, but the Jews killed one of the ambassadors and wounded the other. Cestius then attacked them and put them to flight, and pursued them to Jerusalem. He pitched his camp within a mile of the city. On the fourth day, he brought

his army within the walls. The violent party among the Jews retired into the inner city and into the Temple, defying the Romans. The Romans attacked the insurgents. For five days, they assailed the inner walls within which the insurgents had retired. The attack was without result. On the sixth day, Cestius, with a select body of soldiers, attempted to break into the Temple by its most assailable part. The Jews repelled the attack. The attack was renewed several times, but each time was repulsed. The Romans then began to undermine the wall, under the protection of their shields ; but, at this point, when success was within reach of the Roman grasp, Cestius, apparently unconscious of the fact, ordered the soldiers to retire. The soldiers obeyed, and marched out of the city. The insurgents, perceiving their unexpected retreat, recovered their courage, which had begun to desert them, and returned to the attack. They issued from the Temple, and ran after the Romans, harassing the hinder part of the army. Cestius encamped outside the city ; next day he moved further off, which the Jews perceiving, they followed him in increasing numbers, and kept up a fire of darts on both flanks of the retiring army. Many of the Romans were slain. The Romans halted at Gabao, seven miles from Jerusalem. Here they stayed two days. The surrounding hills became full of Jews. Cestius, perceiving his danger, ordered a forced march to Bethhoron. To reach this, the army had to go through mountain passes. To these, the Jews ran before, and occupying the heights, pelted the Roman army with darts and stones. The

Roman army, unable to flee, gave itself up to despair. During the night, the principal part of the Romans escaped, leaving their siege engines and baggage behind them. The Jews continued the pursuit, and then returned to Jerusalem in great triumph to concert measures for

A WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.





CHAPTER XXV.

The repulse of Cestius causes uneasiness at Rome —The emperor Nero orders the suppression of the Jews in revolt —Entrusts the work to the hands of Vespasian and his son Titus.—The Jews organise a war of independence —A Roman army concentrated at Antioch —The Roman plan of operation —The Jews commence hostilities at Askelon —Are twice defeated there —Sepphoris surrenders —Gadara attacked and taken by the Romans —They attack Jotapata. —Desperate defence by Josephus —The city finally taken and overthrown —Capture and destruction of Tarichea —Siege and capture of Gamala —Taking of Gischala —Galilee subdued.—The country desolated —Fugitives repair to Jerusalem —Dreadful disorders break out in the city



CESTIUS, the Roman general, after his flight from Jerusalem, reported to Nero the calamity that had befallen the Roman arms. The report caused Nero great uneasiness. After much deliberation, he selected Vespasian, a military veteran in the Roman army who had distinguished himself in the west and in the reconquest of Britain, and instructed him to suppress the Jewish rebellion at all hazards.

Vespasian ordered his son Titus who was in Achaia to join him at Alexandria, with the fifth and tenth legions. He himself crossed the Hellespont, and marched into Syria, where he was reinforced by several Roman detachments and bands of auxiliaries.

Meanwhile, the Jews, elated with their unexpected success in the defeat of Cestius, made large preparations for war with the Romans. They collected large numbers of Jewish soldiers and organised the public service.

Josephus, the writer of the history, receiving a command in Galilee, fortified Jotapata, and the principal cities in his jurisdiction, he also organised an army of a hundred thousand young men, whom he was at great pains to teach Roman discipline and tactics. Vespasian concentrated the Roman forces at Antioch. The plan of operations resolved upon was, to attack and reduce the outlying positions in the country one by one, with the hope that the Jews soon perceiving it was useless to resist the Romans, would give up the contest. This was a wise plan, but did not work out the expected result. As Josephus remarks, a frenzy seemed to possess the whole nation, urging them to a resistance that compelled the Romans, against their will, to proceed to the utmost extremities against them.

Hearing of the arrival of the Romans, the Jews resolved to assume the offensive. They despatched an army from Jerusalem to attack the Romans at Askelon. A battle ensued which resulted in the repulse and great slaughter of the Jews, of whom ten thousand lay dead in the field. In a short time, the Jews rallied their forces, and renewed the assault on Askelon, from which, however, they were again driven with a loss of eight thousand men. The rest pursued, took refuge in the tower of Bezedel, to which the Romans set fire, and a vast number of Jews miserably perished in the flames.

Vespasian marched from Antioch to Ptolemais—his army mustering sixty thousand. At Ptolemais, a Jewish deputation from Sepphoris placed that city at the disposal of the Roman general, and received a garrison which, returning with the deputation, occupied Sepphoris. The garrison amounted to six thousand infantry and one thousand horse, under Placidus, the tribune. Josephus, hearing of it, marched to the place, hoping to wrest it from the hands of the Romans, but failed. The Romans, incensed at the attack, established martial law, under which the soldiers used their uttermost liberty of plundering and burning throughout the province. Galilee, overrun, was filled with fire and blood. The people in the open country fled to the walled cities for refuge. Those who could not escape were killed or sold as slaves, and the country desolated. Placidus then attacked Jotapata, where Josephus commanded in person; but Josephus, in a sortie, compelled the Roman tribune to retire.

Vespasian then marched from Ptolemais to Gadara, which he took at the first assault and put the inhabitants to the sword without respect of age. The place was burnt to the ground, and also all the villas and villages in the neighbourhood. Survivors brought in as prisoners were condemned to slavery. Many fugitives repaired to Jotapata. Vespasian, hearing that Josephus was there, determined to make every sacrifice necessary to the capture of that place, imagining that with the capture of Josephus (who was known to the Romans) the war would end. Vespasian, with great speed, marched his

whole army to Jotapata, a place of great strength in the mountains. The assault on the first day was a failure, also during the four succeeding days, during which the Jews sallied forth in large numbers, and with great desperation beat off the attacks of the Romans. On the sixth day, the Romans commenced a regular siege; they raised a bank from which to fight the defenders on the walls. The work was much hindered by constant Jewish sallies in small bands, who scattered fire among the materials used in the construction of the bank, besides killing many of those engaged in the work. While the bank was progressing, Josephus, concealing his operations by a tall screen on the wall, raised the wall of the city thirty feet higher, so that the bank when finished was useless. The Romans discouraged, resolved to suspend the attack and starve the city into surrender. The activity of the Jews, in incessant sorties, however, compelled the Romans to resume the offensive. A battering ram was got into play against a portion of the wall. Josephus met the shock by lowering sacks filled with soft materials between the wall and the engine. The Romans succeeded in cutting down the sacks. The Jews then made a sally in great force to destroy the engine. They sallied from three directions, and piling burning materials round the battering engine, they set fire to it. The result was that the engine and the bank, which had cost the Romans many days' patient labour, were consumed in an hour. The Romans then made a desperate attempt to take the city by assault. It was on the point of succeeding when Josephus ordered

boiling oil to be poured upon the soldiers who were scaling the walls. This compelled them to abandon the attempt. Vespasian then ordered the banks to be raised again, with three towers fifty feet high. In due time, the work was accomplished, and Vespasian learning, on the forty-seventh day of the siege, that the Jews were worn out with incessant watching and suffering from want of water, and that the watch at night was loosely kept, made a night attack by which he succeeded in gaining entrance into the city. Exasperated by the prolonged and bitter defence of the Jews, the Romans gave over the inhabitants to indiscriminate slaughter. Of forty thousand in the city at the commencement of the siege, only one thousand two hundred women and children were spared for captivity. Josephus was taken alive and retained in Vespasian's staff. Jotapata was burnt and the fortifications demolished.

Joppa, a fortified town near Jotapata, with an outer and inner wall, was attacked by a small Roman force under Trajan, sent by Vespasian. The Jewish garrison met the Romans outside the walls and were defeated. In escaping within the first wall, the Romans got inside with them, and the Jews inside the second wall, fearing the entry of the Romans in the same way, shut the gates against their own people, who were put to the sword by the Romans to the number of many thousands. The Romans, reinforced by Titus, then proceeded to besiege the inner city, and in a short time succeeded in forcing an entrance and obtaining possession. The Jews, however, refusing to surrender, continued to fight the

Romans in the streets and from the windows of the houses. The result was the total extermination of the inhabitants to the number of fifteen thousand, over two thousand being reserved as captives to grace a subsequent triumph.

Vespasian heard that Mount Gerizim was in the possession of a force of nearly twelve thousand insurgents. He despatched Cerealis with about two thousand five hundred horse and foot to disperse them. The Romans surrounded the foot of the mountain and summoned the insurgents to surrender. On their refusal, the Roman commander attacked them and put them all to the sword.

Vespasian then retired to winter quarters at Cæsarea and Scythopolis. He heard that Joppa, on the sea coast, was in the hands of the insurgents, and that they had many ships with which they piratically infested the whole coast, doing much damage. He despatched a force to capture the place. The garrison, after a short fight, took refuge in the ships which crowded the roadstead. During the following night, a violent storm drove the ships on the rocks, and multitudes were drowned, and those who gained the shore were destroyed by the Romans. The Romans burned Joppa to the ground, and pillaged the whole country round for miles in all directions.

After receiving the submission of Tiberias, Vespasian proceeded towards Tarichea, on the lake of Gennesareth. Tarichea, a strongly fortified place, with a fleet in the lake, bade defiance to the Romans. Finally, the Romans carried the place by assault. The Jewish soldiers escaped

to the ships, and fled to other parts of the lake. They were followed in a few days by the Romans, who destroyed the Jewish fleet, and massacred the crews and soldiers. About six thousand five hundred perished. The survivors, to the number of between thirty and forty thousand, gave themselves up to the Romans on a promise of preservation. The old men, numbering one thousand two hundred, were sent to Tiberias and massacred, six thousand of the strongest were sent to Nero, to labour on the public works : the rest were sold into slavery.

Hearing of the fall of Tarichea, all the neighbouring fortresses and cities of Galilee surrendered to the Romans, except Gamala, Gischala, and Mount Tabor. Gamala, strongly situated among the mountains by the lake, was then invested by Vespasian. Banks were cast up by the Romans. A breach being made, the Romans carried the place by assault ; but the streets being narrow and precipitous, and the inhabitants numerous and furious, the Romans were repulsed, and retired to the outside of the walls with a considerable loss. The Romans renewed the assault without success, but destroyed many of the Jews. They then settled down to the regular operations of a siege : provisions ran short in the city. Many of the people died of famine. At the end of several weeks a principal tower was undermined and fell with a crash, spreading consternation throughout the city. The Romans entered the city, and a desperate conflict ensued, during which the streets ran with blood. A gale of wind at the same time blew vast numbers of the Jews over

the precipices on which the city was built. many voluntarily threw themselves down rather than be taken prisoners by the Romans. In all nine thousand perished.

Titus was then sent by Vespasian against Gischala, which was full of military fugitives. Titus perceived the place was capable of easy assault, and already satiated with blood-shedding, he proposed favourable terms of capitulation. This was on the Sabbath. A certain violent man named John, who had made himself leader of the place, asked Titus to wait till the Sabbath was over, which Titus, peaceably inclined, consented to do, and withdrew his troops to camp at some distance. John took advantage of the opportunity to flee. He escaped by night. Several thousands of the citizens with their families fled with him—a multitude of women and children. When three miles out of the city, finding the people with him slow in their movements, he left them, and rode in all haste to Jerusalem. Many of the men accompanied him, notwithstanding the agonizing importunities of wives and children to stay. The multitude thus deserted were in great distress. They were afraid to go back and unable to go forward. They dispersed among the hills, and vast numbers of the women and children perished. Next day, the Romans slew crowds of them. Three thousand of them were driven back like a flock of sheep to the city. The city was spared and occupied by a garrison.

Vespasian then advanced from Cæsarea to Jauma and Azotus, both of which he captured and garrisoned. Disorder and civil war now prevailed throughout the country.

The Jews were everywhere divided between those who wanted war and those who wanted peace. This raised feuds even in private families, and led to bitter quarrels. The more violent banded together in bodies and betook themselves to rapine, and for barbarity and iniquity exceeded the Romans themselves. The Roman garrisons took no notice of these disorders, and the country became a prey to misery. The lawless bands, after exhausting their opportunities of plunder and cruelty, repaired one after the other to Jerusalem, which became crowded with the refuse of the country.

JERUSALEM BEFORE THE SIEGE.

Galilee subdued, the Romans next turned their eyes anxiously to Jerusalem, which, on account of its great strength and abundance of supplies, threatened a stubborn resistance. John of Gischala, arriving there, incited the people to war, by reporting the Romans to be in a weak condition on account of the resistance of Galilee. John's harangues had the effect of inciting the young and violent part of the city, but saddening the aged and the prudent. The numerous vagabonds from the country sided with John, and soon evinced a disposition to domineer over the city. They supplied their own private wants by robbery, and murdered all who stood in their way. They assassinated the public treasurer, a man of royal lineage, and two other public men. Other leading men soon fell a prey to their violence, under the pretence that their victims were in secret correspondence with the Romans. Terror prevailed in the city even

before the Romans arrived. Ananus, the high priest, persuaded the people to rise against John's party, who, after a collision and much effusion of blood, took refuge in the temple, and fortified themselves there against their assailants. John's party sent secretly for the Idumean Jews to come to their assistance. The Idumeans came to the number of twenty thousand, but the party of the high priest refused them admittance. John's party, who may be called the temple party, cut open one of the gates at night during a tempest, and admitted the Idumeans to the temple. When their presence was discovered, dismay filled the city. Fighting ensued, during which the Idumeans slew nearly nine thousand persons. The outer wall of the temple was covered with blood. The Idumeans proceeded to violent measures in the government of the city. They assassinated the high priest, Ananus, who, had he lived, had influence enough to have persuaded the Jews to submit to the Romans and save the city. Jesus, the next in influence to Ananus, was also slain, and the bodies of both thrown out of the city naked and without burial. General massacre ensued. The better class of citizens were imprisoned in the hope they would join the Idumean party; refusing which, they were put to all manner of tortures. Public terror prevailed. Nobody had even courage to weep for the dead or bury them, for anyone suspected of sympathy with the murdered were immediately put to death.

The temple party increased in arrogance with their success, and resolved to assume the government of the

city. They determined to get rid of Zacharias, a leading man in Jerusalem, of great influence by reason of his wealth, wisdom, and probity. They arraigned him before the Sanhedrim on the accusation of designing to betray the city to the Romans. They furnished no proof, and the Sanhedrim acquitted him of the charge; whereupon two of the party slew Zacharias before the Sanhedrim, and dismissed the Sanhedrim with a blow on the back of each member with a sword. The Idumeans then got out of love with the proceedings of the Temple party, and left Jerusalem in a body. The high-priest party were glad of this, but without reason, for the Temple party became more audacious and lawless in their proceedings—arresting and assassinating prominent citizens at their pleasure. Anarchy then set in. The Roman commanders hearing of what was going on, advised Vespasian to march on the city. Vespasian replied that God was fighting for the Romans, and that it would be far better to leave the Jews to wear themselves out in their seditions than to unite them by attacking them. Many Jews left the city and deserted to the Romans. The exodus was stopped by the Temple party, who killed all who were found fleeing, unless they were able to pay a large sum of money for their liberty to go. All along the roads vast numbers of dead bodies began to accumulate in heaps. The Temple party refused burial, and the bodies putrefied in the sun. If any man in the city granted a grave to any of the slain, he was himself killed instantly. The terror of the living grew so great that the dead were envied. To increase

the dreadfulness of the situation, the Temple party laughed at the law, and poured contempt on the prophets as "jugglers"; though, as Josephus observes, they proved the prophets true by the miseries they brought on the city. John, the leader of the Temple party, aspired to the position of dictator; upon which the Temple faction split into two parts—one for, and the other against him.

The fortress of Masada, outside of Jerusalem, at this point, was seized by a large band of lawless men, who made incursions from the fortress into the neighbouring country, and plundered the villages, slaying the inhabitants. Engoddi, a small city in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem was taken by them. The population fled, and the women and children left behind, to the number of seven hundred, were butchered. The whole region was quickly desolated, and those parts of Judea hitherto quiet, were now in commotion and misery.

Vespasian was importuned to come to the rescue. He temporised, but at last decided to move, resolving, however, to reduce what Jewish cities still held out in the provinces, so that nothing might interrupt him in the siege of Jerusalem when once begun. Accordingly, he marched against Gadara, the metropolis of Perea, a place of some strength. The place was surrendered on the fourth day, and the walls demolished, but the people spared on account of their friendly disposition to the Romans. Numerous seditious fugitives escaped from Gadara to Bethennabris, and made a stand with the Jews there. A detachment of Roman horse followed

them and took the place by storm, and put all the inhabitants to the sword, and burnt the village. A few survivors escaped; they spread the news of the Roman arrival throughout the district, and declared that the only hope lay in insurrection *en masse*. The population accordingly left their homes in the hills and mountains, and fled to Jericho, which was fortified, and had many inhabitants. Before they got there, they were overtaken by the Roman horse and driven to the banks of the Jordan, and compelled to accept battle. A massacre—not a battle—ensued; 15,000 were slain by the Romans; large numbers were drowned in the Jordan, and 2,200 taken prisoners.

The Roman commander Placidus, who performed this exploit, next fell on the smaller cities and villages in the district, subduing Abila, Julias, and Bezemoth, and all other places toward the Dead Sea.

Vespasian marched to Jericho. Hearing of his approach, a great multitude left Jericho and took refuge in the mountains. Vespasian took the city and built a citadel, in which he placed a garrison. He despatched a Roman officer, with horse and foot, to Gerasa. The place was taken at the first assault, the young men slain, the houses pillaged and then burnt. The adjoining villages were treated in the same way.

The mountainous district of Judea was now desolate and also the plain country, and escape from Jerusalem was impossible. Returning to Cæsarea to make final arrangements for the siege of Jerusalem, Vespasian was informed of the death of Nero, and suspended his plans

till he should see who was made Emperor, and what instructions he should receive as to the Jewish war.

The death of Nero postponed the fate of Jerusalem for many months. Meanwhile, new trouble arose for that unhappy city. One Simon, of Gerasa, a man of violent and domineering disposition, got himself appointed captain of the marauding bands in the fortress of Masada. Increasing his numbers by various means, he extended his operations into the open country about Jerusalem till he was in a position to invade Idumea. The Temple party in Jerusalem—headed by John of Gischala—watched Simon's movements with great jealousy. They captured his wife and household, and brought them into Jerusalem. Simon appeared outside the walls of Jerusalem in great rage, and demanded the restoration of his wife. He laid hold of all the stragglers he could find outside Jerusalem; killed many by torture, and cut off the hands of others and sent them maimed into Jerusalem. His threatenings were so formidable that the temple zealots at last sent his wife out to him. He departed into Idumea, but returned in a short time and environed the whole city with his soldiers, torturing and slaying all who ventured out of the city.

Meanwhile, inside the city, affairs became worse. John of Gischala propitiated the support of his party by giving them license to pillage and murder and ravish without restraint. His men revelled in every form of violence and excess. Many sought to escape from the city, but in fleeing from John inside the walls, they fell

into the hands of Simon outside. Affairs grew so bad that the high priest party tried to overthrow John by admitting Simon. The people welcomed Simon with joyful acclamation: but the remedy proved worse than the disease. Simon having obtained possession of Jerusalem, treated those who had admitted him as enemies equally with those of John's party. He made an assault on the Temple where John's party were established. A great deal of bloodshed ensued, but with little result.

A faction then sprang up in John's party, headed by Eleazar the priest. Desirous of getting rid of John's tyranny, this faction established themselves against John in the inner court of the Temple and assailed John's adherents from the upper part of the building. John was thus between two fires—Simon in the city and Eleazar in the inner and higher parts of the temple. Constant and desperate fighting ensued between the parties. Simon and John both resorted to the use of fire, by which the principal calamity of the city was prepared. In addition to the houses near the Temple where the strife raged, the granaries near the Temple in which had been stored corn that would have lasted the city several years, were burnt down. This was the cause of famine afterwards. The city now sank to a state of extreme wretchedness, and the elder part earnestly desired the arrival of the Romans, but had no means of communicating with them, or in any way of influencing the course of events, as every exit from the city was carefully guarded, and every one suspected of

favouring the Romans was put to death, equally by the three factions at war with each other.

The Roman army at Cæsarea proclaimed Vespasian emperor. Vespasian departed to Alexandria, and thence to Rome, leaving the direction of the war to his son Titus. Titus remained for a time at Cæsarea, making preparations for the siege of Jerusalem. At last he marched and was reinforced at various points.





CHAPTER XXVI.

Arrival of the Romans before Jerusalem — Preparations for siege — The feast of unleavened bread draws large numbers to the city. — The city crowded — The suburbs devastated by the siege works — The Jews desperately molest the Romans — Capture of the first wall — Then of the second — Deserters to the Romans — Desperate resistance of the defenders — Titus shows them the Roman army in array for four days without result. — Proposes terms of submission in vain — Renews the siege — Speech by Josephus — Progress of famine — Thousands of dead bodies thrown over the walls — Dreadful closing scenes — Hundreds of Jews crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem — The houses inside crowded with dead — Capture and burning of the city and Temple — Enormous crowds of slain.



IN due course, the Romans, marching under Titus from Cæsarea, arrived at Scopus, within sight of the doomed city. There they encamped. The first thing Titus did was to make a circuit of the city with a body of horsemen to view the place, in the course of which he was nearly captured by the Jews in a sally. As the result of his inspection, he ordered the construction of three fortified camps round Jerusalem. The Jews then dropped their quarrels and made common cause against the Romans. While the

Romans were at work on their fortifications, the Jews sallied in overpowering numbers, and drove the Romans away. Reinforcements arriving, the Jews were driven back into the city. The Romans resuming work, the Jews made a second sally in greater force than before, and with terrible energy. Josephus says they rushed as if they had been shot out of a siege engine, and that the Romans could not withstand the fury of their onset. The Romans broke and fled. Titus himself with a select band of soldiers stood in the breach and succeeded at last in rallying the fleeing soldiers and repelling the Jewish assault.

After this, the Romans proceeded with their fortifications in peace, and the internal strife again broke out in Jerusalem. The feast of unleavened bread having arrived, great numbers of people, notwithstanding the dreadfulness of the times, pressed into the city to keep the feast. The Temple was opened for the service, and John of Gischala made use of the opportunity to introduce a large band of his supporters, with arms concealed under their clothes. Once inside, they threw off their disguise and seized the Temple. Scenes of violence ensued, during which many were slain in the Temple.

Titus, for the erection of battering rams, levelled a considerable space outside the walls in the direction of Scopus, using for the purpose the hedges and walls of all the gardens and groves in the neighbourhood, and also all the fruit trees that abounded in the valleys in the suburbs. He also brought great masses from the rocks with iron instruments, and in this way filled up all the

chasms and hollow places from Scopus to Herod's monuments, desolating the environs of Jerusalem which had been of great beauty.

Having, in four days, completed the levelling works, Titus made a tour of inspection round the walls. Josephus was with him, and instructed by Titus, proposed terms of surrender to the Jews on the wall. The Jews answered with darts, one of which wounded Nicanor, a friend of Titus, on the left shoulder. This exasperated Titus, who gave his soldiers leave to set the suburbs on fire. He also directed them to cut down all the trees within reach and bring them for the purpose of raising banks against the city. The Jews brought the siege engines to the walls, which they had captured from Cestius, and kept up a fire of stones and arrows against the Romans busy at the banks. They also made frequent sorties. Notwithstanding this opposition, the Romans finished their banks, and the battering rams were brought into play. In the consternation caused by the shocks of the engines on the wall, the Jews again suspended their dissensions and fought against the Romans. They kept up a perpetual fire of darts and torches on the soldiers working the engines, who, however, continued their operations, yet without result to the wall.

After a lull, the Jews made a sally in great force at the Tower of Hippicus and tried to set the Roman engine on fire. The Romans were obliged to give way for a time, but finally succeeded in driving back the Jews, who nearly succeeded in their object. One of the Jews taken

prisoner in this fight was by order of Titus crucified before the wall, to strike terror into the besieged. On the following night, the engines began to make an impression on the wall, especially one called Nico, which succeeded in making a large breach. A chosen band of Romans entered this breach, and as the Jews had retired within the second wall to escape the fire of darts from the towers, the Romans who assaulted the breach easily obtained possession of the first wall, and opening the gate admitted the whole army. This was on the fifteenth day of the siege.

Having captured the first wall, and having seized that portion of the city lying outside the second wall, Titus transferred his camp within the second wall, and immediately made arrangements to attack the second wall. The Romans, however, were harassed by constant and violent sallies from the Jews. For several days, neither side wearied. The day was occupied in perpetual attacks and repulses, and the night passed without sleep, from the fear each side was in that advantage would be taken by the other of the darkness. At last the Roman engines made a breach through which a thousand Roman soldiers entered and took possession of the second wall. Titus hoped that this event would break the resistance of the Jews and lead to the surrender of the city, which he was very desirous of preserving from destruction. With this view, he forbade the soldiers to kill any of the Jews caught on the second wall, or to set fire to any of the houses. He then proposed terms of capitulation. The bulk of the inhabitants were anxious to comply, but

the fighting men rejected the proposal with scorn, and threatened death to every one disposed for peace. Some who advocated peace were instantly put to death, and an attack was made in great force upon the Romans who had come within the second wall. These taken at a disadvantage from their ignorance of the tortuous and narrow streets, were overpowered, and only a portion of them escaped through the breach with their lives.

The Romans renewed their attack on the breach. Inside of the breach the Jews formed themselves in a dense body. Covered with their armour, they formed a wall with their own bodies, which for three days the Romans in vain tried to break. On the fourth day, the Roman attack became so vehement that the Jews were obliged to give way and flee within the third wall. Titus demolished the captured (second) wall, and made preparations for an attack on the third.

Before commencing his attack on the third wall, Titus resolved to try the effect of a military display on the minds of the beleaguered Jews. He accordingly got his soldiers to polish their accoutrements and get themselves into good trim, and then marshalled his army in imposing array in a prominent place inside the north wall. The splendid appearance of so great a body of troops produced a great impression on the countless thousands of spectators who covered the walls of the temple and the houses of the city. Even the hardiest of the Jews were overawed, and Josephus expresses the opinion that but for the enormity of the crimes of which the factionists had been guilty, causing them to despair of forgiveness,

the city would have surrendered. As it was, the factionists, believing they would die with torments if they surrendered to the Romans, prepared to die in war, and resolved to go on with the defence of the city. The display lasted four days, and Titus, perceiving no sign of surrender, on the fifth day resumed the work of the siege.

The Romans raised banks at the tower of Antonia, and at John's monument. They found difficulty, however, in prosecuting the work, for the Jews within the third wall, standing on a higher elevation than the Romans, were able to keep up a constant fire of missiles upon them. The Jews had now learnt the use of siege engines, and of one sort for the firing of darts, they had no fewer than three hundred in position, and forty for stones. By this means they were able very seriously to impede the progress of the Roman work.

Titus, perceiving the slow progress made, resolved to make one more effort to induce surrender. He sent Josephus, who was attached to his staff, and whose wife and mother were among the besieged, to intercede with them. Josephus dared not enter within reach of the Jewish missiles, but selected a safe place within hearing distance of the wall and delivered an eloquent address to them, using every argument to induce them for their own sakes and for the sake of the city to surrender to the Romans. The Jews scorned his words and threw darts at him, whereupon he delivered himself of a long and vehement denunciation, expressing his conviction that that generation of Jews was the most impious

that had ever existed, and that God had fled from His sanctuary and was on the side of those who were fighting against it.

Although the violent and factionist element of the Jews spurned Josephus's advice, his speech made a great impression on the common people, many of whom stole out of the city to the Romans and were allowed to pass through the military lines into the country. This caused increased vigilance on the part of the factionists within the city, who killed everyone in the least suspected of an intention to desert to the Romans.

DREADFUL CLOSING SCENES.

All order now began slowly to dissolve in the doomed city. Food grew scarce. The factionists went up and down the city to secure, by force, a supply for themselves. They entered private houses and took whatever description of food they could find. If they found none, they suspected there had been concealment, and tormented the inmates till they disclosed their hoard. If the inmates were emaciated, they believed them when they said they had no food in concealment, and passed on without further search. If they saw any house shut up, this was to them a signal that the people inside had some food, and they broke open the doors, ran in, and in many cases took the food out of the people's very mouths. Old men who held fast their food were beaten till they let go. Women hiding what they had got, had their hair torn out by the roots, and children clinging to their morsels were lifted and dashed on the ground. Those who had

succeeded in actually swallowing their food before the robbers obtained admission, were tortured as if they had been guilty of a fraud.

The scarcity of food became so great that even the rich had difficulty in procuring, at exorbitant price, a single measure of corn. When they got it, they ate it in stealth and with closed doors for fear of the robbers. There was no such thing as a regular meal throughout the city, except among the soldier-robbers of Simon and John. The demoralization caused by the famine extended to private houses—children pulled the morsel from their fathers' mouths, and mothers were not ashamed to eat what was set apart for their children, while the dying were utterly neglected. Some crept out of the city by night to gather wild plants, but almost invariably the soldier-robbers snatched from them what they got.

Titus laid an ambush for those who came out to gather food, and a great number of them were captured. Titus, thinking it unsafe to let them at large, and not feeling he could spare soldiers to watch them as prisoners, gave in to the clamour of the Roman soldiers, whose hatred of the Jews had by this been fanned into a fierce flame. He consented to their being crucified. Crosses were erected all round the walls in sight of the besieged, with the writhing forms of the wretched prisoners transfixed upon them. The followers of Simon and John used this as an argument against surrender. Notwithstanding this, many ran out of the city, preferring death at the hands of their enemies to the slow agonies of starvation. These, by the order of Titus, had their hands cut off,

and were sent back into the city, if possible, to terrorise the city into submission. He rode round the city, exhorting the besieged to leave off their madness and not force him to destroy the city. In answer to this, they heaped reproaches on him from the wall.

The Romans then made additional efforts to raise banks for the siege engines. In seventeen days, four great banks were finished, and the engines were placed on them. The engines had scarcely got to work, however, when the principal bank, which had been, unknown to the Romans, undermined from the interior of the city, suddenly fell in with a loud noise, and was consumed with fire issuing from the mine. The Jews then made a sally upon the other banks, and set fire to the engines in the midst of desperate fighting. This occurrence very much discouraged the Romans.

Titus then abandoned the erection of banks, and resolved to build a wall round the city with towers, hermetically closing the city in till starvation should compel a surrender. The whole army were set to work, and in three days, the wall was completed. By this means the Jews were hemmed into the uncaptured part of the city, and could no longer make incursions to the environs either for food or fighting. A deep silence settled down on the city and famine made its direful progress. The upper rooms of the houses were full of dying women and children, and the streets full of dead bodies. Burial ceased and bodies were simply thrown over the walls into the valley beneath. Titus, in going his rounds, was shocked at the thick putrefaction running

about the heaps of the dead, and called to witness that he was not responsible for this awful state of things. He then began again to raise banks so as to expedite the capture of the city and put an end to the misery of the living.

Inside the city, one of Simon's lieutenants resolved to surrender the tower in his charge. Having persuaded the garrison, he beckoned to the Romans, who took no heed, not believing him to be in earnest. Titus hearing of it, approached the tower, but by this time, Simon, within the city, had become aware of the lieutenant's purpose, entered the tower, seized and killed the garrison in the sight of the Romans, and mangling their dead bodies, threw them down the wall.

Many of the Jews now deserted to the Romans; but only to encounter an awful death. A report (true in many cases) got abroad that the Jews deserting the city had swallowed gold to save it from the robbers inside. The Roman soldiers consequently killed and opened every Jew that fell into their hands for the sake of the gold. Josephus mentions that in one night, about two thousand Jews were thus dissected. He remarks that God had condemned the whole nation, and turned every course that was taken for their preservation, to their destruction.

Inside the city, John and his robber companions finding no more opportunity of plunder among the people, melted down the holy golden vessels of the temple. They now fought without any hope of victory, and gave themselves over to the hardihood of despair. They only

aimed to harass the Romans as much as possible, and the Romans suffered great distress at their hands.

The wall suddenly gave way at the place where the ground had been undermined for the destruction of the Roman banks, but the Romans were dejected to find another (new) wall inside. Notwithstanding they made a desperate attempt to storm the new wall, which was weaker than the old one. The attempt failed; but two days afterwards, a band of Romans, during the night, crept through the ruins and effected an entrance into the tower of Antonia, where they killed the sentinels, whom they found asleep, obtained possession of the wall and summoned the army with the trumpet to the assault. Both sides woke up and a desperate and prolonged battle for the possession of the temple ensued in the city. As the struggle took place in the streets, the Jews had the advantage, and the Romans had to retire, content with having taken possession of the tower of Antonia.

Titus gave orders to demolish the tower of Antonia, so as to make a ready passage for his army. Meanwhile, he put Josephus forward again to try and induce the Jews to surrender. Speeches were interchanged between Josephus and John, but without effect. Many of the Jews, watching the opportunity, crept quietly over to the Romans and were well received by Titus. To prevent others deserting, John gave out that Titus had killed those who had gone over to him. Titus hearing this, displayed the deserters to the people, upon which a great many more fled to the Romans. All these, standing together, besought the Jews, with tears and groans, to

surrender to the Romans, and so save the city, and, at least, the Temple, from destruction. Titus himself appealed to them, declaring that he would preserve the Temple whether the Jews wished it or not. The Jews answered these proposals with imprecations and darts, and Titus, seeing there was no hope of making any impression upon them, resumed the operations.

At the end of seven days, the tower of Antonia was demolished and a wide passage for the army made to the walls of the Temple. The Romans raised banks against the Temple wall. The Jews harassed and impeded them by constant sallies. One of these attacks (upon the Roman guards on the Mount of Olives) came near the point of success; the Romans, however, gradually advanced their works against the Temple cloister. This was the beginning of the destruction of the Temple.

At this point, the Jews killed many of the Romans by a desperate stratagem. They stored a part of the Temple cloister with inflammable materials, and then retired as though beaten before the Roman attack, upon which a body of Romans took possession of the deserted cloister. The Jews then set fire to the materials and few of the Romans escaped the flames.

To make quicker work, the Romans piled burning materials against the western gates of the outer court and set fire to them. The fire caught the cloisters on the inside of the wall and extended a considerable way. The Romans by this means were enabled to make a large breach for the passage of the legions into the first or outer court. The actual Temple itself was

as yet intact. Titus called a council of war to determine whether to spare or destroy the Temple. It was decided to spare it as an ornament to the Empire, and orders to this effect were issued to the army. But God had proposed otherwise.

Next day, the Jews made a desperate sally from the east gate of the Temple. The attack, which lasted some hours was repulsed with great difficulty by the Romans. The Jews then retired into the inner court and shut themselves up. With a view to preserve the Temple, a body of Romans, by order of Titus, attempted to extinguish the fire in the outer cloisters. The Jews from the inner Temple attacked them while so engaged. The Romans, enraged at this attack, repelled it with great fury, and one of them jumping upon another one's shoulders, threw a burning brand through a window in the Temple itself. The Temple caught fire; upon which the Jews raised a great clamour. Titus hastened to the spot and ordered an immediate stop to be put to the fire, but the tumult on all hands was so great that his own soldiers could not make out his orders. The fire extended. The Jews then indiscriminately fell upon one another among the smoking embers of the cloisters, and perished in large numbers. Many of the Jews who had taken refuge in the Temple were weak and unarmed: these were killed without mercy. Dead bodies were piled in heaps about the altar before the Temple. Titus dashed into the interior, resolved, if possible, to rescue the building. His soldiers in an enthusiastic fury disregarded his commands. He gave orders to those about him to beat the soldiers who

refused to obey ; in the confusion, however, he made no impression. Exasperation at the Jews and love of plunder proved too strong for him ; the Romans spread the fire in all directions, and Titus was obliged to hasten out of the Temple to secure his own safety. The conflagration finally wrapped the whole building in a blaze, and in a short time it was burnt to the ground.

The Temple destroyed, Titus concluded there was no object in sparing anything, and the soldiers set fire to adjacent buildings. In the remaining portions of the cloisters and the outer wall, there were about six thousand women and children. Titus was asked what was to be done with them, but before his decision could be given, a soldier set fire to the cloisters, and the whole multitude perished. When the fire subsided, the Romans brought their ensigns into the Temple area, and there offered sacrifice amid loud acclamations.

The upper city was still unsubdued, and in the possession of Simon and John, with whom there were still a vast multitude of Jews. These, seeing the destruction of the Temple, proposed to treat with Titus about a surrender. Titus offered to grant them their lives. Simon and John declined these terms, and asked that they might be allowed to leave the city with their wives and depart to the desert. Titus, indignant at their request, broke off the negotiation, and resolved to hold no further parley. He gave orders to his soldiers to burn and plunder the city, and give no quarter to any. That part of the city in their possession was then fired.

The Jews in the upper city (Mount Zion) and part of the lower city, then resumed hostilities. On the day following, the Romans drove them out of the lower city, and set all on fire as far as Siloam. Josephus made a last appeal to the Jews holding the upper city to surrender. The Jews were inexorable, and set ambushes throughout the upper city to catch and kill those who attempted to desert to the Romans. Vast numbers were thus slain, and the city was everywhere full of dead bodies. The soldiers of Simon and John, driven to extremities for want of food, fought with one another over the plunder of the houses of private citizens.

Titus now raised banks round Mount Zion, from which to batter the walls of the upper city. Several of Simon's lieutenants privately conferred and resolved to surrender to the Romans with their men, but Simon finding it out, killed five of them, put the others in prison and placed a garrison to watch their men. The latter, notwithstanding, succeeded in deserting in large numbers.

Famine prevailed in its severest form throughout the upper city. The soldiers had still some supplies left, but the citizens were absolutely without food of any kind, and perished in large numbers. Men went about the streets in search of food in a state of madness. In their intolerable hunger, they ate leather, wisps of old hay and refuse of all kinds. A lady roasted her baby and ate it in two meals. Despair settled down upon all survivors.

In eighteen days, the banks against Mount Zion were finished, and the engines were brought into play against the wall. In a short time, a breach was made, and

the Romans obtained an easy entrance, all power of resistance having departed from the Jews. The towers were captured and the city taken. The Romans planted their ensigns on the towers, and made joyful acclamations of victory. The city was given up to plunder. When the soldiers entered the houses, they found the upper rooms full of dead men, women and children. They were horror-struck, and set all on fire. Vast crowds of miserable survivors in the streets were slain without mercy, and the torrent of blood was so great that the fire in many of the burning houses was quenched by it. The Roman soldiers, tired of killing, received instructions to spare the young and the strong. During the process of discriminating as to who should be kept alive, eleven thousand perished for want of food.

The number spared for captivity was ninety-seven thousand, of whom many were afterwards destroyed in the public games. All above seventeen were chained and sent to work in the mines in Egypt. The number which perished during the siege was eleven hundred thousand, of whom six hundred thousand were thrown over the walls, causing at one time such a pile of corruption that the Romans were obliged to withdraw from that part. The city and the Temple were utterly demolished to the foundations, and the ground on which they stood was ploughed up.

Such was the dreadful tragedy (unparalleled in the history of the world) in which Jehovah's long pent-up wrath against Israel burst at last upon their heads, and destroyed their national existence from the earth for a

long series of centuries, during which they have been wanderers among the nations, among whom they have been objects of obloquy and scorn, finding no rest for the sole of their feet, till these later times, when the hour has arrived, with the near termination of the times of the Gentiles, for some mitigation of Israel's calamities, in preparation for the glorious restoration long foretold and now approaching.





CHAPTER XXVII.

Summary.—Nature of providence.—Importance of understanding it.—Much that is not providence.—“Chance.”—God’s personality the basis of providence.—The leading illustrations.—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.—Joseph.—Moses.—Joshua.—Israel.—The nations divinely used as instruments.—Myriads of incidents outside the channel of providence.—European politics.—Prophecy.—Providence the divine machinery for saving the world.—A mighty work complete in many parts.



WE have now completed the survey of the facts presented to us in the scriptures which authentically illustrate the ways of providence. There are some omissions from the survey, but they are few, and do not throw further light on the subject. It may be profitable to summarise the results arrived at. They are of great value in the right reading of the ways of God. The ways of God are not confined to the age of miracle. They extend throughout all generations. They are extant to-day in the sphere both of politics and private life. It is a great help in the battle of life to be able to discern them aright. To make some small contribution to this discernment is the aim of these chapters, and the method of them has been

to adhere strictly to what the scriptures set forth as illustrations of the subject, in the conviction that here only is reliable guidance to be obtained.

Much that is talked of in a common way as providence is no providence. Providence consists of the divine regulation of natural circumstances; and the principles upon which this regulation takes place, can only be learnt from the scriptures of truth. These principles we have endeavoured to exhibit, with the result of enabling us to realise that all who commit their way to God in a scriptural manner, are included in the operations of the only providence that exists in the universe—that is, the control of natural circumstances by angelic agency; in an unseen manner, however, and without any apparent interference with natural ways. Outside of this control, all is chance; for there is such a thing as chance, but chance is controlled when the purpose of God requires it. This control is exercised in accordance with the “charge” which the angels receive from the Creator. Where no such charge exists, things happen naturally, or according to the mechanical relations of things in nature.

It is a first principle of the subject that God is a glorious person, dwelling in heaven, yet filling the immeasurable universe by His Spirit, which is the effluent energy of His person, constituting the basis, or force, or first cause of all things in heaven and earth; in this Spirit all things exist. These things have fixed mechanical relations in Him, and a permitted independence of action, constituting the platform of His higher

operations. All things are of God in their fundamental constitution; but the interaction of their established affinities in their detail, is not due to His volition, but results from the nature He has bestowed on them. He knows them all and can control them all; but He does not influence them where His purpose does not call for it. In this sense a multitude of occurrences are not of God. Some things He does; some He does not. Here is the sphere for the operation known as providence.

The light obtainable from the scriptures, as to the exercise of His providence, is clear, and of great practical value: that is, it is available for the regulation of our own lives, and may be appropriated without the least reservation as to its reliability. We may rapidly review the leading illustrations.

Abraham's case shows the shield of an invisible protection over those whom God chooses to protect (and there is no respect of persons with Him, but whosoever fears His name and submits to His requirements is accepted with Him). It shows us also in Abimelech a righteous man unconsciously withheld from a wrong course which was right in his own eyes, through want of correct information. Abraham's case also shows us in Ishmael a son blessed for his father's sake, and the domestic path made divinely plain for another son in whom the seed was to be called.

Isaac shows us a man preserved without miracle in the midst of famine, doing his part, however, with the hand of wise industry, and receiving the blessing in a form calling for constant faith.

Jacob illustrates plainly the angelic nature of what we call providence giving affairs an intelligent bent this way and that, as occasion requires, without showing His hand. Where the angels do not operate, providence is not at work, but affairs are left to work themselves out on natural principles. Yet angelic operations in ordinary life are not distinguishable from effects of nature, the results induced appearing natural. We cannot discover their hand and need not make the attempt. Our part is to fear God, keep the commandments, and go forth with courage and trust, believing the assurance that all things work together for good for those who love God. Jacob's life is an especial illustration of one fact most important to be recognised, that the life of those whom God regards is not necessarily a life of unmixed prosperity. God is with them and God guides them. but because of the imperfect nature of the present state, "chastening" is a necessity which takes the form of evil permitted for correction. His case also forcibly brings into the foreground the fact that divine guidance does not dispense with the necessity for individual prudence. Though God is with His children, He looks to them to arrange their affairs with discretion, as testified in all the proverbs of Solomon. Human action is the basis of divine supervision. In its absence, there is nothing for the angels to work on. God has conferred upon man the God-like gift of independent volition within the boundary imposed by surrounding conditions. This limited independence of will is the basis of all God's dealings with man. "Providence" manipulates circumstances, and so acts

through without setting aside the natural action of the unconstrained human will. We have to work with God, doing our best with diligence, leaving the disposal of results with Him. Co operation between God and man is God's glorious arrangement by which man at last partakes of God's joy.

Jacob's case further shows us that God does not propose the bestowment of perfect good in the present state. The present life in its best state is a state of exile from Eden. Reconciliation and return are in process of accomplishment, but we shall make a mistake if we look for unmixed good till the proclamation is made: "There shall be no more curse." The very best experience at present is only a state of divinely-regulated evil. The divine regulation of this evil may and does permit the experiences of evil in severe forms by His people. Some of Jacob's experiences, however, show that the cruelest and apparently most aimless wrench of affliction may be but the preparation for the highest blessedness even now. Trouble is often a preparation for good even now. How completely is this lesson illustrated in the case of Joseph, which yields this additional feature, that God may be at work in our affairs not only when there is no trace of His hand but when it seems impossible He can be at work. It may often seem not only that God is not working with us but that He is working against us. Joseph's case may teach us patience on this point. The very injustices and barbarities of men may be the Lord's hand to put us to the proof and to twist our affairs into a form for future blessedness.

In the case of Moses, we learn a great lesson touching the working out of God's purpose in the earth. God was remembering His promise of Israel's deliverance from Egypt by disposing events in preparation for its fulfilment one hundred years before the moment of action arrived, at a time, too, when there was not the least indication of it—when God was silent and the hope of Israel seemed a forgotten dream. By a series of apparently perfectly natural circumstances, He laid the foundation long in advance, yet, to the last moment, there was nothing distinctly indicative of the tremendous crisis impending. The eye ranging over the whole earth could see nothing but ease, carelessness, power on the side of the oppressor, and wickedness established in safety. The purpose of God was invisible. But at the last, the situation having been prepared in a natural way as it seemed, the angel of the Lord announced His presence. The lesson is of special value to us who are living like Moses at the end of a period of Israel's downtreading: who are looking for a promised divine interposition: who, like him, are able to discern providential signs characteristic of the situation, but who, like him, have nothing else to point to but the promise, and have been the subject of premature expectations. Like him, we may see that notwithstanding adverse appearances, God is at work, and will soon terminate the present attitude of expectancy on the part of His servants by the inauguration of the hour of open interposition.

The raising up of Pharaoh in the natural order, for a

divine purpose, enables us to realise that in our own day, men may equally be a divine development though thoroughly natural in every element of their lives. The natural in such cases is but the form of the divine hand or rather the tool used by it. The tool is invisibly guided in a way that seems to themselves and others purely natural, and yet the work done is divine work because divinely planned and divinely supervised in its execution, though the agents are unconscious of divine initiative. But this conclusion requires careful application. All natural things are not divine; few of them are. If we cannot make out which are and which are not, we need not be concerned. Sufficient that God may be at work where things are apparently natural. Our business is to subject all our constructions to the law and the testimony. It is ours to conform in all modesty to what God has required without reference to the undeterminable question of where and when He works during the present walk of faith. It is, however, a comfort to know that matters and men and results may be of God which are apparently natural only. The difference between such cases and those which are purely natural is the presence of a divine volition supplementing natural tendencies. This was constantly illustrated in the difference between the same acts of war when God was "with" Israel in the matter and when He was not.—(Numbers xiv. 41-45.) When God was "with" them, Israel stood firm to their work: when He was not, they quailed.

There is a sense which everyone will readily recognize in which the work of God is independent of all human

action: but when God works with and by means of man, human agency is far from superfluous. Israel were made to recognize that while they could do nothing if God were not with them, He could not in a sense do His part unless they did theirs. God requires men humbly and faithfully and diligently to do their part as the condition and means of enabling Him to work out His purpose with and concerning them. In this beautiful combination, we have to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, while it is God who works in us to will and to do His good pleasure." It is a noble and beneficent principle tending to keep back man from presumption, preserving a place for faith and wholesome activity while giving us the comfort of divine co-operation in all that we do according to His will. While the performance of our part is necessary, the accomplishment of final results is all of God, who can prosper or frustrate the devices of men or leave them altogether to their own ineffectual ways. Nevertheless, the experience of both Moses and Joshua shows that if God gives men opportunities, He expects them to discern and enterprisingly use them. There is a time to stand still and see the salvation of God, but it is not when He proposes to work by us. All the promises of God pre-suppose active, diligent, courageous and care-taking co-operation on the part of those to whom they are made. Where we are in circumstances which makes this exercise on our part impossible—(as when Jeremiah was in the pit in the court of the prison, sunk to the arm pits in mire) prayer and waiting is the not unavailing alternative.

These are the principles yielded by a study of the scripture examples of the ways of providence in their individual application. In their larger form, as affecting the ways of nations, they are if possible still more clear. The cases passed under review show that nations are divinely used to execute divine purposes of which they have no knowledge, while in fact they propose objects of their own purely, and while they distinctly feel in the mood expressed by the boast, "Our hand is high; the Lord hath not done all this. —(Deut. xxxii. 20) The calamities that have befallen Israel are the principal illustrations of this. Jehovah said He would bring these calamities and acknowledged them as His work when they came, yet they were all apparently due to human power only. The nations prevailing against Israel have all been tools in the hand of the God of Israel. But they were not aware of it, and nobody could have known it from casual observation, yielding the conclusion abundantly manifest in the individual branch of the subject, that God may be at work when men as mere natural observers see no evidence of it. In such cases, there was nothing apparently divine. They were all obviously natural. They can be explained on natural principles down to a certain point. It is always possible to put the finger on the circumstance or measure leading to defeat. But what about the causes of measures and circumstances? Here the human intellect is at fault. Yet here lies the root of all events which, while on the surface perfectly natural and spontaneous, may be the evolution of a secret will.

There are myriads of events that have no such root, but are due to the interaction of established conditions. The ways of providence have nothing to do with the determination of such events. But there are other events which are due to divine initiation and guidance as we have seen, though men are unaware of the guidance. Such are those affecting the political affairs of men. Those affairs stand related to the purpose God is working out in the earth and which requires a certain state of things to be slowly prepared. Therefore those affairs are held in the lines and channels of His plan. The programme exists beforehand in the mind of the Deity and has been entrusted for execution to angelic hands. It principally concerns events on the territory of the dominion represented by the Fourth Beast of Daniel—Roman or European territory. Consequently, the events of European politics are not haphazard. They are the results of carefully manipulated natural causes. These causes are invisibly affected in their inception and guided to the working out of intended effects. The results that come are due to an invisible divine control and are illustrated by the statement of Daniel that "God ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will." It is this that imparts to political occurrences the character of "signs of the times," in the discernments of such as are enlightened in the scriptures of truth. These occurrences, which to the natural man are the fortuitous changes of the hour, are to the other class the open and public expression of the secret and divine will which is

moulding all public affairs, with a view to the appointed climax when all things will be gathered together under one head, even Christ. The recognition of this fact makes all the difference between the mere newspaper point of view, which is that of scientific Paganism, and the point of view of the scriptures, from which we are able to see things as they appear to Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, and who is guiding them to a determined end—even the end proclaimed in the gospel of the kingdom and the promises made to the fathers in the beginning.

Prophecy proves and necessitates, and history illustrates the operations of the ways of providence. Those ways are neither more nor less than part of the divine machinery for saving the world. They operate individually and nationally, because the working out of the plan involves both departments. The ignoring of them is part of the barbarism of the natural man. The recognition of them is part of true enlightenment. When the work of God is finished, when man sent forth from Eden to shift for himself 6,000 years ago, is received again into open friendship and fellowship with God in the day announced for faith beforehand in the gospel of the kingdom, and gloriously exhibited in the closing pages of Revelation, it will be seen with a clearness which may not be attainable now, that without the vigilant angelic supervision, both of national and individual affairs (*alias* the ways of providence), the glorious issue then reached would have been an impossibility. The world would have gone to chaos and no

flesh would have been saved. The plan which was commenced when sacrifice was instituted at the gates of Paradise, has been in ceaseless course of development from that day to this. God has been at work all the time, though the work has been slow and the means largely natural. The miracles and wonders and signs have been but as the lights on the steamer in the dark. There has been no break though often there has been nothing to see. The work that is a present work and a natural work is not less a real work, because not obviously a divine work. The whole work is one—in many parts—“at sundry times and divers manners,” taking different shapes according to the exigencies of the particular situations; and when all is complete, each part will be seen in its true importance. The minor phases of the work will appear but as the softer tints in the rainbow that will arch the throne of glory.



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