

THE VISIBLE HAND OF GOD

OR

THE MIRACLES, SIGNS, AND WONDERS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PAST DEALINGS OF GOD WITH THE NATION OF ISRAEL: THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF SUCH OPERATIONS, AND THEIR NECESSITY TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE WORK OF GOD IN THE EARTH.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

It has become the popular habit not only to doubt but to discard miracle as not only unnecessary to, but inconsistent with, the objects of true religion. The object of this book is to show that this habit does not rest on rational grounds, but, on the contrary, is opposed both to facts that are undeniable when thoroughly looked into, and to necessities intrinsically appertaining to the nature of the subject.

The miracles of Romish tradition, and the legends and mythical prodigies of the numerous faiths and superstitions to be found under the sun, are rightly scouted as the figments of fancy and the inventions of a designing fanaticism; but it is a hasty and enormous blunder to include in this verdict the things recorded in the writings of Moses, the prophets and the apostles. The two things are as distinct as the light of the stars and the flare of the naphtha lamps on the stalls of a street fair. Men of sense have but to compare the two things to see the difference. There have been genuine miracles (the evidence of this is positively not impugnable); and that there should be fictitious and counterfeit miracles is not only not surprising, but what is to be expected from the working of things among men; a thing that, rightly construed, is one of the many evidences of the genuine.

The nature and necessity of the genuine miracles of the past are discussed in the following pages with reference to the modern scientific temper. This temper is to be respected and valued in so far as it demands exactness and accuracy of knowledge; at the same time, it requires to have imposed on it the limitations arising out of its own maxims. Scientific inference easily runs into speculative licence and even into axiomatic dogmatism, with the disastrous result of barring the way to coordinate truth in other departments of really more practical importance than science's own discoveries.

This is shown to be the case in the modern attitude on the subject of miracle. The most important of the works of God on earth is effaced for the mass of educated people by the application of scientific maxims in an

unscientific way. The plan adopted in the course of this work is not on the old scholastic lines. The subject is treated historically, which, while admitting of as thorough a consideration of the abstract phases of the subject as a formal treatise, has the advantage of being more interesting, and supplying a greater diversity of materials in the illustration of the subject.

The book is companion to a previous work on *The Ways of Providence*. It is a necessary supplement to that work, showing that the basis of all our knowledge of the operations of God in Providential channels, lies in the evidence of His existence, and the revelation of His will furnished in the “miracles, wonders, and signs” wrought in the midst of Israel in ages which, though past, are only past in the sense of being the preliminary part of a programme of divine wisdom and power which reaches forward to ages of glory and perfection.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER 1. —THE PLACE, NATURE AND NEED OF MIRACLE

The INVISIBLE hand of God has been amply illustrated in *The Ways of Providence*. God's hand may work—and often does work—in affairs of a natural form and complexion, without being discernible in the operation. This we have learnt from the authenticated cases on record in the Scriptures of truth. There is no doubt about it. The only uncertainty is as to where and when the operation takes place. In the vast mass of sublunary events, there is no Providence at all. They are the fortuitous concurrences of unconnected events, with which God has nothing to do in the direct, though veiled, form of causation involved in the term Providence. This also we have learnt on the same indubitable authority. The value of the lesson is found in the modesty it brings in our interpretation of the occurrences of common life, and in the yet helpful confidence that God, though unseen and in the darkness, will guide the steps of those who frame their purposes in His fear, and with a regard to His will.

But were there no other works of God than the ways of Providence, we should languish in our confidence. Those ways are often so dark, and so protracted in the time required for their full development, that without some tangible reason for trust, our hopes would sicken and our steps falter before the end of the matter was reached. We require the visible hand to give us faith in the invisible. God does not ask us to trust the one without showing us the other. It is the visible hand of God in the past that has laid the foundation of faith in the invisible one in the present. It is what God has openly, visibly, manifestly, undoubtedly done in the beginnings of things, that furnishes the ground for the wholesome belief in His present and continued operation in a way not manifest, but necessary, for the guidance of affairs to their appointed issue in that morning of brightness and peace which is to succeed the present night of darkness and confusion.

There is a constant appeal of this sort in the Scriptures. Throughout their entire course, there is a recognition of the reasonable view that the obligation to obey an invisible God arises out of the fact that He has made

Himself visible in His acts before calling upon us to submit to Him. Let two illustrations of this suffice. Moses, in pressing home upon Israel the duty of obedience, said to them,

“Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and these great miracles”—(Deut. 29: 2-3).

Jesus, in speaking of the moral responsibilities of his rejectors said to his disciples,

“If I had not done among them the WORKS WHICH NONE OTHER MAN DID, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father”— (John 15: 24).

It is the facts in both these cases—Moses and Jesus—(and the number of similar cases and facts clustered around them)—that supply the foundation for faith. Faith is confidence for a reason. Everyone understands faith in this sense, as applied to ordinary matters. It is the same in divine matters. There is no truth in the popular view that places faith outside the confines of reason. Faith is a mental act; and, as a mental act, it is independent of and separate from the nature of the thing acted on. If a man knows by experience that water gets hard with cols, his faith that the frozen lake will allow him to walk safely over is the result of a fact perceived—not understood. The ice has nothing to do with it, except as a fact seen. Faith is the same to whatever applied. In matters divine, popular view has confounded the act with the thing acted upon. Miracle may be outside the power of reason to understand, but this is no bar to the recognition of it (i.e., faith in it) as a fact, if its reality as a fact is demonstrable in harmony with all the demands of the perceptive faculties. If we are to wait to comprehend the *modus in esse* before we believe anything, the circle of our belief would be narrowed to a microscopic point. We should refuse to believe that the sun shines, or the earth moves, or that flowers grow out of the ground, or, in fact, that we ourselves exist; for all these, and a million things besides, we only know as facts: the “How?” in the profoundest sense, we know not, and cannot know. We may talk of radiation and gravitation, and cellular development and biological force: we but substitute other words, and shift the difficulty. Subdivide the phenomena as we will—analyse, dissect, decompose as exhaustively as the scientific appliances of modern times will

admit, you only push the mystery a step further off. The “How?” waits you at the last stage. It is only the shallower minds that imagine knowledge complete. They mistake facts for their origin. Doubtless, to a cow in the farmyard, the turnips are their own sufficient and all-satisfactory explanation. There is a very wide application to Paul’s words,

“If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8: 2).

The facts of nature we receive because they are facts, and not because we understand them in the ultra-philosophic sense. So it is with miracles: the whole question is “are they facts?” not “are they comprehensible?” or “are they credible?” or “are they necessary?” or “can they serve a purpose?” A good deal of dust has been thrown in the public eye on this subject by the works of several accomplished writers, whose polished sentences and well-mannered dogmatisms have procured influence and consideration for badly-reasoned conclusions. David Hume and the writers of *Essays and Reviews* have a good deal to answer for on this head. By the influence of such writers, it has come to be a tradition in educated circles that miracles are impossible, and that if possible, they are useless. Even Canon Farrar, in his interesting *Life of Christ*, refers apologetically to the miracles recorded by the evangelists, with a remark to the effect that the cultured mind has come to regard them as unnecessary. How extraordinary that a professed public representative of Christ should pronounce those works of Christ unnecessary to which Christ himself appealed as a weightier evidence than his own personal claims! (John 15: 24; 5: 36; 10: 37-39; Luke 7: 20-22). The sentiment that miracle is impossible, and useless if possible, or that it is in any way open to doubt, is one of the greatest barriers to the reception of the truth that exists in modern times; for the truth is nothing if miracle is taken away. It is founded on the miracle of Christ’s resurrection, and hangs on the anticipated miracle of our own resurrection.

The grounds on which the educated mind has come so easily to disbelieve in miracle are very slight, and really untenable. On the score of possibility, it is astonishing that any objection whatever should be felt. Granted, that to human power, miracle is impossible; but this no more disproves its possibility than it disproves nature. Could human power produce a star? No; yet there it is. Consequently, there is a power that is not

human power. Will a sane man affirm that to this power a miracle is impossible? The denial is common, but then sanity is rare. What is a miracle? Take any of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and it will be found that there is not one of them but what, in some form or other, is being performed slowly before our eyes every day in the year. The miracle consists of doing quickly and by the direct employment of energy, that which is gradually and indirectly accomplished in nature. The multiplication of frogs, lice, locusts, etc., in the afflictions of Egypt, for example, was not new, inasmuch as these creatures multiply each year. The marvel consisted in their instantaneous production. The production of bread by Christ to feed the thousands around him is an operation performed yearly on every corn-growing farm in the world. The turning of water into wine may be seen regularly done in France, and other countries, where the water-nourished grape yields the liquor that maketh glad the heart of man. Even the more apparent marvel of raising the dead has its counterpart. The raising of the dead is the making of a living being. Where were the living beings of the present moment a hundred years ago? They existed not. They have been made before our eyes, so to speak; slowly, and by orderly growth, it is true, but still made.

To deny the possibility of these things being done quickly which we see done slowly, is to be guilty of unphilosophical dogmatism. It is the most obvious dictate of common prudence to refrain from limiting the capabilities of a universe that is without measure in its extent, and without the possibility of being computed in the length of its antecedent periods. If we had no experience of miracles, the question of their possibility would, of course, be a matter of barren speculation; but it is evident that the question of their admissibility when they come before us as realities, cannot philosophically be prejudiced by any dogmatic assumption beforehand that they are impossible. Man, himself a product of the invisible energy that sustains all things, cannot surely be in a position to limit the possibilities of the power that has produced him.

The unbeliever here says that miracles are inconsistent with our experience, and opposed to the order of nature, and therefore incredible. This argument assumes two things that cannot be maintained: —

1. That our experience is to be taken as the measure or standard of what

is possible, and that whatever we have not experienced, in the sense of having witnessed, is to be rejected; and—

2. That the passive order of nature as we see it is to be taken as the only phase in which nature has or ever can appear.

The impossibility of maintaining these propositions will be evident from one or two very simple illustrations. There are stars and comets of remarkable beauty, seen in our heavens only once in a few centuries. Most of these have never been witnessed by the generation now living upon the earth. Shall we refuse to believe in them because we have never seen them? We should be bound to do so if the argument in question were a correct one. But no one acquainted with the subject of astronomy would dream of doubting them. Though the belief in their existence is founded on testimony merely, this belief, on the part of scientific men, amounts to absolute conviction. They believe the testimony because they know from their experience of human knowledge and the laws of testimony, that there is no other explanation to be given of the unanimous agreement of a number of separate and independent witnesses, who have no personal objects to serve than the truthfulness of that which they unanimously testify. A thousand other illustrations of this point will occur to the reflecting reader, showing that our own experience is by no means a certain guide in matters of fact; and that testimony is the most prolific source of all our knowledge. It is a question of the reliability of the testimony, and not the nature of the thing testified, though that will doubtless have some weight in the argument.

As to the argument on the passive order of nature: nature is doubtless passive as we see her; but how shall this be taken to prove that there does not dwell within her an Operator, who, when the objects of wisdom call for it can, and does make Himself her active Master and Controller? We live too short a time to justify a negative conclusion on this subject. We are like the insects of the summer day, who do not live long enough to know the difference between night and day. A mouse at midnight among the benches of an empty orchestra, might just as reasonably conclude that there were no performers, as the philosopher that there is no Mighty Worker in the universe, because he has not seen His hand. If the Mighty Worker were to show His presence in works as evidently impelled by intelligent volition as a philosopher's movements in his library, would not the philosopher then believe? Doubtless. Facts are his teachers; and one fact would be received as

well as another. Suppose, however, though not permitted himself to witness such a supreme phenomenon, it is credibly testified to him by many others who have in past ages witnessed it, is he not bound to receive it?

Unquestionably. He shows it by believing in the stars and comets he has never seen, and cannot see, unless he lives a thousand years. Here, again, it may be remarked, that the mere abstract possibility of such a thing would not be worth discussing, if the evidence of Divine operation and revelation were not one of the most palpable things in human history. The value of the considerations passed in review lies in showing that the present passiveness of nature cannot be philosophically treated as a barrier to the reception of the fact of Divine activity in nature, if such fact is credibly testified.

But it is said again—(and here perhaps is the argument that has weighed most with thinking minds)—that miracles cannot be useful, because in their nature they are inscrutable, and, therefore, cannot in true logic be so connected with that which we do not know as to prove anything. The maintainers of this argument contend that morals exist independently of miracle, and that miracle cannot impart increased obligation to duty, and that therefore in the nature of things, they cannot be mixed. The class with whom this sort of argument weighs, maintain that morality is more respectable without miracle than when supported by it, and that for their part, they would rather have the ethics of Greece without prodigy than the precepts of the Bible based on miracle.

The argument is plausible, but fundamentally fallacious. It assumes a theory on the subject of “morals” which cannot stand—a theory which embodies the gratuitous conception of ancient philosophic speculation which is not only not demonstrated, but upset both by modern research and the teaching of Scripture. The theory makes “right” and “wrong” a fixed quality or essence, and “conscience” the natural capacity of the mind to discern between one and the other. We had occasion in the consideration of the ways of Providence to discuss this point, and need not repeat. The theory is perfectly natural at the first stage of reflection on the subject. Men have looked at it in the light of their feelings. Experiencing a certain sort of “light within,” they have assumed that this is a sort of inseparable attribute of human mentality with corresponding fixed qualities of right and wrong in the constitution of things around. They ought to have extended their enquiries on

the subject, and they would have discovered their conclusions to be out of harmony with the facts. They ought to have asked if all men possessed this moral discernment, and if in any man it existed independently of education. It would have been found that multitudes of men are devoid of the moral discernments that exercise educated persons, and that no man is born into the world with knowledge on any subject, but has to be carefully instructed, and that if he be not so instructed, either by direct tuition or by the example or talk of others, he will grow up a barbarian. Further investigation and reflection would have led to the discovery that right and wrong are relative ideas only, and that the only standard of their application is the revealed will of God. Those things are wrong which He forbids, and those things right which He commands. When men are ignorant of these, they are ignorant of right and wrong. Most men's knowledge on these points is but the diluted ideas that have filtered down society from originally divine sources, but which have become corrupted by admixture.

The application of these principles to the subject in hand lies here: if morality be the obedience of the commandments of God, how can morality exist without the conviction that the commandments proposed for obedience are the commandments of God? And how can this conviction be produced apart from some evidence along with and outside the commandments themselves to show that God is the Author of them? And what could be evidence on this point short of miracle? Those who contend that miracle is no proof in the case, surely fail to apprehend the nature of miracle and its relation to Jehovah's claim on our obedience. The foundation of the claim is the assertion that He has made all things: that they are all His; and that He upholds them by His power. Now, is not this assertion proved by the exhibition of perfect control over the forces of heaven and earth? Who but the Upholder could instantaneously arrest the storm in its fury, as on the Sea of Galilee? Or suddenly combine the elements going to constitute bread, as in the feeding of five thousand men with a few loaves? Or in a moment alter the conditions causing disease, and so by a word healing all manner of sickness among the people? And who could thus control but the Upholder? And who could uphold but the Maker? And this is what it is necessary to prove before the foundation for obedience can be felt to exist.

The connection between miracle and morality, therefore, so far from

being unnatural, is inseparable, when the nature of morality is apprehended. There cannot be true morality until the foundation for it is established by the demonstration of the divinity of the commandments set forth for obedience. And this demonstration requires miracle, for apart from miracle there could be no such demonstration. The objection to miracle, therefore, on the ground of its needlessness, is the weakest of all the weak objections that in modern days have shaken public confidence in the very basis of revelation. We have shown that miracles are necessary: that they are possible: that they are not inconsistent with the established order of nature. The only question remaining is, have they occurred? This is an affair of testimony. The testimony is abundant: it is specific; it is spread over a long period of the world's history; it is given by the best of mankind. The fact of its delivery and the result are seen in the existence of any little good there is to be found in the constitution of society as it is in the present day. The whole case, as a matter of testimony, is invulnerable; it is established beyond the possibility of logical overthrow. The sole reason for its non-reception by the wise of our day is their assumption beforehand, that the testimony is to a thing that is impossible. Their position in the matter is the extreme of logical absurdity.

It does not come within the scope of the work thus commenced to discuss the value of the testimony. That is a separate line of investigation. The present aim will be to rehearse the miraculous occurrences testified, with the object of illustrating the nature of them, and their necessity for the accomplishment of the ends in view.

CHAPTER 2. —THE BEGINNING OF THINGS NECESSARILY MIRACULOUS

“The present aim will be to rehearse the miraculous occurrences testified, with the object of illustrating the nature of them, and their necessity for accomplishing the end in view.” In carrying out the plan sketched in these words at the close of the last chapter, we might begin with the first chapter of genesis. Here we have marvel enough of the miraculous order. “*God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,*” and so with other things: His word produced the result. It is not foreign to the subject to realise in passing that such must have been the beginning of things.

It is the scientific fashion to believe that things have “evolved” themselves. But this is a mere speculation. That is, it is a guess suggested by certain facts on the surface of things that look in that direction, but which are capable of another explanation. It is a guess inconsistent with other facts: a guess hazarded by one or two clever men, and taken up and re-echoed by thousands of mediocrities: a guess, however, rejected by men of equal scientific eminence to the originators of it, and refused by a large section of the scientific community. As a guess it is not like most scientific conclusions—demonstrated truth; it is a mere theory in the air that has rapidly become popular because of its tendency to liberate from the obligations associated with the Scriptures. It is a guess effectually demolished when the resurrection of Christ is established, for with the resurrection of Christ comes the proof of his divinity and the consequent establishment of Moses and the prophets endorsed by him.

But even evolution itself cannot dispense with such a beginning of things as is exhibited in the Mosaic narrative. For what is evolution? It is the gradual development of things from latent power. The power for a thing to be (or its “potentiality,” as scientific writers say) must exist before the thing itself can come. For example, the potentiality of any plant exists in its seed; the potentiality of ice exists in water; the potentiality of the various orders of living things exists in their respective seeds. Without this antecedent power to exist, they would not come. Now, carry the process of evolution backwards far enough, we are bound to come to a time when there was no

earth, no sun, no stars; when the universe was an undeveloped potentiality. (The hypothesis of evolution involves this.) Very well, imagine ourselves in such a time, what should we look at, so to speak? In a sense, of course, there would be nothing to see, for nothing concrete existed to be seen; but the force or power now incorporate in the splendid frame of the universe must have existed. There must have been an all-space-filling ocean of invisible power or energy out of which heaven and earth came by “evolution.” Now, in this ocean there must have existed the potentiality of heaven and earth; for if the power of them to come did not exist there, how came they? Yes, says the evolutionist, their potentiality did exist; that is what we contend for. Very well, but look at this, how came the potentiality to stir itself? Select any time for the start you like (any number of millions of years), it was at rest before then? Yes. Now for how long a time was it at rest? It matters not if you say a year (which of course would be absurd) or a million years (which would only be a little less absurd), or measureless time—time without beginning (which must have been the fact). Here is the problem you have to face: how came the potentiality to stir when it did stir, and why was it quiescent in the antecedent eternity? Must not something have come upon the scene at the moment of the stirring which was not before at work? Must not an impulse have begun to move which was not moving before? Must not the previously sleeping “force” have begun to vibrate with a formative stimulus not previously experienced? How came the antecedent “force,” however slowly, to incorporate itself in the beautiful forms of the universe, which had no previous existence? Something like the Mosaic start took place even on your hypothesis; a fiat, a stimulus, a volition not before active, gave things a start in the direction of their present form, even if they have been evolved in the Darwinian sense. The slowness does not make the process any easier to understand. If the Mosaic start in a quick way is inconceivable, so is the Darwinian; they are both equally out of the range of the human intellect. There are two great differences between them in favour of the Mosaic. First, the Darwinian hypothesis is a guess, while the Mosaic narrative is a matter of testimony commended to our faith by many powerful evidences; secondly, the Mosaic view gives us a cause adequate to the effect produced, namely, an all-wise, all-powerful Intelligence, possessing in himself the focalised power of the universe, and capable of imparting that initiative to creative power that is required for the explanation of what we see, while the Darwinian theory gives us eternal force without will or wisdom to do a thing

which required both in their supremest form.

God has made heaven and earth by His power. This is the simple proposition to which the profoundest of philosophy leads. Nothing deeper or at the same time more satisfactory, as an account of the beginning of things, will ever be written than the words of Genesis 1. :

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

The child and the philosopher meet here on common ground. The only difference is, that the philosopher has been out on the field of exploration to which the child’s curiosity will by-and-by lead him, and has returned with the discovery that things in general are larger and more inscrutable than the child has any idea of.

The only practical difficulty in the way of accepting the Mosaic narrative is the assumption that it teaches that the work of creation began 6,000 years ago. Close study will show that there is no real foundation for this assumption, and that all that the Bible teaches us is that the earth was put in order and the Adamic race appeared on the scene 6,000 years ago. The pre-existence of the earth and of races upon it, is not only compatible with the Mosaic narrative, but is recognised in the opening chapter. Before the six days’ work began, it shows us, chapter 1 verse 2, *“darkness on the face of the deep;”* the earth without order, and void. The very first incident described is the movement of the spirit of God *“on the face of the waters”* (same verse), from which it follows the earth and the waters existed before the re-organising work of 6,000 years ago began. How long it had existed in that state there is nothing to show; but there is room for any length of time the evidences of geology may claim. Consequently, there is none of the practical and insuperable difficulty which most people suppose to be in the way of receiving the Mosaic account of creation. The earth had a history before the six days’ work, as further evident from the words addressed to Adam:

*“Be fruitful and multiply, and **replenish** the earth.”*

The nature of that history is not disclosed to us in the Scriptures, and geology cannot tell us. Both the Bible and geology show it was a history marked by convulsion and ending in catastrophe. The Bible shows us the recovery from that state by the six days’ work ending in the appearance of Adam on the scene. The Bible and geology are sufficiently in agreement to

make the acceptance of both possible, but even if there were hopeless divergence between them, we must remember that geology is too incomplete and changeable a science (changeable, that is, in the inferences that men draw from the facts observed; changeable also in the aspect in which facts present themselves to various students and at different times), to come into competition with the attested authority of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets and the apostles.

The beginning of miracle upon earth, then, we doubtless contemplate in the formation of Adam from the dust and the attendant works of repair and re-order. There is no difficulty in the reception of this miracle that is not equally experienced in any theory in which human intellect may prefer to take refuge. This is the conclusion reached by the line of reflection we have roughly sketched. Whatever the nature of the beginning, and to however remote a point it may be deferred, it is enveloped in mystery inscrutable. Here is the fact, that man—wonderful man with all his weakness and baseness—is here; and there is the other fact that go far enough back, and he was not upon earth. Between these two points of time his appearance takes place; and whenever and however that appearance took place, a marvel occurred for which no explanation can be found in the antecedent eternity, apart from the existence of eternal wisdom and power. This is adapting the argument to modern habits of thought. By whatever name people may please to designate the cause, that cause, combining wisdom and power, is God and nothing else. That we cannot understand God, is no obstacle. Whatever we may call it, we are in the presence of that which cannot be understood. Who can understand eternity? Who can understand “force”? To put away God and give us “force” is not relieving us of any difficulty; it is not giving us anything we can understand better. It is rather increasing our difficulty; for if passive, mindless force can produce a creation like that which we see around us, bearing the stamp of matchless wisdom, both in its general form and its minutest arrangements, then is force a more wonderful god than the God of Israel; for the God of Israel declares to us He has made all these things by His power and His wisdom, while scientific Atheism would give us a god possessed of neither—a blind god—a sleeping god—a god that slept for ages and then woke up without a cause and proceeded to “evolve” at a rate of progress suggestive of wonderful sloth in the first case.

Adam must have appeared at once, and at the time Moses informs us he appeared; for if he appeared by slow development from a lower life, or by spontaneous development in a complete form, the fact would demand three things that experience does not realise.

1. There ought to be no lower forms of life now: for if creation “evolves” by mechanical impulse without discernment, discrimination, or design, her “developments” should march abreast, and there ought to be no monkeys, no dogs, no “primordial germs”—nothing but men.
2. If to this it is objected that surrounding circumstances exercise a “natural selection,” and prevent development in certain cases, then, as there are all sorts of circumstances, there ought to be all sorts of stages of development, and we ought to have some tribes of men with tails, and some with wings, and some with horns, and some with amphibious capabilities like the hippopotamus, and certainly we ought to have speaking animals; instead of which man is man everywhere: there is an unbridgeable gap between the lowest human specimen and the highest of the animals in the bulk and distribution and position of the brain.
3. If man appeared on the scene by spontaneous development (most absurd of all the wild suggestions to which atheistic predisposition drives the cleverest of men) he ought to do so now, because nature, on this hypothesis, is unchanged and unchangeable, and ought to present us every now and then with a man whose mother should be the rock or the peat bog, and his father the sun’s rays or some other form of the wonderful “force.”

Finally, the extent of human population upon earth at the present time, considered with reference to known rates of increase, after allowing for the devastations of war and the de-populations of barbarism, and the flood, involves the conclusion that human generation began at the time represented by Moses. What if there are remains of pre-historic and pre-Adamic races? The conclusion is not weakened. Such facts would only go to show that in the pre-Adamic history, for which there is room in the Mosaic narrative, the prior races, with which we have no connection, played a part of which all memory and trace have been obliterated by the catastrophe (probably judicial) which plunged the earth into the chaos in which the Mosaic

narrative opens for it: after the analogy of the Noachic flood which we shall have to consider by and by.

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”

This is the all-sufficient explanation of the marvel of man’s advent upon earth—the initial miracle of human history. God fashioned him direct from the dust. This is enough. It suits and harmonises all the facts of the case, which cannot be said of any scientific hypothesis. It has the merit of being unburdened by the pretentious jargon of science, and of setting forth all that we can or need to know of the process by which the foundation of the human race was laid in the production of the first man. It has the further merit of being an authoritative piece of information and not speculation, for it comes to us with the stamp of Christ’s endorsement, and Christ’s case is too far beyond the region of uncertainty to be debatable: In telling us that God made man it clears the resurrection of all the difficulty which some men have professed to see in it; for obviously, God who produced the wonderful mechanism of human life at the beginning, can easily reproduce it when the occasion calls.

The creation of man is not precisely of the order of miracle with which these chapters propose to deal. It is the miracles wrought towards man after his establishment on earth that chiefly claim our attention. Still, it is not without advantage to begin at the very beginning, and fix attention upon himself. We have looked upon him in the moment of his appearance on the scene. We look at him in the first stage of his career.

“The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed . . . to dress it and keep it” (Genesis 2: 8-15).

This was before the appearance of Eve. The planting of the garden would be in the nature of a miracle. A clearing or enclosure would be made, and stocked with fruits and flowers, in a readier and easier manner than by shovel and pick. The power that made a man from the same material would find no difficulty in this. It was not a work of superfluity. It was necessary that Adam being alone in the land should have a prepared and suitable place to be in, and what more suitable than an enclosed collection of *“every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food”* (verse 9). Such surroundings

were adapted to the tastes and necessities of a newly-made and solitary man. But another miracle was necessary to complete his situation.

“The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him . . . and the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

God could have made woman direct from the ground as he made Adam: but he preferred to extract a portion of Adam’s own framework and use that as a foundation from which to build the woman. We should speak presumptuously if we were to say there were no reasons for this preference. We may not know them all, but it is easy to see that the fact of Eve’s origin (coming to Adam’s knowledge as it did—see verse 23) would give her a place in his sympathy which another origin might have failed to give her: and it is not unnatural to suppose that the employment of a portion of his own being as the basis of his helpmeet would establish an electrical affinity between them, which would tend to the unity which God designed should exist between man and woman as “*one-flesh*.” There was also an allegory established which would have been wanting had Eve been independently produced. Paul tells us that Adam was “*a figure of him (Christ) who was to come*” (Romans 5: 14). Now, it was in the purpose of God to develop “*the bride, the Lamb’s wife*” from Christ himself by death (the antitype of Adam’s deep sleep). Consequently, it was fitting that the relation of Eve’s origin to Adam should exhibit the analogy corresponding to this.

Naturalists, of course, scout the whole affair as a fable. But they are precluded from doing so in true reason. They must first get rid of Christ, which is impossible, and of the Bible, which is another impossibility; and of Palestine and the Jews—still further impossibilities. It does not follow that because the lower animals are male and female by common derivation, which does not distinguish one from the other, that therefore it is so in the human species. Though man, in his present condition, is like the animals in nature, and lies down on equal terms with them in the dust, he is far higher than they in his origin, type, and destiny. He is in the image of the Elohim. He is the similitude of the divine form among the myriads of living forms that people the earth: among them, he is the only reflex of the moral and

intellectual attributes of the Creator. He is the head of the animal world. Therefore he is not to be classed as a matter of course with the lower creatures as to the laws that govern his appearance upon earth. A dignity and a meaning attach to his origin and his history totally apart from that of the animals. Naturalists reason from below up to man: in truth, the process must be reversed. Man has come down from the position in which he started: and the nature of that position and the reason of that descent cannot be understood without contemplating him from the divine point of view. Reproduction was a foreseen necessity in the purpose of God with the human species: therefore the male and female relation was introduced, but it was done in an interesting, dignified and sympathetic way. It was an adaptation of a common animal peculiarity to a special and noble creature formed for the glory of God. Woman was formed from a rib extracted from man, and thus was achieved the first miracle after man's appearance in Creation.

CHAPTER 3. —THE MIRACLE OF REVELATION

If a message were to arrive from God today by the hand of an angel, it would be considered a miracle. In a sense it would be rightly so considered; it would be an act of God out of the common run of our experience. In another sense, the term might seem inapplicable. For evidently, in the abstract nature of things, it must be as natural for God to signify His mind, whether by an angel or by the power of the spirit, as for a man to do the same, by messenger or by letter. However, adopting the common idea that it would be a miracle, we may say that the next miracle after the fabrication of Eve from Adam's rib was the command delivered to Adam, as recorded thus (unless the command was delivered prior to Eve's appearance, which is immaterial):

“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

We will not stay to discuss the wisdom of such an interdict or the need for it. Such a discussion would be foreign to the particular object of these chapters. Such a discussion, too, is unnecessary, in so far as the prohibition being proved a divine one (as it is in so many ways), it must needs have been needful and wise. We can even go further than this, and say that the prohibition is so self-evidently suited to the needs of the case as almost to exclude discussion. It exercised Adam in that subjection to the will of God which was the first law of his being. In the absence of that or other form of divine authority brought to bear, Adam would have been left to develop a life of creature enjoyment merely, which would have been foreign to God's object in creating him, and obstructive of the highest joy of which Adam's nature was capable. God formed him for His own glory and pleasure (Revelation 4: 11), which are realised in man's intelligent recognition and affectionate submission: and in these also are realised the highest satisfaction and well-being possible to man. David speaks of *“God my exceeding joy”* (Psalm 43: 4). This expresses the experience of man in his normal state. The present is not man's normal state. He has been banished into the darkness, so to speak, to take care of himself, in consequence of which he has, in his generations, sunk and degenerated till his original nobility is

scarcely recognisable at all in the vast mass of the race. This view is of course at variance with the accepted notions of scientific circles. Nevertheless it is demonstrably true. Man has been formed for God; and until man is reconciled to God and in loving friendship with Him, man can never be happy. God is working out a plan for this reconciliation, and it will succeed in the long run with a sufficient number of the whole race to people the earth with man in the right relation to God.

But we must not digress. We return to Adam. In his innocent and “*very good*” state (sin having not yet entered into the world), the authority of God was brought to bear in expressed command. Have we not here an evidence that in the perfect state to which we are hoping to be introduced at the completion of Christ’s work on earth, there will still be commandments to obey? Yea, this obedience will be the “*exceeding joy*” of the perfect state. In the workings of present love, do we not find its most congenial exercise and expression in complying with the wishes of those we love? How much more with the highest of all loves, and the highest of all powers to carry it out? It is written of the angels, to whom we hope to be made equal,

“That they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word”

(Psalm 103: 20).

In this we have a manifest sanction to the idea (reasonable on his own grounds), that obedience will be the law and delight of the perfect state, and that therefore, as in the case of Adam, though without the contingency involved in his case, the authority of the Creator will be brought to bear in the form of things commanded to be done, and perhaps, commanded not to be done. But this is digressing again.

The miracle (so called) consisted in God speaking. God can speak in various ways; not now including those ways that leave us to infer His voice, or that may be figuratively described as His voice, but speaking of those only that are actually His voice. Three ways are illustrated in the Scriptures:

1. He can speak directly so as to cause His voice to be concentrated on any point in the atmosphere and be audible to those in the neighbourhood of that point. Of this, we have an example when Jesus in the course of conversation

with the Jews in the courts of the temple concerning the Father, said,

*“Father glorify thy name. Then **came there a voice from heaven**, saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by and heard, said that it thundered. Others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes”* (John 12: 28-30).

Another example may be found in the voice, proclaiming on the banks of the Jordan when Jesus was baptised,

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3: 17).

Men of the world, a generation ago, would have pronounced this impossible. Within recent years, their sceptical dogmatism has been rebuked by the discovery of laws by which sound can be transmitted great distances, so that, incredible as it may appear, the sound of the tramp of a fly’s feet on glass can be heard at a great distance. What though this require carefully-adjusted mechanical appliance, does it not show the existence of possibilities to which no man can set the bounds? What men can do by wires and funnels, adapting themselves to the laws of God’s power in its passive form, God can do with the naked power which is part of Himself, so to speak, so that when need be, He can cause His voice actually to be heard in any part of His universe. What a glorious contemplation does this open up to the mind concerning the ages to come. The cases in which He has so spoken have been few, and limited to those occasions that were suitable for such a signal honour and such a sublime occurrence. But what may we not hope for when the besotted generations of the wicked have for ever ceased upon earth, and the earth is the quiet and glorified habitation of His children, the meek of all generations for whom it is being prepared by all the vicissitudes it is now passing through? There is a depth of meaning which experience alone could qualify us to apprehend in the Apocalyptic description of this finality:

“And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and

they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22: 3-5).

2. Next, God can speak through men. That is, He can so lay His hand upon them by the Spirit and so control their thoughts and utterances as that the man’s voice, though, in a mechanical sense, the man’s voice, is yet actually the voice of God in so far as God uses the man’s voice to express God’s own ideas, without the man understanding or even knowing what he says. This is the case of the prophets, of whom it is testified that—

“They spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1: 21).

“Prophecy” the same authority informs us, “came not in old time by the will of man.”

It was not, so to speak, secreted in the brain tissues of the men called prophets by the spontaneous working of impressions naturally derived, as in the case of a man’s own thoughts or dreams; it was stamped there by the direct action of the Spirit of God, as in the case of one man mesmerically controlling the mind of another who may be subject to his influence (which is in fact the same operation on the human and infinitesimal scale). Having this origin, the prophets themselves were external to the word they spoke. What they said was no part of their own mentality, except mechanically, and for the time being. There was mixture but not amalgamation between the mind of the prophet and the Spirit of God upon him, so that when the vision had passed, and the prophecy had been uttered, a prophet was himself a student of his own utterances. This is what Peter informs us:

*“The prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, **searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify**, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1: 10-11).*

As prophecy “*came not by the will of man,*” so the Spirit of God that brought the prophecy was a power which the prophet could not resist. This is illustrated in the case of Jeremiah, who felt inclined to repress the impulse on account of the scorn which the utterances of the prophecy brought upon him. Thus he writes:

*“Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily, then I said, **‘I will not make mention of***

him nor speak any more in his name': but his word was in mine heart AS A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES, and I was weary with forbearing; I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20: 8-9).

The same is illustrated in another way in the history of Saul, of whom it is related, that when he went in hostile pursuit of David, what happened to three successive bands of messengers he had sent before him, happened to him also:

“The Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Samuel 19: 23-24).

In this case, an angry man, starting out full of evil purpose against Samuel, who had given refuge to David, is taken a helpless captive by the power of the Spirit of God, and brought and laid at Samuel’s feet, in the most humiliating of conditions.

The action of the Spirit of God, operating through the infinitudes of space, is as quick as lightning. This is shown in the case of Isaiah’s visit to Hezekiah, when he was sick. Isaiah’s words were not comforting to the suffering king:

“Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.”

Receiving this message, the king turns his face to the wall and gives himself over to a transport of grief and prayer, upon which Isaiah takes his departure.

“And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, etc.” (2 Kings 20: 5).

Here is a fact perceived at the incomputable distance of the universe’s centre, and a message transmitted from that centre concerning the fact, in a minute or so of time. There are many other illustrations, but this is sufficiently striking by itself. It gives point to the declaration that Jehovah, by His Spirit, fills heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23: 23-24;

Psalm 139: 7-8), and that He is near to every one of us, and discerning of all our ways, even “*the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Acts 17: 27; Hebrews 4:12). As in the matter of voice, so in this matter of quickness of operation through space, the discoveries of modern investigation have silenced the foolish scepticism that would have said, “I do not believe it possible,” and have shown that there are higher things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the common run of human philosophy. The rapid journey of light, the instantaneous flash of the electric current—(facts familiar but impossible to be conceived in their *modus operandi*)—help us to receive this highest of all facts wherein all facts have their root and power: that the Spirit of God is everywhere present, and that in it, we are under the shadow of the Almighty and close to His ear, and that our lot and portion are a mere question of His will. The fact belongs to what most people call “miraculous;” but in truth, it is as much a fact as the sun or the harvest, or the beautiful fresh air. The only difference is, that these are seen: while the other, in the present state of things upon earth, is only to be intellectually discerned. By and by, when Christ at his return confers the precious gift of immortality, intellectual discernment will be supplemented by living perception and glorious experience which will bring with it a comfort and joy of being of which we may now only dream.

3. God can speak through the angels. This is not so direct as when He himself speaks; but it is more direct than when He speaks by the prophets. It is so much more direct that while in the case of prophets, their messages are always prefaced by the intimation that “*thus saith the Lord,*” in the case of the angels, such a form rarely occurs; the message is almost always given without preface and in the first person as when the Almighty speaks directly. There are many illustrations of this. Let one or two suffice. When Israel, after their national settlement in the land of promise under Joshua, began at the first (after Joshua’s death) to go astray,

“*An angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land of which I swear unto your fathers, etc.*” (Judges 2: 1). Again,

“*The angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame of*

fire out of the midst of a bush, and . . . He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3: 1-6).

Again the angel which spake to Moses in Sinai (Acts 7: 38; and Hebrews 2: 2) always speaks in the first person without preface, e.g.,

“I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt”

(Exodus 20: 2).

In these cases, the angels speak as if they were God himself. What is the explanation of this? It is doubtless to be found here, that when the Spirit speaks by an angel, it speaks by an organism that is part of itself, so to speak. Man is of the earth, earthy; he is an animal organism which, though subsisting in the Spirit, as all creation does, is not organically in unity and sympathy with it. He is, therefore, separate from the Spirit in all that constitutes his characteristics and sympathies as a living being. But angels are spirits (Hebrews 1: 7); that is, they are spiritual natures, spiritual bodies, organizations affinitised to all, that characterises the Spirit in its eternal subsistence of wisdom, goodness, and power. When, therefore, God, the eternal sole universe-filling Spirit, speaks by them, He speaks by a vital apparatus that is, so to speak, part of himself. Considered in relation to the ineffable Father himself, they are separate from Him and ministrant to Him; but considered in relation to man to whom they are His representatives, they are One with Him, and therefore speak in His name, when He wills. By the one spirit dwelling in them all, He fills them all, and is therefore “*all in (them) all.*” They are in relation to man the One Majesty of heaven and earth in plural manifestation, though the distinction between the media and the power manifested through them is well marked, though not always. It is this form of things doubtless that explains the grammatical peculiarity of the Hebrew of which Dr. Thomas alone has suggested any reasonable solution, namely, that while in the description of the acts of God, the verb is always in the singular, the nominative is more frequently plural than singular. The universal rule of grammar that the verb must be of the same number with its nominative is disregarded in the matter in question. The name *Elohim* is plural: the verb is singular. It is as if we were to say,

“Powers is agreed;” “Governments has made war;” “*Elohim* (powers) *yommer* (he said) *let there be light.*” We can understand this when we keep in view that while the one Eternal Father Spirit is the doer of all things, He performs his work by the multitudinous agency of the angels, who are His spirit incorporate, so to speak, in many glorious worshipping persons. The plural agents (*Elohim*) do **his** (singular) pleasure; yet are He and they one by the Spirit, as Jesus prays it may be with his disciples (and what he prays for will be granted)—

“That they all may be one; I in them and thou, Father, in me, that they also may be one in us” (John 17: 21, 23).

But we have strayed far from the garden of Eden while keeping close to the matters it presents to us for consideration. God spoke to Adam there. It must have been by one of the modes we have looked at. That it was not the first—the voice of the Almighty made audible as in the case of Christ—we may gather from the fact that the voice in the case was associated with a “*presence*” from which Adam hid himself. It was not the second (speaking through a man) for that the “*presence*” was not a prophet is self-evident. It was not by inspiration in himself that the voice addressed him: for the voice which spoke to him was a something external to himself, as we learn by the intimation that after disobedience, he “*heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,*” and hearing the voice, “*Adam and his wife hid themselves,*” which would be inconceivable on the supposition of a subjective inspiration. There remains but the third—the angelic, which harmonises with all the features of the narrative, and is entirely consistent with the peculiarities of Divine discourse in the form already pointed out. It explains the local “*presence*” of the Lord God in the garden. It imparts a precise meaning to the form in which human creation is proposed: “*Let us make man in our image*” (Genesis 1: 26); and it throws light on the otherwise dark record of verse 22 (chapter 3)

“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.”

It is customary to understand this of “The Trinity”; but this is untenable on every ground. Even if the idea of a Trinity in the fountain head of Deity were not excluded by the testimony of the absolute unity and supremacy of the Father “*out of whom are all things,*” who is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11: 3), and to whom Christ himself is subordinate (1 Corinthians

15: 28; John 14: 10), the fact that the consulters of Genesis 3: 22 once “*knew evil*” is proof that they are not the Deity in the primary sense. Such a thing may be understood of the angels easily enough, for the angels hold their existence of and in the Father, and as the human journey to equality with them is through the path of probationary evil, it is easy to receive the idea that they also tasted evil before attaining to their present wonderful exaltation.

The idea of the angels visiting the garden of Eden places the Edenic chapter of the Divine work on earth on a par with all its subsequent recorded phases. We have the angels visiting Abraham (Genesis 18); Lot (Genesis 19); Moses (Exodus 3); Israel (Joshua 2); Gideon (Judges 6: 11); Manoah (Judges 13: 3), etc. etc., in all which cases their utterances are attributed directly to God as in Genesis 3. The same harmony is to be seen in the prominence of the angelic service in the work of Christ, at his birth (Luke 2: 9-13), his temptation (Mark 1: 13), his crucifixion (Luke 22: 43), his resurrection (Matthew 28: 2), his ascension (Acts 1: 10), and his coming again (Matthew 16: 27). A final harmony is furnished in Christ’s allusion to the intimate relation of the angels to the day of his completed work on earth,
“*Ye shall see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*”
(John 1: 51).

The appearance and speech of angelic visitors can only be called miraculous by those who have not been privileged to experience the fact—a description as yet applicable to the whole of the present generation. In its own sphere, it is as much a natural occurrence as anything else. The angels live as much as we do, and more; for we are only half alive and rapidly tending to dissolution. They live a higher life than we do; for it is written,
“*Thou hast made man a little lower than the angels*” (Hebrews 2: 6-7).

They are already incorruptible, immortal, powerful, and glorious, which we only hope to become on attaining equality with them (Luke 20: 36; I Corinthians 15: 49). But though thus immeasurably higher than human nature, they are not less real. They can be handled (Genesis 32: 24-32; Hosea 12: 4) and seen (2 Samuel 24: 17) and fed (Genesis 18: 8) and talked with (Zechariah 1: 9). They have powers of locomotion by the Spirit, which we

have not in the present state: but this does not argue miraculous independence of the laws of nature according to the popular conception. It shows higher power. They have a command of nature which we have not; but this not through any separation from nature, but through an intimate relation to its powers by their affinity with the primary power in which and by which it exists and from which it has received its constitution. The angels being alive and powerful, their appearance is not a prodigy or a miracle in the vulgar sense, but merely a supremely interesting fact, not as yet within the experience of any now living, it is true, but a fact of the past as credibly testified as any astronomical phenomenon and much more decidedly confirmed. The recurrence of the fact is an imminent contingency; for the evidence is strong that Christ is near, and when he comes he is attended with a multitude of the angelic host.

To the naturalist, again we are in the region of myth in dealing with the subject of angels. His notion on the subject we may dismiss as a prejudice resulting from contracted knowledge. He will not accept what he has not seen for himself: consequently this branch of knowledge remains out of his range. Nay, he is not so consistent as this. He will admit that no man is able to see all facts for himself. He does, as matter of fact, receive much knowledge from secondary sources. He relies on the recorded experiments of other investigators in fields of nature which he has not time to work for himself, and his faith in the experiments is not weakened by the fact that the experimenter may be dead. (Faraday, to wit.) He puts much faith in class books, though the authors may be in their graves. He accepts history enacted ages before he was born, and relies on the evidence of long-dead witnesses in the working out of conclusions as to eclipses or other astronomical occurrences. Why, then, is he so shy of the testimony to the work and nature of angels? The evidence as evidence cannot be touched. It is the nature of the thing given evidence to that excites his invincible intellectual repugnance. Angels he places with mermaids and houris and fairies. There is not the least parallel whatever. These are the mere fictions of fancy, unsupported by any kind of evidence—unconnected with anything serious or rational under the sun. But angels are part of the Bible, part of Jewish history—part of a great work which beginning in Judea in the first century, has already revolutionised the world. They cannot be put aside. A man may exclude them from his individual recognition by isolating himself from the facts that

establish their existence; but the facts—great and serious and noble—remain to be seen by every earnest mind in diligent quest for truth irrespective of the form it may take.

There is nothing in the idea of angels in the abstract calculated to excite incredulity or aversion. On the contrary, it is in harmony with reasonable presumption, suggested by the contemplation of the universe. It is reasonable to assume as a matter of scientific induction that there are higher forms of life than we now see upon the earth. The universe is too vast and grand to allow of the supposition that it exists only for such a poor abortive creature as dying man. An immortal organism is not out of the range of even scientific conception. Prof. T. H. Huxley himself, in his last work, points out that there is no reason in the abstract why there should not be such an equipoise between the processes of waste and reparation in the animal tissues as that an organism thus perfectly balanced should go on working for ever. What modern science thus dimly gropes after as a pleasing but useless speculation, is seriously revealed by the Bible. There are higher things than man, to whom God, by Christ, has given man the hope of becoming equal. They have often been seen upon earth and will be seen again. Their first recorded appearance was in the garden of Eden—an event which the dullness of modern thought compels us to speak of as a miracle. There we must leave them for the present, hoping to have to make their closer acquaintance in future chapters.

CHAPTER 4. —THE REIGN OF DEATH

The WHOLE incident of the entrance of death into the world by Adam's disobedience, may be considered as the next exhibition of the visible hand of God in human affairs—an exhibition reaching down to our own day in the continuance and propagation of the death constitution then miraculously established. It has become quite unfashionable to suppose that death entered into the world at that time. It is universally accepted in learned circles that death has always been in the world. So far as their view is founded on manifest truth, it will be received by every mind that desires to know what is true. Birth, growth, and death have, doubtless, been the law of animal and vegetable existence ever since they appeared on the earth, as proved by the embedded and fossilised remains which have been exhumed at all depths in every part of the earth; but this does not touch the question before us. The question is—the mortality of Adam's race; how did it come? Was the race created subject to death? or did death come as a specific divine super-addition for a reason that came into play after Adam was made? No light is thrown on this problem by the fact that other and lower animal organisms have always been subject to death; because if Adam was separately introduced afterwards, in the image of the Elohim, as lord of all the inferior creation, it is reasonable, even apart from testimony, to suppose that his case was separately and specifically dealt with. If it be urged that the fossil remains of the past include human remains, as well as remains of the inferior races, the answer has to be made that there is a lack of scientific evidence that these remains are identical with the Adamic race. The animal and vegetable remains are those of species now largely extinct, belonging to pre-Adamic ages; and analogy would require that what are considered human remains, if they are human remains (which is by no means certain from the evidence) are the remains of an anterior race, existing at a remote time, when as yet the earth had not been overtaken by the convulsion which brought it to the state (developed in darkness and submerged in the deep) depicted to us in Genesis 1: 2. The Adamic race is a new start; and our enquiry relates to it. Did it commence mortal, or was it brought down to a mortal state after it appeared?

It is impossible to get any light on this question from geology or any

other natural source. Speculation on the subject on scientific premises is only pretentious maundering. There is a short and satisfactory way to the root of the matter. As on many other subjects, so in this, the resurrection of Christ is the key of the whole position. If Christ rose from the dead, Paul, his specially selected apostle, is an inspired declarer of truth. Consequently, his dogmatic assertion that “*by one man (Adam) sin entered into the (human) world and death by sin*” is a settlement of the question. Paul’s dogmatic assertion does not stand alone. It is founded on and endorses the mosaic account, which is itself commended to our confidence as divine on separate and independent grounds. However unfashionable it may have become, therefore, and however unscientific and far behind it may seem, the man stands on logically unassailable ground who holds that death did not come into the world with Adam, but by him after he came; that at first, he was free from the action of death in his organization; that though not absolutely immortal in the sense of being indestructible in nature, he was in that state with respect to the working and tendency of his organization, that death did not wait him in the natural path, but had to be introduced as a law of his being before he could become mortal. His was an animal nature that would not die left to itself—a natural body free from death. The difference between this state and the immortality to which we are invited in Christ, and which Adam would have attained in the event of final obedience, will be discerned in the fact that the latter immortality is the immortality of a spiritual body; the immortality of a higher nature; a body with higher gifts, powers, and relations. An elephant lives a hundred years, and man sometimes lives a hundred years, but the human century is the century of a higher life, higher capacity, higher intelligence, higher enjoyment than the elephantine century; but they are both a century. Extend the century indefinitely; let the elephant live on and the man live on—for ever; then we should have the difference illustrated between the deathlessness of Adam the living soul or natural body, and the immortality he would have attained by change into the likeness of the divine nature.

But this immortality Adam did not attain. Nay, he lost the good natural state which was his by creation. He had to confess to having eaten of the tree which he was commanded not to eat; and he had to suffer the dread sentence which doomed him, after a life of toil, to return to the ground from which he had been taken. In the execution of this sentence, we have the

visible hand of God. Left to himself as God had made him, he would not have returned to the ground: left to itself, too, the ground would have brought forth beneficially and plentifully. It required what men call a miracle to depress to the level of the beasts that perish, the noble creature formed in the image of the Elohim, and to cause the earth to yield spontaneously *“thorns also and thistles.”*

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Genesis 3: 17-18).

It was not cursed before.

“Thou shalt die” (Genesis 2: 17):

This was not the prospect apart from disobedience. How were the two results effectuated? By the interposition of the Divine will causing the one and the other. The Divine power that made man and the ground *“very good”* at the beginning easily modified the constitution of things for evil. A slight alteration in the condition of the soil and in the distribution and proportional activity of vegetable germs, was sufficient to make it soon apparent that the curse of God was on the earth, while as regards Adam, the sentence judicially pronounced would write itself in his constitution after the example of Elisha’s imprecation of the leprosy on Gehazi who went from the presence of the prophet’s words as white as snow. Mortality has been a fundamental law of human nature from that day to this. We have all to acknowledge with Paul, the *“sentence of death in ourselves”* (2 Corinthians 1: 9). This sentence is anterior to and surmounts all questions and conditions of health. It draws an inexorable boundary line beyond which human development cannot pass, however carefully promoted. It is a circle enclosing human life—a contracting circle—which will go on contracting till it comes to the vanishing point. Men may labour for the improvement of their species: but it is in vain. All their hygienics are within the contracting circle. They may stave off the concentric collapse for a little: they may do something to ensure the highest attainable vigour for mortal life—that is, condemned life; but it is a mere tinkering—valuable in its place, but of no moment in the ultimate and final relation of things. It is the truest philosophy that recognises, once for all, that at his best estate, under present circumstances, man is altogether vanity (Psalm 39: 5). Paul had to say of himself and his class,

“We groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8: 23).

“We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not

that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life”

(2 Corinthians 5: 4).

The man who expects to improve on Paul’s philosophy or David’s, is bound to find himself woefully mistaken at last, and that, without waiting long in any case. Death is written in our present nature. It was written in Eden. It is the writing of God; no man can blot it out. God can, and will in the cases He chooses. He began the work at Nazareth in harmony with his own greatness. He sent forth His son in the death-written nature that in him it might be cleansed, redeemed, and perfected.

“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead”

(1 Corinthians 15: 21).

How the resurrection came by man is told in the life and death of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. It came by his obedience (Romans 5: 19), but obedience requiring death as the declaration of Jehovah’s righteousness (Romans 3: 25), and the condemnation of sin in the flesh (Romans 8: 3). Jesus died unto sin once (Romans 6: 10). It touched him through Adam: but though a sufferer from its effects, he was without sin himself (Hebrews 4: 15). Having died once, death has no more dominion over him (Romans 6: 9).

“Through death, he destroyed that having the power of death, that is, the devil”—otherwise sin in the flesh (Hebrews 2: 14).

By him and by him alone can men attain to this victory, for it has been wrought in him and in him only as yet. He will confer the fellowship and participation of his victory on those who come unto God by him (Hebrews 5: 9; 8: 25; Revelation 2: 7). He will do it by the power God has given him. God has given him power over all flesh with this view (John 17: 2). By it, he will change the bodies of his people that they may be conformed to the likeness of his own glorious body (Philippians 3: 21). The spirit of God, changing the mortal to the immortal, will thus blot out the sentence of death written in Eden. Thus one miracle will undo the effects of another. That is, God will change His own work as wisdom and love, in their times and seasons, require. God who kills will make alive; God who curses will bless; God who causes evil will bestow good: for all these things belong to Him (Deuteronomy 32: 39; Isaiah 45: 7).

“Of him and to him and through him, are all things.”

The hand of God is visible in a variety of other items to be briefly noted before passing from Eden. The visits of the angels we considered in the last chapter. The speaking of the serpent probably comes into this category. A speaking serpent has not been disclosed in the annals of natural history since that time. The possibility of such a thing will, of course, not be denied by any wise man. It is a mere question of throat mechanism and the relation of the necessary nerves of volition to that mechanism. The parrot illustrates such an adaptation, only minus ideas to express by this means. The serpent had the ideas and the power of expressing them, too. Was this combination the result of natural organization, or was it an extra-natural gift as in the case of the ass that forbade the madness of Balaam? In either case, the hand of God is visible: for if it was not a miraculous endowment for the occasion, then miraculousness is visible in the withdrawal of the power as part of the degradation of the serpent. The Miltonic idea of Satanic possession or personation is of course entirely out of the question. The Satan of that theory is a myth, as we know from considerations for which this is not the place. Whether it were natural endowment or divine inspiration that led the creature to entice the woman to disobedience, the moral bearings of the incident are the same. The obedience of Adam and Eve **was put to the proof**. And this was the object intended. Left to themselves, obedience would have been a matter of course; but it is not obedience of this mild description that is commendable to God. **Obedience under trial** is what pleases God. To give Adam and Eve an opportunity for obedience of this sort, or to terminate and set aside the obedience they were rendering if it should prove of the flimsy order of a mere circumstantial compliance, this creature was placed in the way. It was a divine arrangement with a divine object. The same principle was afterwards illustrated when "*God did tempt Abraham*" (Genesis 22: 1), that is, put him to the proof, by requiring at his hands a performance which seemed on the face of it inconsistent even with God's own purposes in the case. There is no contradiction in this to James' deprecation of any man saying, "I am tempted of God" (James 1: 13), for in the case of James' discourse, it is a question of enticing to evil for evil's sake. God never does this to a just man: He tries him, and in this sense tempts him, which is another thing. We may be quite sure if we are children of God that some time or other, we shall be similarly put to the proof. To him that overcometh (offering the stout front of a determined obedience to

God to all suggestions or incitements in any direction forbidden), will the palm of victory be finally awarded. In our case, the hand of God is not visible; but the principle is the same. Allowance, however, will doubtless be made for the lesser privilege of those who like us have not been permitted to see with our own eyes the visible hand of God. The principle of God's recorded dealings would suggest this (2 Chronicles 30: 18-20; John 20: 29; Luke 12: 48; Acts 16: 30; John 9: 41).

Next to the part performed by the serpent, we have the visible hand of God in the qualities imparted to the trees of knowledge and life, and the expulsion of Adam and his wife from Eden, and the fiery blockade of the approach. As to the first, it was no ordinary tree that had the power to open the eyes and to impart new discernments. That the tree of knowledge of good and evil had this power is evident from the things testified concerning it, and from the effects produced on Adam and Eve. The serpent said that the eating of the tree would have this effect, and its words were shown to be true by the actual result. That the serpent should state the truth in the case would probably be due to his overhearing the Elohim converse on the subject. The serpent seems to refer to them as his authority:

“Elohim doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened” (Genesis 3: 5).

That the effect was produced would show that the power to produce the effect resided in the tree. That such a power should exist in such a cause will stagger no one who is acquainted with the extraordinary and diversified powers resident in vegetable juices of even familiar acquaintance, not that any of them have the powers of imparting knowledge, but that they illustrate the possibility of producing mental effects by a substance of vegetable constitution. Such a tree in Eden was placed there as part of the apparatus constituting the visible hand of God in the Adamic situation. To Adam, it would seem as natural as the rest, and probably was so in the truly scientific sense; to us, it savours of miracle, merely because we do not know of such a tree, and never heard of any one having access to it since the one man for whom it was specially planted as part of the garden which—

“The Lord God planted eastward in Eden,” there to *“put the man to dress and to keep it.”*

These reflections are specially cogent in their bearing upon that other

tree, of which he was not permitted to eat—the tree of life—in which resided the extraordinary power that had he partaken of it even after his condemnation, he would have lived for ever (Genesis 3: 22). We may dismiss the idea that some have advanced, that Adam had been in the habit of eating this tree: and that so long as he did so, he was immortal, and that all that was necessary to secure his mortality was to cut him off from the use of the daily medicament. The prompt and energetic precautions taken “*lest he should put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life,*” are out of keeping with this idea. It was a single eating in the case of the single tree of knowledge; and the “*also*” of this verse suggests that it was a similar contingency that was in view in the case of the tree of life. The interposition of “*a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life,*” would have been an excess of energy if the object was merely to cut off the supply of what required to be daily taken in order to have its effect. The withering of the tree or expulsion from the garden would in that case have met all the necessities of the situation. Then it would have been strangely disproportionate with the facts to speak of Adam, “*putting forth his hand and eating and living for ever,*” if he had to eat for ever in order to live for ever; and a rather over-vigorous use of language to call a tree of life that which had only power to impart life during the short time the quantity taken might remain in the system. The figurative use of the tree in the New Testament, to represent the life everlasting which God will give to all who receive Christ at the resurrection, is inconsistent with the notion that it had to be used constantly to be effective. The whole surroundings of the case show that Adam had not taken of it, and that if he had, he would have become immortal. The only countenance to the contrary idea is the permission to eat “*of every tree of the garden,*” except the tree of knowledge in the midst of the garden (Genesis 3: 2-3; 2: 16). It is argued that this must have included the tree of life. But this does not follow. The tree of life was evidently not reckoned among “*the trees of the garden.*” It seems to have stood apart by itself, having a “*way*” or approach that could be guarded (Genesis 3: 24).

That a tree should have the power of imparting immortality to the eater will only strike us as strange by reason of our want of experience of such a thing. There is no end to the variety of God’s operations in the universe. Immortality will ultimately be conferred by the direct transfusion of the Spirit of God upon the substance of the accepted by the will of Christ;

but it is impossible to deny that God could effect the same result in another way, by the same power differently applied. God showed Moses a tree in the desert, which, on portions of it being put into the bitter springs, healed the water (Exodus 15: 25). So He could make a vegetable substance which would have a similar effect on the organs of the eater. He did actually create such a tree in the beginning; had Adam proved obedient, he would probably have been invited to eat. The event turned out otherwise, and the tree, first carefully guarded from intrusion, was in course of time removed.

The guarding of the way of the tree of life was an operation of what would be called the miraculous order. “*A flaming sword which turned every way*” was no natural phenomenon, yet it was not essentially different from what we may see and know any day. Destructive fire and brightness of light are familiar, if latent, properties of nature in its dullest aspects. Fire sleeps in stone, and who that has seen the electric light can fail to realise the dazzling brightness that resides in the invisible electric current or the lifeless charcoal. The difference between these and the Edenic coruscation lies in the fact that while they are passive and mechanical forces of nature as divinely constituted, this was the product of the Divine volition brought to bear locally and specifically for a limited purpose. All power is one—in God, but there are different manifestations according to His will. In the upholding of heaven and earth, we see power in a mechanical state: passive, inert, established; in what is called miracle, we see the same power acting under an intelligent impulse derived from the centre of all power—the everlasting God—the Creator of the ends of the earth.

The whole situation in Eden required the visible hand of God. The veiled hand—the indirect guidance—would not have been adapted to a time when there was but as yet a single individual, and be in harmony with the Superior Will which had given him being. The ways of Providence were for after times, when men had multiplied, and sin had introduced that confession out of which the Divine wisdom purposes the evolution of order, and the highest good. The veiled hand belongs to times of evil only. When the ministry of reconciliation—(“*to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*”) shall have accomplished its object, there will be no need for God to hide Himself from the inhabitants of the earth. His power and wisdom are now manifest, for

they cannot be concealed; but His existence and His love have to be laboriously discerned. He has withdrawn the open manifestation of Himself, both from Israel and the Gentiles; but on the day that He has appointed—on the day when His earth family is complete and His will paramount everywhere under the sun, there will be an end to concealment. This is one of the great and precious promises—that we shall know as we are known (1 Corinthians 13: 12)—that heaven will be open—(John 1: 51); that the tabernacle of God will be with men, and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and there shall be no night there (Revelation 21: 3; 22: 5), that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15: 28).

CHAPTER 5. —ENOCH AND THE FLOOD

THE HAND of God is visible in Adam's possession of speech without the opportunity of acquiring it in a natural way, whence we might be led into the interesting inquiry whether there is a primitive language with God, and whether Hebrew be that language, and whether this will be the language in use in the age to come, and throughout the endless ages of perfection. We may have a better opportunity for looking at these matters when we come to consider the confusion of tongues. There are other features of the visible hand in the circumstances of Adam and Eve; but we have lingered long enough in and about the garden of Eden, and must needs proceed on the sorrowful journey "through times' dark wilderness of years"—thankful, however, that the darkness is not so complete as it might have been, but that here and there the glory of the visible divine hand illumines the night, showing us the road that leads at last to day restored for ever.

We pass by Cain and Seth, and note the first undoubted gleam of the visible hand, in the termination of Enoch's three hundred and sixty-five years' "*walk with God.*"

"He was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5: 24).

This might have been for us a very enigmatical saying if it had not been interpreted for us by apostolic comment. Our orthodox friends would, of course, have had no difficulty with it in any case. As they read it, it is a thing that happens every time a righteous man dies. We hear them say of such and such, "God has taken him," when we know that what has happened is the man's death and burial. It is unfortunate for their view of the case that Enoch's case, who did not die, is the only case in which we have this mode of narrative. In all the other cases, the record is, "and he died" (Genesis 5: 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, etc., etc.). The explanation is furnished in the apostolic comment referred to:

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11: 5).

If we are told that God took Enoch, it is because he continued alive to be taken and was taken, and did not die. If Enoch had died as our modern

friends die, it would not have been said of him that God took him, as modern friends say of their dead. The fact is, the Bible and our modern friends are entirely out of harmony. Our modern friends have inherited a philosophic speculation which, not being true, is a fable—to the effect that man is immortal and cannot die, whereas the very backbone of the Bible is the fact, proclaimed, defined, and illustrated times without number that the race of man has become liable to death through the sin of Adam, and in death remains without existence for the time being.

But it is the taking of Enoch in the Scriptural sense that we look at. He was “*translated that he should not see death.*” When he fulfilled a year for every day of the year—365 years—he was removed from among men without seeing death. The reason of this removal does not quite belong to the subject of these chapters. Still it is interesting to note, “*He walked with God.*” His life in an age of growing corruption was so conformed to the will of God as to secure the perfect approbation of God. The disapprobation of God in the case of Adam was expressed in the sentence of death; here we have exemption from death as the result of God’s approval of Enoch. It naturally occurs to us to marvel how this exemption could take place in view of Enoch’s inclusion in Adam’s sentence, as yet untaken away in Christ. But our difficulty eases when we realise that Enoch’s “*walk with God*” included that regular offering of typical sacrifice in which Christ’s great work was foreshadowed, and by which Enoch identified himself with that work. There was no more setting aside of God’s appointed order than there will be in the case of those who “*are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*” and shall not see death. In the case of these, the law of God has its fulfilment in their retrospective “*crucifixion with Christ*” emblematised in baptism into his death; in the case of Enoch, the same result was reached prospectively so far as the divine purpose was concerned, and actually in Enoch’s offering of sacrifice.

It is the fact of Enoch’s removal, however, that more particularly claims our attention—the fact considered as a miracle. It was a wonderful event certainly for a man to be taken away from the earth. The need for it from the divine point of view, we cannot estimate for want of intimate acquaintance with the circumstances of Enoch’s generation. The fact of its occurrence may satisfy us as to its suitability to what the age in its divine

relations called for. The possibility of its occurrence will not be a debatable question with those who look at things with a broad robust sense that takes in all facts. Those who view their surroundings in a superficial way may feel some doubts. Gravitation (as we call it) is the law that we are most acquainted with; and looking at this alone, poor mortals feel it is impossible that they could rise through the air and leave the earth. But even poor mortals can see, as in the case of a balloon, that a counter force interposed can neutralise the action of gravitation, and carry a man in the opposite direction to that in which gravitation would draw him. Will they be so presumptuous as to declare that ballooning is the only mode of counteracting gravitation? If so, we can but turn away without much hope of making an impression in favour of reason. The man who knows most is least confident on all such points. The universe is full of hidden powers and wonders. The wise man but wishes to know what they are; he does not dictate what they ought to be. Gravitation is one wonder; but there are others. Gravitation is an invisible force; but there are other invisible forces, and the greatest of them all is the one invisible force that holds them all together, and of which they are subdivided manifestations—the Spirit of God—the eternal living intelligent force, power or word, which was with God and is God. With this power, it is as natural in a given case of need to bestow the faculty of mounting the skies as the susceptibility to be drawn downwards as in falling to the earth. And when such faculty is given and exercised, it is no more a violation or going against nature than the most ordinary of natural occurrences. It is merely a higher use of power than mortals are accustomed to—the exercise of which to those who possess it is as natural as the exercise of the faculties we all so wondrously possess now. As a matter of fact, we have such a power exemplified in the cases of Elijah, the Lord Jesus, and the angels. Elijah was taken away from the earth; the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven; and the angels, by volition, have power of movement through the atmosphere. Men dream of exercising such a power. There was quite a discussion on the subject in the newspapers some time ago; it was carried on under the name of “Levitation.” Many correspondents were able to tell of having dreamt—in some cases in waking dreams—of having by the mere exercise of the will wafted themselves through space. It speaks of a latent possibility which, though it must remain latent in our present sluggish nature, points to a possibility of development under the right conditions. What those conditions are, it is impossible for unassisted man to guess. They

are revealed to us in the Scriptures. The first is a moral harmony with God, and the second physical harmony. Because of the violation of the first (the entrance of sin into the world), the second was made impossible by the consequent sentence of death which we considered in our last chapter. Nevertheless, we are in the image of the Elohim—the battered and deteriorated image, but still the image, in defacement, of a higher nature, and therefore we experience aspirations and intuitive reachings after higher accomplishments that we can never realise in our present state. The gospel of Christ is the gladsome intimation that such as receive the divine approbation by reason of faith and obedience, will be emancipated from the present low, earth-cleaving, dying nature, and “clothed upon” with a higher nature, like to that of the Lord Jesus and the angels, in which they will be powerful, glorious, and immortal, and endowed with that infinitude of powers and faculties which we now but dreamily and wistfully yearn after. (1 Corinthians 15: 40-54; Philippians 3: 20; John 3: 2-8; 1 Corinthians 13: 9-12; 2 Corinthians 5: 1-4; Luke 20: 36; Revelation 7: 15-16; 20: 4).

Among those powers will doubtless be included that faculty of locomotion by volition—travelling by will through space—which the angels so constantly exhibit—a mode of travel exceeding the highest dreams of modern mechanics—because achieved on principles out of their reach—the dynamics of the Spirit of God, acting through the vital machinery of spiritual immortal bodies in harmony with the nature of the Universal Spirit which has its kernel in the Living God, in whom they will have and hold their being more intimately and consciously than now. But this power, like all other powers, will be exercised in submission to the divine will. The setting aside of the divine will was the beginning of sorrows with Adam’s race: the restoring of it to its place will be the laying of the foundation of our everlasting peace. Consequently, the power of travel in inter-stellar space will not be used at the caprice of its possessors. The Father’s command will govern all. When we have said this, the whole subject is enclosed in the boundary line of the plan which gives the earth to the sons of men. Excursions from the earth, if they take place, will be exceptional, and by special permission. The possibility of such excursions is shown by the Lord’s ascent to the Father’s right hand, and the coming and going of the angelic host. More than this we need not seek to know.

Enoch had but to be seized of the Spirit of God, so to speak, in which all things subsist, to become capable of a removal as easy and natural as the falling of Newton's apple to the earth. It is only the same power differently applied. But then comes the atmospheric difficulty from our sharp but shallow contemporaries of the unbelieving fraternity. What is the difficulty? Well, say they, and truly, the atmosphere becomes so rare at a short distance from the earth that it is impossible for an animal organization, in which life is generated by breathing, to exist. In support of this contention, they will faithfully rehearse the records of experimental balloonists, how, that at a height of three or four miles, or six at the highest, the ears tingle, the nose bleeds, the senses benumb, and vitality sinks; to all of which the receiver of higher truth has but to say, granted; granted, but what has it to do with the case? We are not speaking of a man taken up in a balloon, or taken up in any other natural way, but taken up by the Power that is at the bottom of nature everywhere, out of which nature has been evolved by Omnipotent volition. We are speaking of a direct act of the wondrous eternal wisdom, out of which has come the vast and complicated system around us—from the balanced revolutions of the planets to the minute and exquisite apparatus of life in field and flood everywhere. Do you suppose that if God draw a man from the earth, He would make no provision for the preservation of his senses on the way? Do you suppose God has no other way of developing vitality than by the heart-pumped, lung-purified arterial circulation of minute scarlet discs, floating in transparent serum? Do you suppose that the electrical energy thus generated in the animal organization cannot be supplied in any other way? The propounding of the question terminates the difficulty. Enoch, when "*God took him,*" would be exposed to none of the discomforts and perils of balloonists. The full mantling supply of divine energy would not only upbear him from the drawing grasp of Earth, but would preserve every vital power in full and vigorous play, and invest him with a sense of comfort and self-possession such as we feel in our placidest and pleasantest dreams—and all without any of the opposition to nature such as people imagine takes place when a miracle is performed: all would be done in harmony with the fundamental laws and needs of nature, by addition and adaptation to the power already imparted to nature, and not by setting it aside.

In the case of spiritual bodies, there will not be the need for

adaptation that must take place where an animal body has to be preserved in an attenuated atmosphere. Spiritual bodies have powers in harmony with the Immensity-filling spirit in which all things subsist.

We pass from Enoch to the flood, to look at the next exhibition of the visible hand of God. We assume the occurrence of the flood, as a matter of course. The circumstances of its record in the Mosaic writings is sufficient proof in view of Christ's endorsement of those writings as divine, even if he had not himself specifically referred to the flood as an event of actual occurrence, with which to bring his own second coming into comparison (Matthew 24: 38). It is, of course, interesting to know that the tradition of a flood comes to us in most national histories—the most recent and striking instance being Mr. Smith's discovery of the story of it in a corrupt form on Assyrian tablets over 3,000 years old. But these confirmations are by no means essential to evidence otherwise complete.

We look at the nature of it, the object in view, and the extent of its prevalence. The object of it was to destroy mankind on account of their indifference to God's expressed will, and their corruption of the "*way*" He had placed among them for His worship. It would be interesting to dwell on the principle illustrated in the purpose, that God's pleasure and not man's well-being as a creature, is the governing element in human destiny. There is need in our day for the enforcement of this principle, when men are everywhere carried away by notions on the subject of human rights, which are utterly unphilosophical while pretentiously the opposite—altogether one-sided—derived from a contemplation of only one, and that the most limited aspect of the case. They have looked at the human bearing of things only. They have left God's rights (which are the only rights) altogether out of the account, with the result of unfitting them to recognise justice in the authenticated dispensation of his destroying judgments, whether in Eden, outside Noah's Ark on the day of the deluge, or among panic-stricken Canaanites in the presence of Israel's host. Christ is on the side of all those dispensations of judgment, and every wise man will desire to be where Christ is on any question. However, this is not the place for discussing the aspect of the flood, though a glance at it was unavoidable. It is the nature of it as an interposition of miraculous power that demands our consideration.

The first reflection that occurs to the mind is, that in the flood itself (leaving out of account the miraculous nature of its revelation beforehand to Noah, and the directions for preparation) the miraculous element was, so to speak, minimised to the lowest point. God could have annihilated the human race more expeditiously in many other ways; for example, Nadab and Abihu struck dead in a moment; all the first-born of Egypt destroyed in a night; Sennacherib's army decimated by a single fatal blast, and many more. In the flood, natural suffocation by water was resorted to. There was doubtless a reason for this slow method. Probably, it admitted of those adjuncts of preliminary terror which the justice of God saw the case demanded. Then, again, Noah's salvation was accomplished by as little of the miraculous as possible. It would have been easy for God to have isolated a certain district from which the destroying waters should have been kept, and within which Noah and all his, would have been protected from the destroying tempest. Instead of that, just as the death of the doomed population was effected by natural means, so the salvation of Noah was effected by natural means, by the floating of a wooden structure within which he had previously retired for safety. For this also there was doubtless excellent reason: Noah's salvation was in this way made the result of his own faith and obedience, in which God was honoured and Noah brought into the right relation.

The ways of God are always most wisely adapted to the requirements of each situation as it arises, and it will be found in the study of each case that the amount of miracle employed is the smallest that the case calls for. There is none of the prodigality of marvel—meaningless marvel that characterises all artificial histories—such as the apocryphal gospels, the life of Mahomet, or the Arabian Nights entertainment. Only so much extra-natural effort is put forth as is needful for the object in view. The miracle in the case lay in the bringing of the water. The question of how much was necessary involves the question of the area to be covered: in other words, was the flood universal in the sense of covering the entire globe? Considering the comparatively limited extent of the human family at the time, and that it was confined to one small district of the globe, it would seem reasonable to conclude from the principle already looked at—the divine sparingness of means—that the flood was co-extensive only with the Adamically-inhabited portion of the globe.

There are facts that compel such a conclusion; and as all facts are of God, they must be in agreement. The animals of New Zealand are different from those of Australia. The animals of Australia, again, are different from those of Asia and Europe. These again differ entirely from those of the American continent: all differ from one another: and **the fossil remains on all the continents show that this difference has always prevailed.** Now if the flood were universal in the absolute sense, it is manifest that these facts could not be explained, for if the animals all over the earth were drowned, and the devastated countries were afterwards replenished from a Noachic centre, the animals of all countries would now show some similarity, instead of consisting of totally different species. The animals taken into the ark in that case would be the animals of the humanly-populated district only—a comparatively small district in relation to the face of the world at large. If we suppose that only the district populated by the human race was submerged, there would be no difficulty, because in that case, the outlying parts of the earth would not be interfered with, and the state of the animal life in these parts would continue to be what it had been in previous times.

It seems at first sight a difficulty in the way of this view, that the Mosaic description of the flood seems to set before us an absolutely universal flood.

“All the high hills that were under the whole heavens were covered.”

This difficulty will vanish, however, if we realise that the language of the narrative is intended only to represent things as they appeared to the Noachic survivors. The whole Bible narrative was written for the inhabitants of the earth, and therefore adopts their point of view throughout. Any other would have been inconsistent with the object of the narrative. When you describe a matter to children, you instinctively adapt the form of your discourse to their modes of looking at things, otherwise you fail to be understood. You speak very differently to an equal. In relation to God’s great works, men are children: they can only take in the aspects of these works as they appear to mortal sense, and consequently the Divine presentation of them in narrative has to deal with aspects, not with the *modus in esse*. This is not to present an error instead of a truth, but to use in discourse a part of the truth where a part only is serviceable: for the aspect of a matter is certainly part of the truth of a matter, though it may be but a small part. To speak of the sun rising in the

morning is to speak of an aspect of the truth not in any way inconsistent with the fact that the sun does not move.

To an onlooker, “*all the high hills under the whole heavens*” would be covered; as a matter of fact, all the hills within range of his observation and for many miles beyond it would be submerged. But the hills in other parts of the world might be untouched for all that. When Moses said that God had put the fear and the dread of Israel upon the nations that were “*under the whole heavens*”; and Paul, that the Gospel had been preached “*to every creature which is under heaven*,” the statement was not intended in the absolute sense, but in the sense relative to the speaker. The nations “*under the whole heavens*” of Israel’s experience were afraid, but there were other nations under the whole heaven of absolute speech, that had never heard of them. Every creature under the heaven of actual apostolic operations had heard the Gospel, but there were vaster multitudes under other skies to whom the Gospel never went—the Chinese, Japanese, and others. This indicates the local stand-point that must be recognised in the understanding of apparently absolute expressions—a thing common to current speech, as when we say of an invited party of friends, “Every one has come,” the “every one” is absolute only within the range of the subject referred to.

The only question remaining is, how could the Mesopotamian district of the earth be overspread with a flood deep enough to cover the highest mountains (and there are very high mountains in the district) without at the same time producing the submergence of the universal globe? The intimation that “*the fountains of the great deep were broken up*,” in addition to the falling of a mighty rain, seems to suggest the answer. “*The great deep*” is of course the ocean: the ocean was made to flow in upon the doomed district, and from various directions, as implied in the plural “*fountains*.” Now how was this to be done, but by depressing the district, which a glance at the map will show lies between several great seas on the north, south and west? A slow depression (indiscernible to the inhabitants, because of its gentle and far-reaching extent) would produce the effect of “*breaking up the fountains of the great deep*,” and bringing the waters of the ocean to aggravate the terrors of the appalling deluge of rain. It is Hugh Miller’s suggestion (quoted by McAusland in his work on the Adamite) and seems to meet the necessities of the case entirely. Hugh Miller points out that a depression of

this sort, “would open up by three separate channels the fountains of the deep.” The depression extending to about two thousand miles each way, “*would at the end of the fortieth day*” (at the rate of 400 feet per day) be sunk in its centre to the depth of sixteen thousand feet—a depth sufficiently profound to bury the loftiest mountain in the district, and yet, having a gradient of declination of but 16 feet per mile, the contour of its hills and plains would remain apparently what they had been before. The doomed inhabitants would but see the water rising along the mountain sides and one refuge after another swept away till the last witness of the scene would have perished and the last hill top would have disappeared. And when after a hundred and fifty days had come and gone, the depressed hollow would have begun slowly to rise, and when after the fifth month had passed, the ark would have grounded on the summit of Mount Ararat, all that could have been seen from the upper window of the vessel, would simply be a boundless sea, roughened by tides, now flowing outwards with a reversed course, towards the distant ocean, by the three great outlets which during the period of depression, had given access to the waters. Noah would, of course, see that the fountains of the great deep were stopped and the waters, “*returning from off the earth continually.*”

CHAPTER 6. —THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE AND ITS DIVERSIFICATION

MANKIND SPEAK many different languages. It is this as much as anything that divides them into nations. The fact has caused much speculation. That man should possess the gift of speech at all is a marvel when the matter is thoroughly considered, apart from its familiarity: That he should exercise the same gift in so many ways—that there should be a French language, a German language, a Russian, a Chinese, an English, an Italian, a Hebrew, Greek and Latin, etc., may appear even more wonderful on reflection. A hundred human beings could be gathered together, no two of whom would understand one another's speech. The fact has set the wits of "learning" to work. Our own day is distinguished for theories of the origin of language. Many suggestions are made and plausibly supported by facts—(a few facts), and the agreement of the theories with the few facts has caused a great many educated people to jump to the conclusion that the theories are true. And the vague and pretentious nomenclature of the theories has a tendency to create and perpetuate the impression of their unquestionable reliability. In point of fact, the theories are guesses of the most untrustworthy character, distinguished only by common agreement to ignore the Mosaic account of the matter. In themselves, they contradict one another, and they change from year to year with increasing knowledge. They have a very narrow foundation; they stand upon a very few facts. They do not harmonise the whole truth of the case, as they would if they were scientifically true. The only account that harmonises all facts is the Mosaic; it accounts for the total want of elementary affinity between the leading languages of the world, which cannot be accounted for on the supposition that the different languages are mere differentiations of an original common system of vocables. And as besides this, the Mosaic account is supported by Christ, we have a double reason for accepting that account as true.

The account exhibits the visible hand of God. "*The whole earth* (some centuries after the flood) *was of one language and of one speech*" (Genesis 11: 1), that is, the whole inhabited earth, which at that time was of very limited dimensions. It was inevitable it should be so, arguing from what we see and know in our own day. People who have grown up

together all speak one way. Noah's family would speak Noah's tongue, and their families the same, and their successors the same, as population multiplied. What tongue this was, we may gather to have been the Hebrew tongue. There does not seem any room for doubt upon this point in view of the simple fact that the names of men from the beginning, even commencing with Adam, are all Hebrew. The Creator's own name is expressed in Hebrew. The *Elohim* talked with Adam in Hebrew; and the language which he acquired from them was like theirs. God's communications with Moses were in Hebrew; the nomenclature of the service of the tabernacle (that "*pattern of things in the heavens*") was all in Hebrew. The prophets spoke and wrote in Hebrew. Jesus, after his ascension, in his communication with Saul of Tarsus, "*spake unto him in the Hebrew tongue.*" The primitive language of the Adamic race is thus, without doubt, the Hebrew tongue, and the same evidence proves that this is the divine language. That the Eternal Father should have a language may startle those whose notions of divinity are of the loose and superstitious order reflected in mere popular tradition. In the exercise of reason and in the light of the evidence, it will only appear natural and fitting that the speech of God should have structure and identity. The Father holds converse with the highest intelligences, the angels of His power, as He has done with Israel through the prophets; and is it not a matter of course that speech should be the vehicle of communion? True, He can commune by Spirit-impulse, but is not the very idea of language rooted in this? Strong idea seeks expression, and expression is a universal phenomenon. God is the archetype of every excellence we see manifested in the universe: the Giver of every good and perfect gift; and if David, with logical power, enquires: "*He that hath formed the eye, shall he not see?*" may we not with equal force ask: "He that had endowed man with the faculty of speech, shall He not speak?" He is not a man that He should be imperfect. He is not confined within the boundaries of any gift; for He has received no gift. "Who hath given unto him?" He is not, therefore, like man, bound by laws of speech. Eternal Corporate Wisdom is not confined to any sounds or signs, in the conveyance of ideas He may wish to express. Nevertheless, among all sounds and signs, there must be those which are best (judged by whatever standard), and it seems reasonable therefore to conclude that those in which Yahweh chooses to express Himself are the best. And He has chosen to do so in Hebrew. Jesus has spoken in Hebrew since his glorification, whence it is no unnatural effort of logic to conclude that this is

the language of that state of nature-likeness to Jesus to which men are invited in the gospel. This conclusion brings with it also the other conclusion that Hebrew will be the official language of the age to come, and finally, the language of all the earth. It is noteworthy, in passing, that amidst all their vicissitudes and corruptions, Israel should preserve Hebrew as the language of their worship throughout the world. There is probably in this a providential preparation for the political revolution that is to ensue on Christ's reappearing—in the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy as the government of the whole world.

Hebrew, then, was the “*one language and one speech*” of all the inhabited earth at the time spoken of in Genesis 11. The continuance of this linguistic unity would have permitted of the execution of the plan which commended itself to the leaders of the community for social unity and consolidation. They feared being “scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” It is easy to understand how they came to entertain this view. The population was limited and confined to a small district, outside of which, all was forest and desert. If they separated themselves they would lose the advantages and comforts and pleasures of society. They were comfortable while living in one community. There was a sense of power and honour in association. But there was a tendency on the part of some to separate and depart to the wilds. They therefore formed a scheme to prevent disintegration.

“*Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven* (which could therefore be seen from great distances all round and form a rallying centre of social organization); *and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon all the earth*” (verse 4).

There can be no doubt that this was a discreet plan from the merely human point of view. They were astute enough politicians who recommended that for the benefit of the community, they should keep together, and secure in cooperation those mutual advantages that cannot be realised in isolation. And no doubt, left to themselves, they would have carried out the plan, which, however, was inconsistent with another plan of which they apparently knew little or nothing, or at all events with which they did not sympathise. This was God's plan, which will always override every

enterprise of human policy that may interfere with it. God's plan was to employ the descendants of the first Adam in populating, subduing, and developing the face of the globe generally, in preparation for the time fixed in the counsels of His own will, when He should hand it over to the constituents of the last Adam (developed during this process), as a fit and garnished dominion, to be administered by them for the glory of His Name, and the well being of its countless inhabitants. This plan required that they should be scattered in all directions over its surface. Here, they were planning to concentrate—not to scatter; and they had begun to carry out their plan. The city and tower were commenced, and the work was going on prosperously. What was to be done? The angelic consultation revealed apprehensions of the success of the communistic scheme.

“The Lord came down (that is, the angels came down, as we have formerly seen in such case to be signified) to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded. And the Lord said: Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”*

The effectual remedy was suggested in the proposal:

“Let us confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.”

This was done with the most signal effect. No work of cooperation can be carried on without a constant mutual understanding; and the workmen ceasing to be intelligible to one another, *“left off to build the city.”* The few who did understand one another were unequal to the carrying on of the work. For a time confusion would prevail, but by degrees, those who spoke the same tongue would get together, and after a vain attempt to battle with the extraordinary impediments suddenly placed in their midst, they took themselves off in various directions.

“From thence did the Lord scatter them abroad, upon the face of all the earth.”

Here was a great and needed intervention of the visible hand of God. It is a rule of the Divine Government that there is no peace to the wicked. Mankind, in a state of sin, are not permitted to realise the blessedness that comes from unity and peace. They were by this event broken up into sections and parties, that soon became hostile. Difference of speech compelled

difference of land habitation, and the two circumstances together created rival interests which destroyed sympathy and bred strife and war. Thus the circumstance that impelled the human race into the path of exploration and emigration, and laid the foundation of the future habitable world, also established a condition of things that furnished a source and means of that retributive evil which is the providential dispensation to our age of sin.

* See *Ways of Providence*, page 9.

It was of course what is considered a great miracle—a definition to which there can be no objection when a miracle is understood to be a work of power beyond human achievement. In reality, it was a natural result of the means employed. We see a similar result slowly produced every day. Take an academy for the study of languages. Twelve boys all speaking the English language are brought to be taught each a different language. At the end of seven years each boy fluently speaks the language he has studied. Now, here are twelve boys at the end of the terms of their studies all speaking different languages. How has this result been effected? You say “by study.” Good, but put it nakedly; Speak of the thing and not of the name of the thing; Speak as a philosopher. Is it not this, **that in the brains of these boys, certain impressions have been produced** which enable them respectively to speak a language which their neighbour does not understand? Now suppose the master of the academy had the power of producing these impressions **instantaneously**, instead of by a laborious process of sights and sounds, we should have precisely what happened on the plains of Babel minus one particular: the elohistic teachers of language, while imparting a new language, obliterated the memory of the original tongue so that the subjects of their operations not only learnt a new language, but forgot the old. This is beyond the power of any human teacher. His twelve pupils would all be able to speak English, though unable to communicate in the acquired languages. But the angels of Yahweh’s power have control of the root-forces of nature and can as easily erase an old impression, as imprint a new one. This power they used at the tower of Babel, and though a miracle, it was not such in the popular acceptance of the term, but merely a higher manipulation of the powers of the universe than is possible to man.

There was a similar exercise of power with different objects on the day of Pentecost. Here, twelve illiterate men were enabled to speak a variety

of known languages with an accuracy that enabled those who had been brought up in them to recognise them as their own mother tongue (Acts 2: 1-11). In this case, the prodigy was God's attestation to the truthfulness of the apostolic testimony to Christ's resurrection (Acts 2: 33; 5: 32; 11: 15-17). Tongues were for a sign—(1 Corinthians 14: 22)—a sign to unbelievers to show that God was working with those who were preaching the word (Mark 16: 17-20). There was in this case no blotting out of the memory of the original apostolic dialect: there was only addition—no subtraction; only an impartation of new knowledge. The purpose did not call for any obliteration. It was not to confound speech, but to emphasise speech in the case of the apostles. Thus the operations of the Spirit are always guided by wisdom (1 Corinthians 12: 11). The effect of the operation depends upon the will of the operator. The same Spirit produces the most diverse results according to the object aimed at.

Diversity of language among men is the result of a great miracle performed at the beginning, the effects of which have been perpetuated from age to age by natural means. The creation of this diversity of tongue was not a blessing. It was not intended as a blessing, but as a means of frustrating an enterprise that was inconsistent with the Divine plan and also of promoting that plan in the scattering of the human family. Its mission will have been accomplished when the whole **earth** is gathered under one head and occupied by an immortal population that will be ONE. Diversity of tongue will pass away with the ephemeral age of evil to which it belongs. A knowledge of languages will become an obsolete distinction when God's work with the earth is finished. That purpose is to make an end of all nations upon earth except one (Jeremiah 46: 28) which will last as long as the earth—for ever. This nation is the nation of Israel with Jesus at its head—a nation purified by a process of spiritual selection and having absorbed in itself the acceptable elements of all other nations by the same process. When there is thus but one fold and one shepherd, there will be a return to that oneness of language which was a characteristic of human society at the beginning, and which will be one of the glories of that restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His prophets since the world began. The prophets who prophesy the ascendancy of the Anglo-Saxon tongue are prophets of the deceit of their own heart. They judge by the appearances of things and prophesy in harmony with their desires. Probabilities as they

appear to human sight are a poor rule of faith. At one time Latin, —at another Greek, —seemed likely to become the ruling tongue. At that time the English language had no existence. Now its jargon's turn has come; but in due time it will follow all the other Gentile tongues into the abyss of forgetfulness, and make way for the divine language which was confounded at Babel, preserved in Israel, established for ever in Jesus of Nazareth, and which will be the tongue of wisdom and love in all the earth in the ages of perfection that lie beyond. It seems very unlikely at the moment; but the word of the Lord standeth sure.

CHAPTER 7. —MIRACLE NECESSARY AS THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH (ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB)

THE DIVINE communications to the fathers—(Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)—may be considered as the next exhibition of the visible hand of God. The nature of these communications was considered in the chapter devoted to Adam's intercourse with the Elohim in Eden. We need not further refer to this beyond recalling the fact that they were made by the agency of angels. The reality and practical nature of this agency has been before dwelt upon, particularly in chapter 2 of *The Ways of Providence*. It is sufficient now to recognise the necessity existing for its employment in the case in question.

Abraham had to be induced to leave his native parts, and take up his abode in a strange land, as a beginning of the purpose of God in Christ, who was to be Abraham's seed. The leaving had to be voluntary and an act of obedience, the result of faith in a promise relating to futurity. How was such a result to be brought about without the voice of supernatural command? God could easily have compassed the removal of Abraham in the ways of Providence without the voice of revelation: but how in that case would Abraham's action have possessed the character of direct obedience? and how could God have conveyed promises of good things to come? It might have been done by dream or inspiration but this would only have been another form of the visible hand of God, and not so suitable for the end in view as the voice of direct communication. The end in view was to give Abraham a basis of faith and to put his obedience to the test. And how could Abraham have faith in a promise, or be submissive to a commandment around which the least uncertainty should be left as to its divinity? Dream, vision, or inspiration, may be sufficient when connected with other actual interpositions of the divine hand, as in Abraham's own case afterwards (Genesis 15: 1); but as the foundation of a vital plan, they were not so suitable as the unmistakable angelic voice. The plan was at a very vital and fundamental stage in the case. Abraham was to be constituted "*the father of all them that believe*" by receiving the promises in virtue of which God's goodness should afterwards be manifested upon earth. Hence, it was

important there should be no doubt as to the authorship of the promises. Uncertainty on this point would have interfered with the confidence of faith; for how can a man have faith in a friend's word if he is not sure that it is in reality the word of his friend? If ever there was need for the visible hand of God, it was here.

The ideas of those who prefer “a religion without miracle” are strangely at variance with the first principle of all Bible religion, which consists of faith in the promises of God.

“*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11: 6). It has been arranged from the beginning that God would “***justify the heathen (the nations) through faith***” (Galatians 3: 8). And faith, we are told, “*is the substance of THINGS HOPED FOR*” (Hebrews 11: 1)—hoped for, because promised, as in the case of Abraham, who “*staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform*” (Romans 4: 20-21). How was faith of this sort to be exercised without the spoken promise of God for it to be exercised upon? And if a promise spoken by God be a miracle, and the first principle of true religion be the belief of God's promises, how can there be religion without miracle as the basis of it? The answer is evident. To speak of “religion without miracle” is as incongruous as it would be to speak of science without nature. Miracle, or the specific act of God, is the very foundation of religion, as the very word religion signifies—a binding together again. God and man have been sundered: religion is God's device for reconciliation: and how can there be such a device without God devising it?

The angels frequently visited Abraham, in laying the foundations of faith: also Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise— (Genesis 17: 1, 22; 18: 1-2; 19: 1; 22: 15; 26: 2; 32: 1; etc., etc.). Thus were afforded repeated evidences of the divinity of the promises. And thus were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob enabled to believe. God is not unreasonable. He does not ask man to believe without evidence, but having given evidence of His having spoken, He is pleased with faith being placed in what He has said. What is said of Abraham was true of all three and of all belonging to their family since their day:

“He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”

(Genesis 15: 6; Galatians 3: 6).

This has a practical bearing on every man. The statement as to the consequence of Abraham’s faith is not merely historic. As Paul says,

*“It was **not written for his sake alone**, that it (righteousness) was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe, etc.”* (Romans 4:23).

It is a principle governing the divine dealings with man that faith is “*counted for righteousness.*” The reasonableness of this, though so opposed to the current of modern thought, must appear instantly on reflection. What is more displeasing between one man and another than for a man to doubt the word of his friend? How much more displeasing must such an attitude be towards God? This reflection has only to be turned round to enable us to realise why God should reckon belief as righteousness. How important is such a reflection in such an age as this when faith of all kinds is esteemed as of the lowest account. The idea of believing having anything to do with righteousness, seems an outrage to the ethical conceptions of a generation that glories in the Greek philosophers as authorities in morals. It is an idea nevertheless founded in true reason, as all divine ideas are. The divine view of a matter must be the sole standard of our moral estimate of it. To kill when God commands is no murder: to be merciful when God forbids is a crime (1 Samuel 15: 18-19, 33). The divine appointment governs all. If it please Him to consider faith righteousness, and unfaith, wickedness, who shall demur? It has pleased Him so to do after giving reason for the exercise of faith. The whole apostolic ministry, styled by Paul “*the ministry of reconciliation,*” is based upon this principle. Belief or unbelief primarily defines a man’s relation to God.

“He that believeth shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be condemned.”

Justification by faith, or being accounted righteous for faith’s sake, is a well-known and scriptural periphrasis for the gospel. When the nature of faith is apprehended, as a mental condition induced by testimony addressed to the understanding (Romans 10: 17; Matthew 13: 23) and laying hold of certain expectations as a matter of joyful hope (Hebrews 11: 1; 3: 6) the subject becomes clear. God is pleased to reckon such a state of mind as righteousness in the person who is the subject of it. When a man becomes

aware of the promises God has made, and believes them, he is in the state of mind that is well pleasing to Him, and when he gives this state of mind its logical expression in the obedience which has been prescribed for such, his faith is made perfect by his works, and God, for Christ's sake, on whom He laid the iniquities of us all, forgives his sins, and he stands justified by faith.

But this has its root in the visible hand of God. If God had not spoken (or shown His visible hand), there would have been no ground for faith. A man cannot believe if there is nothing presented to his mind for belief. A man cannot honour God by believing His promises, if God has made no promises. Hence, the whole scheme of salvation by faith presupposes the miracle of revelation. The ground of faith is the evidence of this miracle having taken place. Abraham had the evidence in the form of angelic visitation. The contemporaries of the apostles had the evidence in the testimony of the witnesses to Christ's resurrection and in God's visible confirmation of that testimony by "*divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit*" (Hebrews 2: 2). In our day, we have it in a less direct, but not less convincing, though in a less easily apprehended form: in the evidence we possess that this testimony was so given and so confirmed in the first century. The principle of the thing is the same in all cases. Those who say that the belief of evidence as a mere act of reason, depending upon power to perceive the credibility of the evidence, cannot afford a reasonable ground of acceptance with God, forget that it is not the mere belief that God has spoken that justifies, but the belief that what God has spoken He will perform. Such a belief is honouring to God, and He says,

"Them that honour me I will honour."

Even if it were not possible to discern the reasonableness of the ways of God, it would be the attitude of wisdom to submit to what He has revealed; but when that which God has ordained is self-evidently reasonable, there is but one issue for true reason, and that is, in a joyful and submissive faith.

The exhibition of the visible hand of God was a necessity in the case of the fathers. Men reason narrowly when they argue that because men of the nineteenth century can be saved without the occurrence of miracle in their experience, therefore the fathers could be saved without it. They forget that men of the nineteenth century stand upon what has been done before their day. Men of the nineteenth century have a Bible and a manifest history of

God's doings in the past written upon the affairs of men as they now exist upon the face of the earth. But suppose those doings had not been performed, and that history had not been written, and we had not had the Bible, where should we have been? We should then have just stood in the same need of God's direct communication as the fathers. Apart from such communication, we should have been without guidance—without subject of faith—and without opportunity of obedience—for how can a man obey who has no commandments delivered to him?

The offering of Isaac by Abraham offers a further illustration of these principles. The embarrassment of the moderns in reference to this case is perfectly gratuitous, and due solely to the fact that they ignore, or fail to apprehend, the primary relation of God to man. They tacitly regard creation as existing for man's behoof and convenience. God's rights have vanished from their calculations. His proprietary relation to the universe is not a practical idea with them. They have reduced God to a beneficent principle or a passive impersonal energy with an intelligent turn, and have practically exalted man to the throne of the universe. Consequently, such an action on the part of Abraham as tying Isaac with cords, and laying him on an altar and lifting a knife to slay him, they cannot understand as a divine transaction at all. It is inconsistent with their notions of what is due to man. They experience a similar difficulty with the drowning of the antediluvians, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the extermination of the seven nations of Canaan. If they could but learn (as they might easily learn if they but believed in Christ as they profess to believe, and studied his life and sayings as they ought to study them) that God is a real God, a personal God, of an individual intelligence localised in substantial glory in the heavens, yet embracing measureless immensity by the effluence of His invisible energy, out of and by which He has made all things in His wisdom and for His glory, they would come easily to see that man is but an insignificant permitted form of His power, of no more account with God, even in his national aggregations and pomps, than the dust that a man sweeps out of his doors (Isaiah 40: 15). Coming to see this, he would come to estimate aright God's wonderful condescension in having anything to say to man at all, still more in His having arranged for such a wonderful emancipation as has been offered in Christ on the condition of faith and obedience. He would cease to wonder at the multitudes of rebels that have been swept from the face of the

earth in God's dispensational visitations, and would wonder rather at the patience that permits so many generations of them to brave heaven with their insane effrontery. He would learn to perceive wisdom and fitness in the discipline to which he subjects, in various ways, the men who fear before Him in a reasonable way, especially in view of the fact that the race is in a state of alienation from Him, and that His dealings with men have been to invite approach, with a view to reconciliation on His own principles.

In such a state of enlightenment, no man would have any difficulty in understanding the offering of Isaac in the naked facts just as they stand recorded. It was a putting of Abraham to the test to ask him to offer up in sacrifice his only son (by Sarah), whom he loved, and concerning whom he had been expressly informed that in him should the promised seed be called, raised up, and developed. It was a powerful—a staggering test—but not unsuitable to the case of a man whom God was proposing to constitute the father of the family to whom He should give the everlasting inheritance of the earth in the ages of immortality and glory. He was not allowed to proceed to the full extremity of the test; but he was prepared, and proceeding to do so. His action was arrested when the purpose was served. The practical result of it is thus defined by God Himself:

“By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me—verse 12—that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thee as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22: 16-18).

Now how could Abraham have been exalted to the great blessedness, of having the promises based upon the foundation of his individual obedience under great trial, without God showing His visible hand, and miraculously (as men talk) revealing to Abraham His will? No occurrence in nature could have served such a purpose: and no evolution of “Providence” would have given Abraham the distinct direction that was necessary to put his faith to so great a proof.

It may be said that in this, there is a barrier placed between us and

Abraham, since we have no miraculous experience in the way of test. The barrier is only seeming. Though there has been no miraculous communication direct to us in a personal sense, we are the recipients of such communication in so far as the communications by the hand of Jesus and the apostles are intended for all who listen and receive them. These were as direct and miraculous as in the case of Abraham, and in many particulars, they contain the same elements of test as the offering up of Isaac, and were intended to have this effect as regards believers. Many of the commandments of Christ are of this test order. They put obedience to the proof and exercise us directly in the recognition of God and in practise of patience in preparation for exaltation. They are intended for no other purpose. When Christ commanded his disciples to resist not evil and to give way to the aggressor and to refrain from taking vengeance, it was not that it is in itself a good thing for the evil to have the upper hand, or the wicked to go unpunished. On the contrary, his purpose is in the end to destroy the evil and inflict direct vengeance on the offenders, even to the point of merciless extermination, and that too by the hand of the saints. But the command to his people meanwhile to submit to wrongful suffering, like sheep in the midst of wolves, and to return evil for evil to no man, is one of many ways in which the commandments of Christ lay the foundation of a tried and obedient faith in all those who submit to them, against the day of power and exaltation and glory.

CHAPTER 8. —MIRACLE, SUBLIME, STRIKING AND AWFUL—SODOM AND GOMORRAH

A REMARKABLE exhibition of the visible hand of God occurred in Abraham's days, though somewhat outside the circle of his experiences. The occasion was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This event is distinctly and reliably historic, notwithstanding the modern tendency to regard it as mythical and legendary. Its appearance in the Mosaic narrative would be conclusive, without further evidence, considering how completely established the authority of the Pentateuch is by Christ's own endorsement; but in addition to this, we have Christ's specific allusion to the matter, thus—

“As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17: 28).

Then, we have the apostles alluding to it more than once (2 Peter 2: 6; Jude 7), while, in the prophets, it is familiarly used as a standard of comparison in the most matter of fact way, thus:

“Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isaiah 13: 19).

“As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbour cities thereof, said the Lord, so shall no man dwell there” (Jeremiah 50: 40).

“The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom” (Lamentations 4: 6).

“Sodom, thy sister, hath not done as thou hast done” (Ezekiel 16: 48).

It follows that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah stands or falls with Christ, the apostles and the prophets. As the falling of these is on the list of logical impossibilities, the record of that destruction is established. Let us consider what the nature of the event was.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, had gone to reside in Sodom, in the plain of Jordan, an extensive and fertile district, lying between the hill ranges, at the northern end of the Dead Sea. The plain, we are informed, *“was well*

watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13: 10). That it was an attractive region is shown by Lot’s choice of it, when Abraham called upon him to go right or left, that he might go the other way for the sake of peace. The Jordan probably intersected it in many intricate turnings and windings (after the style of the upper part of the river), before escaping into the Gulf of Akaba (if that was the outlet before the convulsion that led to the formation of the Salt Sea), while mountain rivulets, descending from the Moabite hills on the east, and the Olive-crowned tableland on the west, would water the land on their way to the Jordan. It must have been a smiling scene of plenty and peace.

It had a considerable population clustered in several towns and villages, but the character of the population was by no means in harmony with the beauty of their fertile surroundings.

“The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (Genesis 13: 13).

Their wickedness is manifest in the incident that followed the arrival of Lot’s angelic visitors; but their behaviour on that occasion was only a symptom of their general character. This is thus described in a long subsequent message to Israel:

*“Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, **pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness** was in her, and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And **they were haughty, and committed abomination before me. Therefore I took them away as I saw good**”* (Ezekiel 16: 49).

It may be remarked, in passing, that this divine specification of Sodom’s sins, is not such as would have been drawn up by popular imagination in the case. The men of Sodom were not cut-throats and brigands: they were such as thousands who are to be met with every day in the streets of most European and American cities; whence we are enabled rightly to estimate the true character of modern days, as it appears in the divine eyes. Pride, arrogance, indifference to the poor, and abomination, are the common characteristics of European and American civilisation of the present hour.

In the case of Sodom, there did not appear to be an exception. This

transpires in the interesting conversation between Abraham and his three wonderful visitors, who were to him the angelic representation of Yahweh, the most High, Ail, Possessor of heaven and earth. At the close of their visit (Genesis 18)

“The men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on their way.”

Here is a picture: Abraham, the father of the faithful, escorting three angels, one of whom pre-eminently bore THE NAME. There is a halt on the road, and this last communicates to Abraham the divine intentions with regard to Sodom, after which, the other two angels go forward to execute those intentions, leaving the NAME-BEARER with Abraham, standing before him, at a reverential distance. Abraham is concerned for the fate of Sodom, on account of his nephew, Lot, who had gone to sojourn there. Knowing Lot’s righteousness of character, he makes bold to think that surely he will not be included in a destruction intended only for the wicked. But he does not presume to make known his thoughts in a light or abrupt manner. He draws near and speaks, but he speaks with profound reverence. He breaks the subject, but it is in an indirect and apologetic manner:

“Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy and spare not the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?”

“If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

This condescending answer was satisfactory so far as it went; but it did not touch the subject of Abraham’s anxiety. He would like to ask again; but he is embarrassed at the idea of interrogating the Deity angelically manifest. He makes profound obeisance:

“Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous, wilt thou destroy all the city for the lack of five?”

“If I find there forty and five I will not destroy it.”

Again, he is graciously answered in the terms of his own question: but again he is without the information he seeks.

“Peradventure there shall be found forty there?”

“I will no do it for forty’s sake.”

Abraham is perplexed how to proceed. He throws himself on the consideration of the august personage who held the fate of Sodom in his hands:

“Oh, let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak; peradventure there shall be found thirty there?”

“I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

And so Abraham, with apologies for his familiarity, pursues the subject, till he is finally informed that, if there are as few as ten, the place will be spared. The event showed that there was not a single resident besides Lot, for whom Yahweh had any regard.

This prologue to the destruction of Sodom, is instructive in a variety of ways. Does it not show the value of righteous men in a community? These may be the meekest and obscurest among men, yet are they the shields and safeguards of the sinners among whom they dwell. *“All things for your sakes”* defines a principle of very wide application. *“The salt of the earth,”* *“the light of the world,”* is Christ’s own description of the relation of his people to the present evil aion; and although the idea may be laughed to the uttermost scorn, it will be found a true idea (as regards those whom God esteems righteous), in the day when the saints being removed, nothing will remain to hinder the outpouring of the judgment of God upon mankind. How useful, also, is the picture of Abraham’s intercourse with the Elohim, in illustrating the personal reality and grace and condescension of the angels, who, though so harmless and sociable with Abraham, are, to the enemies of God, more formidable than the deadliest dynamite torpedo, as the Sodomites experienced. The reflection is of practical value in view of the prospect exhibited to us in the Gospel, of one day, and that not a long distant one, becoming acquainted with myriads of them, and of sharing the wonderful exaltation which they enjoy, as the immortal and powerful servants of Yahweh.

The two angels who departed from Abraham while he engaged in the interesting conversation recorded, duly arrived at Sodom. As their arrival and work there are in the highest order of “miracle,” the contemplation of the narrative, in detail, will be advantageous. Lot mistook them for ordinary travellers. He was sitting in the gate of Sodom when he saw them approach. Perceiving they were strangers, and doubtless by their carriage, distinguished

strangers, he rose and advanced towards them, and making profound obeisance offered them an importunate and cordial hospitality for the night. The angels declined, remarking they would “*abide in the street all night.*” Abide in the street all night! Curious visitors these, who could dispense with roof and bed while darkness brooded on earth—and make themselves at home “in the street!” There is here a peep into the modes of angel life. Habits are according to nature and need. The fish in the water, the birds in the trees, beasts in the open field—are at home where man would perish. The comforts of a human home would be death to these. Angels are higher than man: they cannot die anywhere: they can adapt themselves to any condition. At the same time, possessing the highest and most appreciative order of intelligent faculty, they have their preferences. A human habitation may be to them what a “lodging house” would be to the lord of a palace. Sleep they apparently do not require. Sharing the nature of Him who “*slumbers not nor sleeps*” (Psalm 121: 4), “*who fainteth not neither is weary*” (Isaiah 40: 28), they can “*abide in the street all night*” without inconvenience. The fact is interesting to us because of the hope the gospel gives us of becoming like to them (Luke 20: 36).

However, Lot “*pressed upon them greatly.*” His importunities were not unavailing. The angels are not indifferent to the wishes and comforts of others. They are the true gentlemen of the universe. They reflect the character of the Eternal Father of all, who is gracious, compassionate, and good. They would have preferred God’s open air, but in view of Lot’s strong desire, “*they turned in unto him, and entered into his house,*” and not only so, but they condescended to partake of what he provided for them.

“*He made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.*”

Angels eating, will only be a difficult idea with those whose notions on the subject are drawn from religious novels and art illustrations. The Scriptural exhibition of the subject is free from difficulty. Angels can eat, though independent of eating for life; and when they eat, their food is assimilated to their spirit-nature, just as food eaten by man is assimilated to man-nature; by animals to animal-nature. There is this difference, that angel-nature is spiritual and incorruptible. There is none of the offensiveness more or less incident to the processes of all animal organizations. Cleanness, holiness, incorruptibility, and strength, are characteristics of the spirit-nature,

involving completeness of absorption of all substances partaken of.

“Before they lay down”—then they did lie down? Yes, they can accommodate themselves to circumstances. They were under Lot’s roof: they had the hours of darkness to spend; they had accepted his hospitality; and they conformed to his wishes and expectations in the matter of “lying down”; they could make themselves as comfortable by lying down as sitting up, and lying down would be more to the comfort of the family than if they had sat up. But *“before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter.”* They had heard of the arrival of Lot’s guests, and, in an idle and wanton mood, they wanted to get sport out of them. They demanded of Lot to bring them out. Lot expostulated with his neighbours. He might as well have expostulated with a pack of wolves. They are deaf to every appeal of reason; they persist in their madness, and make an attempt to break into the house by force. And, no doubt, brute force would have been successful, as it has been in thousands of cases in the history of the world. But there was a power inside that only rarely takes part in the concerns of men. These comely, gentle visitors, whose arrival had caused the strife, had power that this mob knew nothing of. They had greater power than comes with mere bone and muscle, of however brawny an endowment. They had control of the occult forces of nature. In the exercise of this control, they first released Lot from the turmoil, and shut the door, and then struck the rioters with blindness. This is what men call “miracle,” a definition correct enough when employed to mean a use of power beyond human reach, but not correct when understood to mean a violation of nature, a suspension of law, a magical performance incomprehensible, outside the realm of natural fact. It is by no means so. It is but a superhuman use of nature—a manipulation of nature’s forces by the power that lies at the root of all nature—from which nature sprang, and in which it subsists from hour to hour. The Spirit of God is this energy of nature, and when God gives its control to angel or man, wonderful things can be done, but those wonderful things are all in harmony with nature’s forces—not upsetting or displacing them, but using and modifying them with the aim of producing specific results by means of those forces intelligently and dynamically applied. It is as when a demonstrator of chemical science takes a natural substance, and by decomposing agents, reduces it to elementary principles, or, as when he artificially produces ice,

or light, or any other phenomenon. The professor produces extra-natural results—results that override nature for the time being: but the results are not contrary to nature; he produces them by applying nature’s forces in a specific way. “Miracle” is of this order, with this difference, that the operators have a higher command of nature than is possible to man. They have this by having hold of the root-element, the primal eternal force, the Spirit of God, in which all things exist. Man is an external mechanical operator, so to speak, who can only use the established affinities in educating results. The Spirit of God has to do with the inside and constitution of everything, and can at will evolve results in a direct manner, and of a radical sort. Lot’s visitors were incarnations of this Spirit. They had but to will the blindness of the senseless crowd outside the house; their will became a paralysis of the optical nerves of every one of them, and they were blind. It is what happens in mesmeric experiments, only that, in the case of the mesmerist, he has laboriously to expend much of his feeble force in a warm apartment, free from draught, to bring one or two in a company under his influence, while the angels, with the completeness of divine power, smite a whole crowd of robust people in the open air.

The assault thus effectually repelled, the angels give instructions for Lot’s immediate withdrawal from the place with the first light of dawn.

“Whatsoever thou hast, bring them out of the city, bring them out of this place, for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the Lord, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.”

This “***whatsoever thou hast,***” was explained to Lot to include “*sons-in-law, and thy sons and thy daughters.*” Accordingly,

“Lot went out and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, ‘Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city.’ But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law” (Genesis 19: 14).

Here are relations invited to escape, because of God’s regard for those to whom they were related. Lot, for Abraham’s sake (19: 29), and sons-in-law, etc., for Lot’s sake. The point is worthy of notice in an age when we may look for another divine visitation, and when, for the sake of those whom God may favour, docile relations may again be invited to share the chamber-refuge of the righteous from the destroying storm (Isaiah 26: 20). Lot’s sons-

in-law treated the warning as lunacy, and were destroyed. To this day, the intimation of the divine purpose is as the speech of those that mock. Let the Lots endure. Their faith and patience will be justified.

Some time was spent in these futile importunities. We are told,

*“When the morning arose, **the angels hastened Lot.**”*

There must have been a reason: the reason may have lain in Lot’s concern for his married daughters leading him to try and overcome the mirthful incredulity of his sons-in-law. Probably lot persevered in his implorations, and was delaying for the sake of those he loved. At all events the angels pressed him.

*“Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here: **lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.**”*

Still, Lot was loth to go: he yearned on his married daughters, and perhaps his sons-in-law. Then the angels resorted to gentle pressure:

“While he (Lot) lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth and set him without the city.”

Having brought Lot, his wife, and two daughters, clear of the place, the angels enjoined them to make for the hills, saying,

“Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, nor stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed.”

But Lot’s wife could not be made to hurry. She did what they were told not to do; she looked behind; she lingered; her heart was in Sodom. Perhaps it was natural; perhaps some would glorify it as a case of “fine maternal instinct.” But it was a distinct disobedience to the divine instructions, and “*she became a pillar of salt.*” And Jesus says, “*Remember Lot’s wife.*” Natural affinities are in the wrong place when they obstruct the divine will. The lesson is good for all ages, and may be applied in thousands of cases, though it may not appear to be so urgent as in Lot’s circumstances.

Lot did his best to comply with the angelic command, but he had certain fears about the mountain. He asked that he might be permitted, instead, to take refuge in an adjoining village. His request was granted, but he was told to make haste.

“Haste thee,” said the angel, “*escape thither: for **I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.**”*

Divine anger held in rein for the sake of a man! So it is in a larger sense in all ages till the time appointed. The sun had risen when Lot entered the place of his refuge—Zoar. There was then no obstacle to the dread work of the angels. They let loose the thunderbolts of heaven. They did not go against nature. They used the powers of nature. The elements of combustion exist in the atmosphere. The scientific experimenter can liberate them on a very small scale by instrumental appliances. But who can lay hold of the elements themselves? In coast and harbour defences, a man in a tower can touch a key, which, liberating an electric current, can explode a mine under a ship miles distant: but suppose he had the current under his will without the apparatus? Oh, vain supposition! Here is the dividing line between God and man. The angels, His servants, can, when need be, evoke fire from the air without mechanical appliance, and manufacture burning substance without “chemical works.” They can do so by the instantaneous combination of the elements. They showed their power when Lot was safe in Zoar.

The Lord (Yahweh)—by their hands—“*rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven, and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities.*”

Abraham early astir, “*looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.*” Here was sublime and striking, and awful miracle—the hand of God as visible as it can ever become. It opens out an inexhaustible chapter of profitable reflection. It illustrates divine modes, and gives insight to the divine relation of things in the present evil world. God is angry with the world as it now is, but He defers His anger for His name’s sake (Isaiah 48: 9), that His people may be developed for His praise, and that the earth may be prepared as their inheritance and the habitation of His glory. When the ripe moment arrives, the world will see the arm of His power bared, as the inhabitants of Sodom saw, though with a difference of form, suited to the difference of the age and purpose. It is for the friends and the enemies of Christ to note Christ’s declaration on the subject:

“*As it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*”

CHAPTER 9. —THE WORK OF MOSES
HISTORICAL—NOT LEGENDARY; DIVINE—NOT
HUMAN; MIRACULOUS—OTHERWISE
IMPOSSIBLE

WE SHALL find no more instructive, striking, or necessary exhibition of the visible hand of God than is furnished in the history of Moses—which is the history of God’s greatest work upon earth, next to the work He accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. To the consideration of this history we may naturally proceed, after the destruction of Sodom—not that the hand of God was invisible between the two points: in the life of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, there occurred repeated interventions of the miraculous order in so far as that character appertains to direct communication from God by angelic visitation, or vision, or dream. Still, all these instances are covered by the case of Abraham already looked at. They are all of the same character—the normal adjuncts of the process by which the foundations were laid for the more enlarged development of the purpose of God on the earth that came after. But when we come to Moses, we come to an era of divine operation only to be paralleled by the day still future, when, as Jehovah says to Israel by the prophet Micah,

*“According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt,
I will show unto him marvellous things: and the nations shall see
and be confounded at all their might.”*

It was a day when the foundations of heaven and earth were laid in a political sense in relation to Israel.

The understanding and reception of the facts of the case are essential to the right apprehension of the whole work of God on the earth since. There is no more unfounded impression than the impression so general in our particular day, that the events of the exodus are the legendary exaggerations of natural occurrences. It is impossible for any logical mind to entertain such a view without entangling itself in greater difficulties than those which it may think by such view to escape. The events of the exodus are so involved in the entire structure of Scripture that it is impossible to set them aside in the way referred to, without also rejecting the prophets and Christ himself:

and as such a rejection is impossible in view of the fulfilment of prophecy and the evidence of Christ's resurrection, it follows that the assumption of a legendary character for the events of the exodus would involve the impossible hypothesis of the divine endorsement of fictions as the truth. It will also appear on a serious study of all the facts that the reception of those events is necessary to any rational theory of the origin and establishment of the Jewish nation on the earth. Furthermore, the nature of the narrative itself is such as to carry conviction of its truthfulness.

The events of the exodus are repeatedly referred to in the Psalms of David. They are constantly recognised as the beginning of the nation's history—the foundation of the nation's power. They are by no means referred to in the spirit of patriotic pride. On the contrary, the generation that witnessed them is said to have been *“a stubborn and rebellious generation: a generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law, and forgot his works and his wonders that he had showed them. Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through, and he made the waters to stand as a heap”* (Psalm 78: 8-24). Another Psalm says (106: 7-12):

“Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt: they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea. Nevertheless, he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

The events thus referred to are in deprecation of Israel's share in them. They are not pointed to out of compliment, or as at all affording ground for that sense of pride and glory that is natural to all people, and to none more so than to the Jews. On the contrary, David in another Psalm (44: 3) says:

“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 regard unto them.”

There are other Psalms, however, in which these events—the events of the

exodus—are referred to in a different way. They are recited in a spirit of exultation and thanksgiving to God. —See Psalm 105, for example; also Psalm 136.

Allusions like these abound through all the prophets, and are to be met with in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 7: 34; 13: 17; Hebrews 11: 28-29). Either the events of the exodus were divine realities, or the apostles and prophets were false. The latter is an impossible supposition: the former, therefore, is established on a foundation that cannot in the least be shaken. The miracles in Egypt were a necessity. They had a logical relation to the result to be accomplished. They were not mere prodigies like the legendary feats of the heathen. They were rationally connected with an object aimed at. Moses at the time, and David long after, recognised and proclaimed this connection. David's recognition is briefly but pointedly expressed in one of the foregoing quotations:

*“He saved Israel **for his name's sake THAT HE MIGHT MAKE HIS MIGHTY POWER TO BE KNOWN.**”*

Moses repeatedly alludes to the matter in the magnificent address delivered to Israel at the end of the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, just before their entry into the land of promise. Let an example or two suffice before entering upon a consideration in detail of the mighty work accomplished by his hand:

*“Your eyes **have seen** all the great acts of the Lord which he did: **Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments** which I command you this day”*

(Deuteronomy 11: 7).

*“Ask now of the days that are past which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God, speaking out of the midst of the fire **as thou hast heard**, and live? Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, **according to all that the Lord your God DID FOR YOU IN EGYPT before your eyes? UNTO THEE IT WAS SHOWED***

THAT THOU MIGHTEST KNOW THAT THE LORD HE IS GOD: *there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice that he might instruct thee, and upon earth he showed thee his great fire . . . Know therefore the day and consider it in thine heart that the Lord he is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else . . . Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments”* (Deuteronomy 4: 32-40).

In imploring them to observe the commandments that had been delivered to them, Moses directly appeals to the miracles they had seen, which he adjures them to remember:

“Take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things thine eyes have seen . . . specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together and I will make them hear my words . . . And ye came near and stood under the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO YOU OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice” (Deuteronomy 4: 9-13).

He presses on their notice the fact that he was not addressing those who had knowledge of these things by hearsay, but whose own eyes had actually witnessed them:

*“I speak not with your children, which have not known and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, and his miracles and his acts which he did in the midst of Egypt. And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses and unto their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you . . . And what he did unto you in the wilderness . . . And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram . . . how the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households and their tents, and all their substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. **BUT YOUR EYES***

HAVE SEEN all the great acts of the Lord which he did” (Deuteronomy 11: 2-7).

In enjoining upon them to enforce the obligation of the law upon their descendants, he instructs them to refer specifically to the events of the exodus as the ground of their obedience:

*“When thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, **What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, **We were Pharaoh’s bondsmen in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household before our eyes. And he brought us out from thence that he might bring us in to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,**”*** etc. (Deuteronomy 6: 20-24).

Thus in dealing with the events connected with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, we are dealing with matters having a fundamental and logical relation to the whole subsequent history. It is not a case of myth engrafted upon a commonplace history, as the enemies of the Bible so easily, and so perfectly gratuitously, and so inconsistently with the most elementary facts of the case, suggest. It is a matter incorporate with every national institution, and every national law, and every national tradition for thousands of years past. It is the kernel of the whole Jewish national phenomenon. That phenomenon is unintelligible apart from it. It cannot be separated from Jewish history and the Jewish existence of the present moment. The Jewish law is not a thing that has been changed and amended with successive generations. The legislative idea which belongs to all other national systems is foreign to the Jewish. The Jewish system stands and has stood for ages on the law of Moses delivered at the beginning, concerning which it was enjoined upon Israel:

“Thou shalt not add to nor diminish aught there-from.”

Consequently, the origin of that law is to be sought for in the circumstances attendant upon the delivery of the law at the beginning—circumstances reflected, as we have seen, in many allusions in the law, and in a sense

incorporate in the very structure of the law itself. The idea of these circumstances being an after-thought is precluded by the nature of the case. Such an idea is merely the wild conjecture of a dogmatic hostility, perfectly unjustifiable except on the ground that the admission of these circumstances would be a concession of the whole claim of divinity of origin, which unbelievers feel bound to resist at all hazards.

A glance at the circumstances preceding Israelitish deliverance will show how essential was the divine interposition, in an open, and signal, and irresistible form, for the accomplishment of the ends in view. Their fathers, coming from Canaan at the time of Joseph's ascendancy, had settled in Egypt some centuries previously, under a divine promise that in course of time, God would bring them out of Egypt and lead them into the land of promise. Mention had been made to Abraham for this purpose, and a general period specified for the Israelitish sojourn (Genesis 15: 13). To Jacob also the promise had been given (Genesis 46: 3-4). Joseph referred to it in his last communication with his brethren before he died:

"God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50: 24).

When the time of the promise drew near, the Israelites had become a numerous community, exciting by their prolificness and their prosperity, the jealousy of their Gentile neighbours, as in Russia, Germany, and Austria in the present day. Jealousy, as now, led to persecution. The Egyptians said:

"Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens"
(Exodus 1: 10).

Not only were the Israelites in this afflicted and powerless position, but they were also in a thoroughly untutored and insubordinate state of mind with regard to the God of their fathers. We learn from Jehovah's testimony by Ezekiel (chapter 20: 6-8) that they were idolaters, worshipping the idols of Egypt. Their subsequent behaviour is evidence of their unenlightened state. Before they crossed the Red Sea, they said to Moses, *"Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians"* (Exodus 14: 12), and during their journey

in the wilderness they repeatedly mutinied, and wished they had remained in Egypt (Exodus 16: 2-3; 17: 2-4), and on one occasion under the very shadow of Sinai, they set up an idol calf and worshipped it. Finally, they so heinously resisted the divine instructions touching the invasion of Canaan that they were sentenced to remain in the wilderness till the whole adult generation had died out.

Looking, then, at the powerless and barbarous condition of the Israelites—reduced to helpless serfdom under the Egyptians, and having no disposition to enter upon perilous enterprises—we realise how perfectly unfeasible the idea of deliverance from Egypt was, at the time when the fulfilment of the divine promise was due. Even with a sanguine military leader, nothing was to be made of such a situation of things. But there was no leader. Moses, whose providential development is considered in *The Ways of Providence*, had made one experiment at trying to bring his brethren to right views of the situation, but the only result had been to bring about his own exile. He had been absent from the country for forty years. Nobody had heard from him. There was no scheme among them. Even Moses himself, in the pastoral seclusion of the desert of Horeb, had given himself over to the occupations of a quiet individual life. What more unpromising idea was there at that moment than the idea of leading the Israelites, a helpless, unwilling horde of people, out of a powerful country, where they were held down by special rigours of law, as a useful slave race, dangerous to be allowed any liberty? Such an enterprise had every element of impossibility. As a scheme in human hands, there was no object to serve by it, and no means of accomplishing it.

God had promised it, and if it was to be done, extraordinary means were necessary. This reflection is inevitable if we simply have in view the problem of how Israel was to be rescued from the hands of their oppressors, but how incalculably stronger the thought becomes when we realise the object divinely proposed in that deliverance. It was not merely the rescue of an afflicted race from oppression. This was a subordinate item in the programme. The main purpose, as declared by Moses in the language already quoted, **was that Israel might know Yahweh as the only God, and that the divine Name might be declared in all the earth.** The state of things required this to be done, for the whole world, including the Israelites

themselves as we have seen, was fast settling into a state of complete and incorrigible barbarism. God's purpose ultimately to populate the earth with obedient men (put to the proof in days of evil), required that this state of things should be broken into, and that His existence should be palpably demonstrated, and His will established in a form sufficiently influential to effect intended moral results in the generations following. How was this to be done without the display of His power in a visible and intelligible manner? The answer is obvious, and paves the way for a survey of the extraordinary incidents by which this display was effected.

A beginning was made with Moses—which was according to the fitness of things. As already remarked, he was living in pastoral seclusion, tending the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert of Horeb. He was a man of the right stamp for the divine purpose, but not a man of such characteristics as would have led him to contrive and execute a scheme of national liberation. It is easy to glean his character from the whole narrative. It justifies the description that he was "*a meek man*"—a man of quiet disposition, with no liking for the stir and bustle of public life. He lacked the personal energy and ambition that would lead to patriotic initiative. This is shown by the way he viewed the divine proposal that he should go to Egypt as Jehovah's instrument to effect Israel's deliverance. Even after all his preliminary difficulties had been disposed of, he said,

"O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant: I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue: O my Lord, send I pray Thee by the hand of him by whom Thou wilt send."

It was not altogether wonderful that he should thus be diffident. He was eighty years old: he had been a long time out of public life: his early expectations had all quieted down. Disappointment, and adversity, and delay, had sobered him thoroughly, added to which he was naturally meek, quiet, and of slow speech. He was the last man for the execution of the work on human principles. But for a work to be done on divine principles, he was the very man. This work required modesty of self-estimate, a deep sense of Yahweh's greatness, a disposition to be scrupulously faithful in the carrying out of divine instructions, and a capacity for unbounded patience and magnanimity with those with whom he might be called upon to deal. These qualities, in some degree natural to him, had been matured and perfected by

forty years' banishment, and the unexciting monotonies of sheep-tending in the solitudes of a desert country.

This man—the right man—who proved faithful in all his house, and more honoured than all men, save his unapproachable Antitype, in being permitted intercourse with Yahweh face to face—this man who became the most renowned of all history—was following his usual occupations near the Mount of Horeb, in the wilderness of Sinai, at the time we are considering, when the crisis of divine interference was impending. The hour had struck for God to act (by angelic hands). The mode adopted to secure the attention of Moses was suited to the circumstances. A bush on the mountain side was wrapped in flame. Possibly this was not unusual, but that which was unusual was that this bush went on burning without consuming and without extending the fire to others. When a sufficient time had elapsed to show that this was the fact, the curiosity of Moses was aroused, as any man's would be, at such a sight. He said—

“I will now turn aside and see this great sight; why the bush is not burnt.”

When he had approached the bush sufficiently, the divine speech saluted his ear, calling his name twice, *“Moses, Moses.”*

This was the beginning of the great and mighty work with the house of Israel which has already affected the condition of mankind in the most palpable manner, but the true nature and scope of which will only be generally apprehended when scattered Israel is regathered to Jehovah's land, and all the earth brought under subjection to the sceptre of the Lord Jesus, the prophet like unto Moses, whom they shall hear as predicted, and who will rule all nations gloriously, on the throne of David his father, in the day when that throne, having been re-established, the whole human family will taste for the first time the sweets of true and righteous government, and give praise to Jehovah and His anointed in all the earth.

CHAPTER 10. —NATURE AND OBJECT OF THE MOSAIC MIRACLES

The wrapping of a bush in flame that did not consume it, was a miracle, but not what is popularly understood by a miracle. It was not a violation or setting aside of nature. It was simply a supplementing of nature, an intelligent application of nature's powers, with a view to produce an unusual phenomenon: not more difficult to produce than the ordinary phenomenon of combustion, but requiring a specific discrimination as to the working of the elements to prevent combustion extending, as when a scientific professor, lecturing to a chemistry class, does the same thing in freezing water, or making it burn, or wrapping a substance in flame that does not consume it. The only difference lay in the superior power of the angelic operator (for it was an angel that appeared in the transaction; see Exodus 3: 2)—an operator who could manipulate the elements by a volition which vitally controlled them, instead of having to resort to clumsy apparatus that produced but a very limited result on purely mechanical principles.

The object was to arrest the attention of Moses, and to arrest it in a way that would show him that God was working by the hand of an angel. This result was effectually accomplished. Moses turned aside to find out the meaning of this flaming mystery on the mountain side. He had approached near to the object of his curiosity, when from the midst of the bush he was called by name. Responding to the call, his eyes beheld another marvel.

“The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush.”

Flame does not act on spirit-substance such as the angels are made of (for *“He maketh his angels spirits”*—Hebrews 1: 7). Therefore an angel can, when circumstances call for it, appear in the midst of a flame without inconvenience, as in this case; or ascend in a flame of fire, as in the case of Manoah's visitor (Judges 13: 19-20), or walk in the midst of a seven-times-heated fiery furnace, as on the plain of Dura, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3: 24-25) when, in addition to the marvel of an angelic living form appearing in all composure in the white heat of a glowing furnace, three men cast into the same furnace were so mantled by the protective action of the Spirit of God as to be enabled to bear themselves in the same apparently

dreadful situation, without so much as the singeing of a hair or the smell of fire passing on their clothes.

The angel in the bush forbade Moses to come nearer, and commanded him to unshoe his feet on ground made holy by the Divine presence.

“Moreover, he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3: 6).

The principle upon which an angel could declare himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has been considered in chapter 3. We allude to it merely to preserve the present narrative from the confusion at first sight attaching to the way in which the angel and God are used interchangeably. Having thus secured the attention of Moses, and made him sensible of the august presence in which Moses now stood, the angel manifesting Yahweh proceeded to inform him that he had visited the earth for the purpose of effecting that deliverance of Israel, which had long been promised, but of which Moses himself had begun to despair.

“I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters: for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of the land unto a good land, and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey, etc.”

This would be good news to Moses; but the message did not stop there. The object of the message was not merely to announce a piece of good news in the abstract, but to take a step towards its accomplishment; like the gospel—the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, which is not merely the announcement of God’s good purpose, but a call for people to become the Lord’s instruments at last in setting up the kingdom. The message went on to say to Moses,

“Come now, therefore, and I will send thee to Pharaoh that thou mayest bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

This was a part of the message for which Moses was, apparently, not all prepared. Forty years before—while yet at Pharaoh’s court—

“He supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them” (Acts 7: 25);

But now, after the reverses and delays and solitary pursuits of the desert, he himself had relinquished this sanguine idea; and he shrank at the proposal of it.

“Moses said unto God, who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

Moses, as a man of practical experience, must have realised the stupendous difficulties in the way of such an enterprise. We, who live so long after the time, see how easily stupendous difficulties disappear in the presence of divine power; but Moses had no such example before his eyes. He knew the power of Pharaoh; he knew the helplessness of Israel, as a race of bondsmen; he knew the lack of leadership and organization among them, and the absence of every element from the situation that would make an attempted liberation humanly feasible. It is indicative of the artless truthfulness of the narrative that Moses should be represented as recoiling from the proposed mission of liberation.

The answer to his scruples was what the case called for:

“I will certainly be with thee.”

This was enough for Moses himself. He knew—nay, he has evidence before his eyes, that God was speaking to him; and for God to assure him of cooperation was all that was needed to dissipate the uncertainty he felt in his own capacity for the work. But then, there were the children of Israel themselves to be taken into account. The success of the enterprise must depend upon their working with him, and how were they to be induced to lend themselves to a work so humanly unpromising in all particulars? That God would be with him, Moses could not but believe, but how were the children of Israel to be brought into a similar state of belief?

*“Moses said unto God, behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, . . . **Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say The Lord hath not appeared unto thee**” (Exodus 3: 13; 4: 1).*

This touches a crucial point in the whole case. Moses knew his brethren. He knew their indisposition to adopt any such views as he should have to lay before them. He had had experience of it 40 years before, when *“He supposed his brethren would have understood,”* but they did not, as already quoted. Their treatment of Moses afterwards, during the exodus and sojourn

in the wilderness; their treatment of the prophets for a succession of later centuries, and their rejection of the Lord Jesus himself, as well as the present unbelieving and unreasonable attitude of the Jews throughout the world, all attest the inaptness of the race of Israel to receive and place themselves in subjection to any proposal involving on the part of the proposer a profession of divine commission, and requiring on their part faith in the divine assurances and obedience of the divine commandments. The idea is well expressed in the parting memorial song that Moses, by God's appointment, left them, in which he says that they are—

“A perverse and crooked generation, a foolish people, and unwise . . . They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. Oh that they were wise and understood this, that they would consider their latter end.”

In view of this inveterate national propensity in the wrong direction, the fears of Moses that they would not believe him were well founded; and the fact that they did receive him, nevertheless, and have, as a nation, boasted in his name ever since, is one of the inexplicable facts of history, if the cause of their belief be left out of account. That cause comes immediately into view in God's answer to the expressed fears of Moses:

“The Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thy hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand” (Exodus 4: 2-4).

What was the object of this extraordinary performance? It is expressed in the very next verse:

“THAT THEY MAY BELIEVE that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.”

But perhaps one superhuman feat might only produce wonder, and fail to produce faith.

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

into his bosom again: and plucked it out of his bosom, and behold it was turned again as his other flesh.”

The explanation accompanying this wonder reveals the divine aim in the plainest manner:

“It shall come to pass if they will not believe thee, nor hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shall take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land, and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land” (Exodus 4: 8-9).

Now, these are attested facts. They are attested in the way indicated in the last chapter. They are bound up with the veracity of the Lord Jesus and the prophets, whose truthfulness is proved by the fulfilment of prophecy, and in a variety of other ways. That many in our day may lack the discernment or the desire to perceive the attestation, no more abates from the fact of that attestation than the ignorance of the staring lout interferes with the scientific demonstration of the composite nature of the atmosphere or the existence of spots in the sun. What if it be a strange thing to turn a rod into a serpent and a serpent back again into a rod: is it impossible? Impossible to man, granted; but where is the man having the least glimmer of the resources of the universe, or the least acquaintance with the subtle constitution of nature, who would declare such a thing impossible in the abstract? A man can only say it is a thing he never saw happen, or heard of any other living person having seen happen. He can only say he cannot do it, and does not know how it could be done. He might even go as far as to say he does not believe it could possibly happen without the intervention of a higher exercise of power than is ordinarily at work in nature. Further than this, a man in reason could not go, unless indeed he were to add, as he might easily add, if he were a reflective student of nature, that it would be presumptuous in him to set bounds to the possible transmutations of nature in view of what he sees at work every day in the field. Does he not see any year an immense production of food substance from the soil, which, when produced, is a combination of subtle materials derived from the earth, the atmosphere, the rain, sun, etc.? Does he know how manure and loam and water are transformed into grain and garden stuff? He does not know. He is familiar with the fact, and some

mistake familiarity for understanding. If our supposed critic is a wise man, he will not perpetrate this confusion. He will allow to himself that the chemical (or whatever other adjective he may use to qualify the process) operation by which muck is changed to bread, is to his mind inscrutable, although an every-day occurrence. But let him follow the bread and the fruits of the field. What becomes of them? “Eaten, of course,” you say: but what becomes of the stuff eaten? Eaten by cows, they turn into cow; eaten by horses, they turn into horse; eaten by men, they turn into man; and suppose some of the men are serpents (which they are), then they turn into serpent. Now, here is the mould that you would sweep out of your house; water that you would prefer rather to be outside your house than in; air that you cannot see; and light that enables you to see all things, but that cannot itself be seen—I say, here are all these things (much more unlikely than the vegetable fibre of a rod) turned into a serpent: and why are you to say that a rod cannot be turned into a serpent? The one serpent is made by the slow transmutation of substance, and the other by the quick transmutation of substance. Are we going to make a difficulty of the quickness? If so, to whom is it a difficulty? To us? Granted. The work would be a great difficulty to us—quick or slow; for we cannot do it slow if we had got a million years to do it in. It is not man that makes the grain by slow agriculture. He but supplies the conditions by which God does it by means of the nature He has given things. But to God? Shall you say the quickness is a difficulty to Him? If so, can you object to be charged with presumption and extremest folly in measuring the eternal by the mortal? —the possible by what you have seen? —the power of God by the weakness of man? Good friend (if you can be called good), go and gather your wits. Yield to the demands of sense and truth, lest your desire to escape the demand in this particular, lead you to the deepest infamy of all, of not only saying in your heart, but proclaiming with your poor shallow tongue, “*There is no God.*” For the man who says this, the Bible and true Science have but one name: “*FOOL.*”

The same remarks apply to the two other prodigies with which Moses was armed in his enterprise of first conquering the faith and then accomplishing the deliverance of the enslaved house of Israel. They were acts of power naturally no more wonderful than those we see in daily exhibition in nature, but only distinguished from those ordinary acts of power by their directness and rapidity. In this consisted their so-called

miraculousness, and properly so-called when rightly understood. The purpose for which they were performed, required that they should be miraculous. By what other means could the confidence of Israel be commanded, or the power of Egypt be broken? Those who speak slightly of the employment of miracle in this connection, manifestly speak without competent reflection on the facts of the case. Let any man try to imagine how, apart from miracle, the Mosaic enterprise was to be accomplished, and he will find himself in hand with a problem difficult of solution; for, be it observed, as proved in the last chapter, that that enterprise was not merely the effectuation of Israelitish liberation, but the demonstration both to Israel and Egypt, and the world in general, of the existence and power of God. Had it merely been a question of Israel's liberation, that doubtless could have been accomplished in the ways of Providence, in many ways that might be suggested; but how was God's participation in the work to be manifest except by acts which could have no other explanation? To talk of miracles "affording no sanction" to the Mosaic religion, is to indulge in that great word-swelling of which the apostles speak, which is either meaningless twaddle, or directly opposed to fact. What mean you, ye learned gentlemen, by this ambiguous fine-sounding word "sanction"? Do ye mean authority? Ground of confidence? Power to carry conviction? Do ye mean evidence of divine consent: Warrant for human submission? Probe the nebulous phrase in what way we will, the result is to prove the necessity for miracle to establish the "sanction" of the Mosaic institutions in any valuable sense; for how could the divine consent be indicated in a way not to be mistaken, or how could the people whose obedience was demanded see plain warrant for submission, apart from works which no man could do, and which, therefore, God only could perform? Had Moses seen no angel and no burning bush unconsumed, and heard no voice, and witnessed no terrifying transmutation of his everyday staff into a serpent and back again, how could he have acquired the conviction that God had "*come down* (by the presence of an angel) *to deliver his People?*" And how could he have been induced to visit Egypt to attempt the otherwise Quixotic enterprise of delivering a helpless slave race from the hands of powerful military masters? And how could the Israelites have been brought to the belief that God had commissioned Moses for the work, if they had not seen evidence of the fact in wonders beyond human achievement?

To the man who says that, even granting the wonders, there is no necessary connection of proof those wonders and the God in whose name they were wrought (for the oppositions of unbelief have been refined down to the subtlest piercings between soul and spirit), it is sufficient to say that any power in the universe showing the ability, by an invisible act of volition, instantaneously to turn a rod into a serpent and water into blood, would show such proof of control of nature, and, therefore, of man, as to establish its right to be obeyed—by whatever name it might be called. Very plain people could see the philosophy of this anywhere, in any age, without formulated logic, and our complicated friends would see this too, if they were honoured with such an exhibition of power as Moses and Israel witnessed, which they are not likely to be, except in a form (at the appearing of Christ) that will not be to their comfort. The children of Israel instinctively saw the logic of it; for when Moses arrived in Egypt,

*“Moses and Aaron gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. **And the people believed.** And when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped”* (Exodus 4: 29-31).

Thus was the first part of the work successfully accomplished. Israel’s faith was the natural starting point. Apart from this, nothing could be done. Without faith, Israel could not have taken that part which it was necessary for them to perform in the departure from Egypt; and without faith on their part, it would not have been fitting that God should perform works of power on their behalf. Even a human benefactor would be liable to hold his hand if he found scornful unbelief (or even indifference) among those on whose behalf he was exerting himself. How much more to be feared, and worshipped and trusted is the Creator of heaven and earth.

It may seem as if the term “*faith*” were misused in this connection. It will only seem so, because of the inaccuracies of modern speech. Faith is commonly understood to be a blind trust—that is, a trust not having anything actually seen to rest on. It is supposed to exclude sight altogether. This is only partly correct. As regards the particular objects on which faith may act

—that is, “*things not seen,*” which it confidently anticipates, it is true that faith and sight cannot coexist, but as regards the reason why this faith is exercised, it is not true. Abraham believed in the promises of God, because God gave Abraham **a reason for believing them in appearing** and speaking to him. The apostles believed in the Lord’s resurrection, because the Lord gave them **a reason for believing** by doing the same things after his resurrection. Multitudes believed in the testimony of the apostles, because they had a reason for it, first, in the fact of earnest men giving such a testimony in the teeth of all disadvantage, and secondly, in the wonderful works of power by which the truth of their testimony was divinely attested. Many believe in our day because of the reason there is for it, in a variety of facts which compel it as a logical result. In every case, faith has its foundation in facts justifying it. It acts on “*things to come,*” and therefore on things not seen, but it acts on them by reason of facts past that enable it so to act. It is not a blind or unreasonable sentiment. On the contrary, its eyes are open, and it can formulate the laws of its operation to a nicety. It is precisely akin to the faith of secular usage. One man has faith in another in commercial matters. His faith acts on the future, but it is derived from a past experience. Without that past experience a man does not know whether to have faith or not. To some people, this will appear a degrading comparison, but reflection will show its justice. The cases are exactly parallel so far as the action of the mind goes. The difference is in the objects calling it into exercise.

The miracles performed by Moses in the presence of Israel in Egypt had the effect of producing faith in the promises of God associated with them. Those promises were of a very specific character. Moses was instructed thus to present them to the people:

“Say unto them, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you and seen that which was done to you in Egypt, and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, into a land flowing with milk and honey . . . and I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand, and I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all my

wonders, which I will do in the midst thereof. And after that he will let you go, and I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. And it shall come to pass that when ye go, ye shall not go empty, but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and ye shall put them upon your sons and upon your daughters, and ye shall spoil the Egyptians” (Exodus 3: 16, 22).

In these promises the people placed reliance, and on the strength of them, confirmed by the preliminary signs exhibited by Moses and Aaron, they surrendered themselves obediently to the direction of Moses. As a matter of ultimate experience, they proved themselves “*children in whom is no faith,*” like many who in the first case “*receive the word with joy,*” as Jesus says, and “*in time of temptation fall away.*” Still, in the first stage of God’s work with them, they believed Moses, and humbly performed whatever he directed them to do.

CHAPTER 11. —NEGOTIATIONS AT THE COURT OF PHARAOH—A STUPENDOUS ISSUE— COMMENCEMENT OF THE STRUGGLE

Moses, having obtained the ear of the people, took the next step. Accompanied by Aaron, he obtained an audience of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for which his previous status at the Court of Egypt, in the days before his exile, had doubtless paved the way. The impending struggle between Divine power on the one hand, and the power of Egypt on the other, was opened gently at the first. Moses presented a limited request of a perfectly reasonable nature, even from the Egyptian point of view. The full extent of the Divine purpose was not disclosed at once.

“Thus saith Yahweh Elohim of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”

The kernel of this demand lay in the authority upon which it was made:

“Thus saith Yahweh Elohim of Israel.”

This raised the issue at once—the intended issue—the issue involved in the whole Egyptian struggle. Not a question of the rights of the Hebrews—which formed a very subordinate element in the case—but a question of the authority of Yahweh Elohim of Israel to demand their liberation. The issue was immediately taken by Pharaoh.

“Who is YAHWEH, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Yahweh, neither will I let Israel go.”

Pharaoh had never heard of Yahweh. If he had ever heard that the Hebrew slave race in his dominions had a God, he had never heard of him under this name: for this was a name specially assumed—a name by which He had never before been known—a name revealed for the first time at the commencement of the Egyptian wonders. So God informed Moses (Exodus 6: 3),

“I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty (Ail Shaddai—the strength of the powerful ones or angels): but by my name YAHWEH was I not known unto them.”

This is the name appearing in the English version as Jehovah: that its correct form is Yahweh appears to be beyond doubt. There is a tolerable

unanimity among Hebraists on this point. That it is incorrectly translated, “*I AM*,” appears also beyond doubt. It is the verb of existence, but not in the present tense. This is established by several grammatical books recently published. Their contention on the point is certainly strongly supported by this fact, that in the very few cases where the same form of the verb occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures otherwise than as the name of God, it has a future meaning:

“I will be (Yahweh) as the dew unto Israel” (Hosea 14: 5).

The writers in question concur with Dr. Thomas, that the memorial name of the Deity revealed to Moses was **a prophetic name**—I WILL BE—an intimation of the Deity’s purpose to manifest Himself in a personal form for the deliverance of Israel and all the families of the earth at last.

However, Pharaoh had never heard of Yahweh; therefore he naturally enquired who he was, and declared he knew Him not, and what was more, should not comply with His mandate. Moses explained that Yahweh was the God of the Hebrews, and that the God of the Hebrews had appeared to him. He repeated the request for permission to go into the wilderness to worship—limiting the asked-for leave of absence to three days, and urging as an argument, that might appeal to a pagan like Pharaoh, that the Israelites were in danger of judgment from their God if they did not hold the required feast. Pharaoh met the request with a decided negative. He upbraided Moses and Aaron for hindering the Israelites from their work, and dismissed them peremptorily. He then issued orders to the Egyptian overseers of the Israelites, to make their task as brickmakers more severe by withholding the materials heretofore supplied to them for the manufacture of the bricks, and yet insisting on the same number as before. The comment with which Pharaoh accompanied this tyrannical decree was very bitter for Israel:

“They be idle; therefore they cry, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Let there more work be laid upon the men that they may labour therein, and let them not regard vain words.”

The people had no escape from this severe measure. Pharaoh’s officers said to them,

“Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. Go ye, get ye straw where ye can find it: yet not aught of your work shall be diminished.”

The people scattered everywhere to gather stubble instead of straw. They

could not make bricks while so engaged; yet the regulation number was demanded of them, and not being forthcoming, they were beaten. What a sore strait! What were the Israelites to do? They sent a deputation to Pharaoh. He received them. They said,

“Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick. And behold thy servants are beaten. But the fault is in thine own people.”

Pharaoh only repeated the taunt with which he issued the order stopping the straw.

“Ye are idle; ye are idle; therefore ye say let us go and do sacrifice to Yahweh. Go, therefore, now and work; for there shall no straw be given you. Yet shall ye deliver the number of bricks.”

The deputation retired discomfited.

“They saw they were in evil case.”

They encounter Moses and Aaron with upbraidings. They accuse them of having made them odious in the eyes of the Egyptians, and declare they have put a sword in Pharaoh’s hand against them. It was a perfectly natural phase for circumstances to assume. It is what would happen today were any despot so demanded to concede privileges to a serf race, and it is one of a thousand evidences of the truthfulness of the narrative that such should be recorded as the first result of the summons addressed to Pharaoh. It was a perfectly natural result, but it was not in harmony with the expectations of the people, who naturally supposed that the deliverance that Moses had given them assurance of, would be effected straight away. Instead of deliverance, they felt the bonds drawing tighter. It was only a preparation for the interposing hand of relief. Moses appealed to God in anguish of spirit:

“Wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me? for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all.”

The answer he received was very consolatory:

“Now shalt thou see what I shall do to Pharaoh . . . Say unto the children of Israel, I am YAHWEH, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm,

and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. And ye shall know that I am YAHWEH, your Elohim, who bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Exodus 6: 1-8).

Moses himself was reassured and comforted by this message, and he went and communicated it to the disconsolate Israelites; but they were in no mood to listen.

“They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage” (Exodus 6: 9).

Again how life-like this narrative. There is no artificial glow such as would have characterised a patriotic fictitious narration—no heroic confidence of the people; no sublime resignation in the prospect of Divine interference; no magnificent attitudinising—not even on the part of Moses; for Moses himself, rebuffed by the heartless reception of this message by the people, returns to the Lord and says,

“Behold the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me?” (verse 12).

And shall we say that it was unbecoming divine wisdom that Israel’s afflictions should be aggravated, as the first result of divine interposition on their behalf? On the contrary, it accentuated the situation; it gave acuteness to the crisis; it deepened and sharpened Israel’s interest in the issue at stake; it chased away all indifference, and thoroughly roused the solicitude both of Israel and the Egyptians in the controversy about to be debated with stupendous power. It was a fitting preparation for the display of Omnipotence in exhibition of Yahweh’s mighty name.

Moses again addressed himself to Pharaoh, who demanded some proof of his authority to make the demand for Israel’s leave of absence. Moses then performed the appointed “*sign*”; Aaron threw his rod on the ground, and it became a serpent. But Pharaoh had called his “*wise men and sorcerers and magicians,*” and “*they also did in like manner with their enchantments, for they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents.*” How are we to account for this achievement by sorcery of

apparently the same marvel as God did by Moses? The answer is, it was an imitation. It was after hearing what Moses had done that the magicians did the same! But how could they do it? The record gives the answer: "*it was with (or by) their enchantments.*" It was by the exercise of their art. But could they by any exercise of their art perform a miracle? No; and they did not perform a miracle. Magicians never did perform miracles in the sense of a truly superhuman operation. Their wonders have always been "*lying wonders,*" that is, wonders apparently superhuman, but really only feats of hand or skilful applications of the secret forces of nature. Many such secrets were known to the Egyptians, some of which have perished with them. Artists of our day do not know how they obtained their fixity of colour, nor do mechanics understand by what application of power they lifted and put in their places the immense blocks that go to form the pyramids. Some electricians have concluded, from various circumstances, that they were acquainted with magnetism, vital and mechanical. Their "enchantments" were certainly due to natural knowledge, deftly applied. How could they turn a rod into a serpent? Not having been told (except that it was "with their enchantments") how they did it, we cannot know exactly; but we may guess. They knew that this was what they had to do—apparently to turn rods into serpents by throwing them down. They therefore procured serpents, and paralysed them into a rigid form by some mode of chemical treatment. They then encrusted them with some substance that made them look exactly like sticks; and knowing how to terminate the paralysis of the beasts at will, by the application of some counter chemical or mode of generating electric force, they went before Pharaoh ready to show him the feat which had been ordered. They pitched their stiffened serpents on the floor, and of course the creatures started wriggling by the side of the serpent of Moses. The difference between the two performances became, however, at once apparent, for the true rod-serpent rears itself, darts quickly from one to another of the make-believe rod-serpents, swallows them and then quietly resumes its rod-state in the hands of Moses. There are feats that cannot be simulated, and this is one. It is one of the great differences between the miracles of Divine performance and those of priestly deception, that the works of Divine power are beyond the possibility of human appliance. Who could single out the first-born in every house and kill him? Who could open a path in the sea? Who could feed a multitude for forty years in a desert? Who could cleave the earth beneath a rebellious company and send them

shrieking into the abyss? Who could, by the exercise of will, make the massive walls of a fortified city fall simultaneously in all directions? Who could destroy a whole army in a single night, as the soldiers lay in their tents? Who could heal all diseases with a word? Who could raise the dead? These, and a hundred such like things are the wonders performed among Israel by Divine power—wonders of a nature that excludes the possibility of human collusion. Men may momentarily stiffen serpents, but they cannot give the unstiffened animals the power of devouring a dozen neighbours. They cannot shake Sinai by earthquake, and envelop it with fire and cloud, and cause a trumpet voice to be heard for days throughout a great distance.

However, Pharaoh was satisfied that the performance of Moses was only a higher form of the faculty exhibited by his own conjurors, and therefore he confirmed himself in his original determination to disregard his request. In this decision he was divinely helped.

“The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart that he hearkened not unto Moses and Aaron.”

It was necessary he should resist, and therefore that he should be strengthened to do so. It is strange that any person should find difficulty in the reception of this fact, yet not strange when people entertain the idea that Pharaoh was an immortal being, and doomed by this treatment to the certainty of a hell such as is pictured in popular theology. When it is recognised that Pharaoh was an obstinate pagan, raised up expressly that in him God’s power might be exhibited in all the earth, it is impossible that the difficulty can exist to a logical mind. Human nature is but the earth-clay in the hand of the potter. The potter will work out of the chaotic clay-fields beautiful pottery fit for the potter’s house: but in the process, some clay is turned to inferior account, shaped into inferior vessels, and put to inferior though necessary purposes; tempered, perhaps, to a rough and strong state, quite unlike the fineness and beauty of porcelain. Where is the difficulty? None but such as the false doctrine of human immortality creates.

Pharaoh does not appear to have informed Moses of his decision. Moses and Aaron were dismissed with their serpent-stuffed, but no larger rod, but were left in ignorance of the fact that their marvellous performance had produced no effect, and that Pharaoh was resolved to refuse their request. The fact was communicated to Moses by God.

“The Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened: he refuseth to let the people go.”

What next? Moses was told to put himself in Pharaoh’s way in the morning as he came to the river (probably for a morning bath): and to take with him *“the rod, which was turned to a serpent”*; and to say to Pharaoh when he met him,

“Yahweh Elohim of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and behold hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith Yahweh, in this thou shalt know that I am Yahweh. Behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood, and the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink: and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water in the river.”

To deliver such a message to a man just out in the fresh morning, and with the luxury of a morning bath in the river before him, was certainly to arrest his attention in the most striking manner possible, and to propose to him a sign most palpable and beyond the power of man. We are not told how Pharaoh received this uncourtly interruption of his morning privacy. He was probably displeased enough, and impatiently ordered Moses out of his presence. But God’s business is very urgent when it comes. It cannot stand aside to suit human convenience. God told Moses to order Aaron to stretch out the rod over all the waters of Egypt to turn them to blood. Why the stretching out of the rod? Because there was a right moment for the wonder to commence, and it was fitting that that right moment should be marked so that the connection between the accomplishment of the marvel and the holder of the rod might be apparent. Was it Aaron or was it the rod that produced the effect? Neither: *“Yahweh smote the river”* (Exodus 7: 25); but Aaron and the rod (commanded by Moses) were God’s signal. A railway official shows a white flag from a gallery in the Birmingham railway station, and the train moves off. It is not the flag that does it; it is the signal for the thing to be done: the steam liberated by the drive does the work. God’s drivers are the angels; the Spirit is the steam. When the signal was shown—when Aaron’s rod was elevated—the waters throughout Egypt were simultaneously operated on by the angelic workers, so as to be chemically and organically transmuted into a nauseous coagulation, offensive and deleterious to man and beast. Ye polite unbelievers! Reconsider and discard

your shallow objections. Water turns into blood in your bodies every day. Can ye tell how the marvel is accomplished? Ye may talk of gastric juices, and chyle, pancreatic fluids, absorbent vessels, secerning glands, and all the other apparatus of the animal economy, but when ye have gone over the whole list, ye are still where ye were—ignorant as the cattle in the field of the essential process by which the ingredients of the wonderful element we call water are turned into the still more wonderful crimson fluid that charges the fibre of the body with energy and life. We only know the fact, but not its occult nature; and because the fact is slowly performed every day, ye think it not wonderful. Or else, if ye have sufficient sense to feel that perhaps it is wonderful, ye instantly stultify your reason, and make all wise men ashamed by your assertions that this is the only form in which the wonderful act can be performed—that God can turn water into blood in your bodies, but he cannot do it in the open air on the banks of the Nile. Poor masses of cellular tissue and water! Men will learn yet that your notions and impressions, and poor capacities, are no measure of the possibilities of the Power that produced the framework of heaven and earth.

God can do things quickly or slowly—by direct volition or circuitous organic incorporation of the invisible forces—according as the occasion calls. The display of His power to Israel and the Egyptians required the spoiling of the Egyptian water everywhere, and it was spoiled. But “*the Egyptians did so with their enchantments.*” Yes. They got a small quantity of water; it must have been a small quantity, because it was after the water in general was turned into blood; and with their pettifogging appliances, they were able to turn clear water into crimson liquor; any chemist can do it today. And because they were able to do this, Pharaoh came to the same conclusion as in the case of the serpents: that Moses was merely a cleverer magician than the court sorcerers. So “*neither did he set his heart to this also*” (Exodus 7: 23). But there was the outstanding fact nevertheless, before his eyes—that—

“*All the waters in the river were turned into blood, and the fish that was in the river died, and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river . . . and all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink.*”

Seven days of this wretched state of things probably sufficed only to

make Pharaoh morose. It did not lead him to make favourable advances to Moses. He remained in sullen retirement, vexed, angry, and impotent. It was necessary to approach him again.

“The Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, let my people go that they may serve me. And if thou refuse to let them go, behold I will smite all thy borders with frogs. And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading troughs. And the frogs shall come up both on thee and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants.”

How Pharaoh received this dreadful renewal of the subject, we are not informed. That he resented it, we may gather from the fact that Yahweh commanded Moses to proceed with the infliction of the threatened plague.

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

Frogs were instantaneously produced in multitudes, and became such a distressing plague as we can only imagine. It was a miracle, but the miracle lay only in the rapid production. Slow production takes place every day. God, who started the slow process at the beginning, can accelerate it when occasion requires; and the occasion required it, for God was proving His existence and power to Israel and all the earth, in the blows struck in the controversy raised about the liberation of Israel. And so the frogs came and afflicted the Egyptians greatly, *“and the magicians did so **with their enchantments.**”* Nothing easier under the circumstances. There were frogs enough all about. They had but to collect and secrete, and suddenly liberate a sufficient number to convince Pharaoh that they also possessed the terrible power working with this man Moses. Still the power of the magicians to add to the plague was not very reassuring to Pharaoh, in the absence of power on their part to rid the land of the plague. Moses and Aaron evidently had the greater power, and so he appealed to Moses and Aaron, and through them to the God in whose name they performed their wonders.

“Entreat Yahweh that he may take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord.”

Moses turned Pharaoh’s relenting mood to the best account.

“When shall I entreat for thee?”

This fixing of the time for the stoppage of the plague would show how completely under Yahweh's control the forces at work were. Pharaoh fixes the time, "*Tomorrow.*" Moses agrees, adding this remark, which shows the nature of the effect aimed at,

*"THAT THOU MAYEST KNOW THAT THERE IS NONE LIKE
UNTO THE LORD OUR GOD."*

CHAPTER 12. —THE EGYPTIAN PLAGUES— **NECESSARILY MIRACULOUS—AND WHAT** **THEY WERE INTENDED TO EFFECT**

Having agreed with Pharaoh that the frogs were to cease on the morrow, Moses departed from his presence, and entreated the Lord that it might be so;

“And Yahweh did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields, and they gathered them together upon heaps, and the land stank” (Exodus 8: 13-14).

The manifest connection between the prayer of Moses and this cessation of the plague of frogs ought to have convinced Pharaoh that it was God who was at work in the case, and that it was futile and insane to continue his opposition. It would have had this effect had Pharaoh been of a reasonable and enlightened mind; but he was neither. He was a small-minded, obstinate man, and his education had led him to recognise a multiplicity of gods, which made the plagues only a source of perplexity and embarrassment; for, admitting their genuineness in a divine sense, he had always the reserve thought that possibly there was a more powerful divinity whom the Egyptian priests might succeed in bringing to his aid. These natural peculiarities in the constitution of his mind were aggravated by a divine hardening (itself a just retribution) which the exigencies of the situation, from a divine point of view, required. It was necessary that he should fight the battle out to the bitter and ruinous end for the exhibition of Yahweh’s existence and power to Israel, the Egyptians, and the whole earth, then and for ages after. This point we have already considered.

It is with the sense, therefore, of a very natural sequence that we read:

“When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them (Moses and Aaron).”

There was no further summons at this point, but another blow without ceremony or parley.

“The Lord said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and smote the dust of the

earth, and it became lice in man and in beast: all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Who can imagine the horror that must have spread through Egypt in the presence of this loathsome infliction? Pharaoh had recourse to his magicians. They did their best, but they failed. They tried “*with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not*” (Exodus 8: 18). Serpents, and frogs, and blood, were within their manipulation, but what could they do with dust and lice? They admitted this was out of their power.

*“The magicians said unto Pharaoh, **This is the finger of God**”* (Exodus 8: 19)—

A recognition on their part of the difference between what is accomplishable by human art and contrivance, and what can be achieved by divine power alone: not that any of the previous plagues were within the possibility of human contrivance, in their reality and extent, but it was possible apparently to imitate them on a small scale; but here was a plague they could not imitate. Lice were too small to be successfully dealt with. They might be coated with a substance to make them look like dust, but how could they be instantly liberated at a signal, so as to become obviously lice again? Besides, what heart could the manipulators have to conduct such an experiment, with the disgusting creatures crawling on them everywhere? For “*the lice were upon man and upon beast*” (Exodus 8: 18).

No: the magicians gave it up. They admitted the action of a divine power in the case. They admitted it to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh was in no mood to be influenced.

“Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them as the Lord had said” (Exodus 8: 19).

Another blow impended, but before its infliction it was deemed suitable to address to Pharaoh another summons to surrender.

“Yahweh said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh: lo, he cometh forth to the water: and say unto him, Thus saith Yahweh, Let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my

people dwell, that no swarm of flies shall be there, TO THE END THAT THOU MAYEST KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF THE EARTH. I will put a division between My people and thy people: tomorrow shall this sign be.”

Note the object of the miracle—which was that of all the Egyptian miracles)—that God’s existence and power might be known; and consider the mode of it. It will tax the most brilliant imagination to conceive a more effective, a more unmistakable mode of showing the fact that God was at work—the isolating of a specified district from the operation of the plague: and the fixing of a time for its commencement.

It came out as pre-indicated to Pharaoh. Next day—

“There came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants’ houses, and into all the land of Egypt. The land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies.”

Pharaoh could not stand it. He had reconciled himself to the lice after considerable repugnance; but to have his nostrils assailed with an evil odour in his very palace, and to have every pleasure and office of life corrupted and destroyed by this host of flies dead and flies living everywhere, was beyond the limits of human endurance. His only escape was concession to this pestilent Moses and Aaron. He would make a little concession; not too much, enough to ease the plague, but not enough to loose his hold upon his useful serfs. He would let them hold the feast they wanted, but not outside of Egypt.

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

Moses could not accept this concession: but as Pharaoh was in a relenting mood, he adopted a conciliatory tone and argued the matter with him.

“It is not meet so to do: for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?”

Pharaoh seems to have been impressed with the force of this objection. The Egyptians, like barbarians in general, had strong superstitions on the subject of animals, holding the crocodile and the cat sacred, and the sheep the other way. He seemed to foresee an increase in the public calamities by the result that might ensue among his own people in the presence of religious

ceremonies using for holy purposes a creature they regarded otherwise. Moses urged—

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

This would meet the Egyptian “*abomination*” difficulty, and every other difficulty as well. Three days’ ordinary journeying would take them to Sinai, and, once there, Moses knew he would be subject to divine direction only as to future proceedings. Pharaoh was willing to agree to the proposal so far. He did not like the distance proposed; still, on the whole, he consented, on the one urgent condition that the plague of flies should be taken away.

*“I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away; **entreat for me**” (Exodus 8: 28).*

Moses promised compliance with this condition with all alacrity; for, indeed, it was on this that he wanted particularly to fix Pharaoh’s attention—the proof that God was working for the exhibition of His name in the deliverance of His people.

“I will entreat Yahweh that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more, in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.”

With this rather bold adjuration for a flockmaster to address to a king (natural in the confidence inspired by the divine cooperation in the previous plagues, but otherwise inexplicable)—

“Moses went out from Pharaoh and entreated Yahweh, and Yahweh did according to the word of Moses, and He removed the swarm of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people: there remained not one (swarm).”

And now what happens? According to the agreement, Pharaoh should have issued his warrant for the expedition to the wilderness consented to. But no such warrant made its appearance. With the cessation of flies, there was a cessation of Pharaoh’s good resolutions. He possibly thought that with a little patience, the whole affair might pass off: the God of the Hebrews, like other gods, might change His mind, or something might arise to divert

attention from the issue which had so far been pressed upon him with such a deadly pertinacity. At all events, he changed his mind:

“He would not let the people go.”

Whether he officially or in any way notified the change to Moses is not stated; but Moses became aware of the fact. Left without further guidance, he would have been at his wit’s end: for Pharaoh’s permission was absolutely indispensable: how, otherwise, could he lead out of the country a mere mob of helpless people in the presence of a powerfully equipped army. But Moses was not without further guidance. Divine guidance (and that too in its most direct and brilliant form) was the one glorious feature of the whole Mosaic episode from the day Moses first observed the singular flame flicker on the Mount of Horeb, till the day he was angelically interred on Nebo—a guidance continued after his day in forms more or less direct for nearly fifteen hundred years, and suspended only with the Roman dispersal of the Jewish nation to their present but fast-closing exile among the nations.

The guidance came to his aid thus:

“The Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go that they may serve me. If thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, behold the hand of the Lord shall be upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep; there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the Lord shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and there shall nothing die of all that is the children of Israel’s.”

Moses waited upon Pharaoh—a thoroughly unwelcome visitor, but not to be denied. He delivered his message. Pharaoh probably received the message with all royal composure, as is the manner with those accustomed to unbounded authority, but dreading it in his heart. Moses, by divine direction, specified a date for the new infliction—that no evidence might be wanting that it was a divine doing, and no mischance that was about to occur.

“Tomorrow the Lord shall do this thing in the land” (Exodus 9: 5).

And so it came to pass. The dread morrow dawned; and such a cattle plague as Europe has never known began to rage.

“All the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of

Israel died not one.”

Pharaoh was curious on the latter point. He seemed to hope that, by some possibility, the district where the Israelites were located might be no exception to the fell scourge that had destroyed “all the cattle in the field.” He sent to ascertain how the case stood.

“Pharaoh sent: and there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead” (Exodus 9: 7).

Had he found the cattle of the Israelites dead, he would have felt some comfort. He would have concluded that a common derangement of nature had befallen all alike, under an incomprehensible combination of the gods—(for he was a pagan and believed in “*gods many*”: a myth probably originating in human acquaintance with the angels in the beginning). But he found no such comfort. The Israelite stock were peacefully and healthily grazing in the pastures. The fact did not produce the effect it was calculated to produce. His natural obstinacy was in full play:

“The heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he did not let the people go”
(Exodus 9: 7).

The next blow was delivered without preliminary. Sufficient time having elapsed to show that Pharaoh’s determination was unaltered, matters were brought nearer home.

“The Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, take to you handfuls of the ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh, and it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man and upon beast throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Proud men can stand a good deal so long as they themselves (sound in wind and limb) are able to cope with difficulties; but when trouble invades their own persons, especially in the humiliating form of boils, it makes a considerable difference to their mood. Here was a curious case impending—not only themselves, but all their servants disabled in the same way—not able to use their beasts for help in getting about even, because of the extension of the trouble to them. To what straits can God reduce man, even as to what extent and varieties He can and does bless him, without man realising that his well-oiled joints and pleasure-yielding faculties are all of

His contrivance and carrying on.

What was there in the throwing of a few handfuls of ashes into the air to cause the dreadful infliction? Nothing as a human performance, but everything as a divine arrangement: for God can do anything and in any way. He willed this mode in this case for the sake of connecting Moses with the result, that the result might be estimated in connection with the demands made by Moses concerning Israel in the name of God, who wills to be known as the God of Israel. The operation (which has been bunglingly copied by conjurers of all sorts ever since)—the throwing of a few ashes into the air took its terrible effect.

“Moses sprinkled the ashes towards heaven, and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boil was upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians.”

Ha! ha! ye cunning magicians! ye were not only baffled in your career of imitation by the turning of dust into lice; but now your own personal movements are arrested by this wonder-working Moses. Ye cannot come into his presence to measure your pretensions and deceive Pharaoh. Ye must “keep your rooms”: ye must nurse your boils; ye must groan with pain: because Moses sprinkled a few innocuous ashes towards heaven—because you are fighting against the Creator and upholder of heaven and earth. There will be a wonderful repetition of this, by and by, when marvellous things will again be shown “*according to the days of the coming out of the land of Egypt*” (Micah 7: 15).

“The nations shall see and be confounded at all Israel’s might; they shall lay their hand upon their mouth: their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth; they shall be afraid of Yahweh Elohim”: so the same oracle testifies.

What did Pharaoh do now? Was he also kept at home with boils? Possibly; we are not informed how it was with him personally. “*All the Egyptians*” are said to have been affected; and “*all the Egyptians*” may have included him or it may not. Perhaps he was excepted in reservation for the finish of the awful programme that was fast destroying Egypt. At all events, he remained unshaken in his determination to hold on to Israel. His firmness

in such a situation was something superhuman. Its explanation is found in the narrative (Exodus 9: 12).

“The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them—Moses and Aaron—as the Lord had spoken to Moses.”

And so there follows the next display of power—this time an appalling display—as anyone may testify who has witnessed even our trifling thunderstorms. But before this appalling display of power, which nearly conquered Pharaoh’s hardened will, it was deemed suitable to make a special further appeal to him—nearly the last.

*“The Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him: Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people **(mark again the purpose distinctly aimed at) THAT THOU MAYEST KNOW THAT THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE EARTH.** For now I will stretch out my hand that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence, and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up **FOR TO SHOW IN THEE MY POWER AND THAT MY NAME MAY BE DECLARED THROUGHOUT ALL THE EARTH.**”*

The prominence of this object in the Egyptian transactions cannot be too distinctly pointed out. It forms the key of the whole matter. If anyone read or attempt to understand the Mosaic narrative of Israel’s deliverance apart from it, he will attempt the solution of an unconquerable puzzle. Read as a narrative of human action with human aims, the affair is impenetrable—inconceivable. With the key, all is plain: the means employed, reasonable and intelligible: the difficulties surmounted, manifestly accounted for. And yet this key-principle (forming also the essential principle of the whole Scriptural record, from Genesis to Revelation—furnishing the *raison d’etre* of all its transactions, and all its maxims) is the one principle for which nearly all mankind have the greatest disrelish. That God be known—that He be exalted—that His excellence and irresponsible prerogative, and unsearchable power and wisdom be recognised, is reasonable; and to the highest faculties of man, this recognition effectually accorded, is the highest

and most ennobling and enduring of the mental delights of which he is capable. But the highest faculties of man are scarcely developed in the majority of men. Long disuse, unfavourable surroundings, and the predominant activity of other stronger likes, have dwarfed the power to grasp and delight in God. Themes appealing to human interests or human honour, especially self-honour, are alone powerful to stir the heart of public life as now constituted. The object formulated to Pharaoh in the words under consideration has no interest: is positively nauseating: has become inconsistent with the popular conception of intelligent manly life. This fact is symptomatic of the moral insanity that fills the world, and which will only be dissipated by the means applied in the Egyptian age. The means were effectual then and they will be again. When the nations see omnipotence against them under the manifest control of a directing intelligence, they will open their eyes to the fact forced upon the world's attention in the days of Pharaoh: that God exists, and that His worship, and His fear, and His love, and obedience are the paramount duties of man. A surrender to the power of this perception will quickly follow its palpable demonstration.

As yet Pharaoh was invincible, as the case required. His attitude called for the words further addressed to him:

“As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go? Behold tomorrow, about this time, I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now.”

But mercy would be mixed with this visitation, on the one condition which characterises all Yahweh's relations with man, as becomes His greatness—an honouring of Him in the recognition of His word in the case, and faith therein:

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

Though this offer of mercy on condition of faith with works had no effect upon Pharaoh, it evidently operated powerfully with some of the Egyptians, among whom, or a limited section of them at all events. Moses had doubtless caused it to be promulgated: for we read—

“He that feared the word of Yahweh among the servants of

Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses. And he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field.”

Things being so arranged and disposed, the hour impended for the crashing tempest. The moment arrived.

“Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven, and Yahweh sent thunder and hail and the fire ran along upon the ground: and Yahweh rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast: and the hail smote every herb of the field and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.”

Here, it may be remarked, that much is made by the loud-voiced enemies of the Bible, of the fact that any beasts should remain to be destroyed by this visitation, after the devastation wrought by the fifth plague, as described in Exodus 9: 6, where it is testified that *“all the cattle of Egypt died.”* The objection was urged by Mr. Bradlaugh, in his debate with the writer in Birmingham, in 1876. It may be best illustrated by quoting the questions and answers that passed on the subject at the time, as reported by the shorthand writer:

“Q. Is it the fact that after the whole of the cattle of the land had been killed, God (in the 19th verse) sent a warning so that those that were left might be taken out of the field, and not die?

“A. I prefer you to read it as it is.

“Q. Does it say in the 19th verse: *‘Send, therefore, now and gather thy cattle, and all thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them and they shall die?’*

“A. Yes.

“Q. Is it a fact that some of them regarded the word and fled?

“A. Yes.

“Q. Do you consider it probable that they fled away after they had been killed? Don’t you think that an improbability, though the book states it?

“A. The book does not state that.

“Q. Read it. Read all relating to the cattle fleeing out of the field, and see if it doesn’t.

“A. There is no occasion to read anything beside what you have read.

“Q. Is it true that later than that, God destroyed the first-born of man and beast throughout the whole of the land of Egypt?

“A. Yes.

“Q. All the cattle having been previously dead?

“A. All that did die.

“Q. The words are: ‘And all the cattle of Egypt died.’ Read from the 2nd to the 6th verse, and say if it doesn’t mean all the cattle?

“A. It means all the cattle that were meant.

“Q. How much less than ‘all’? Is not all the money in my pocket all the money?

“A. That is a trifling way of putting it.

“Q. Can anything be trifling that helps to clear up God’s Word?

“A. In the abstract, of course not.

“Q. Then please clear up how all the cattle means less than all the cattle?

“A. If I knew all the circumstances which the writer had before his mind, in their details, I could do so.

“Q. Oh, that is your answer, is it?

“A. My answer is that the book, being otherwise proved reliable, my ignorance of the details does not preclude my believing it to be a divine revelation.”

A more effective answer might have been given. There is in reality no such discrepancy as he strove to make appear, and as is generally supposed to exist. “*All the cattle of Egypt*” that died, according to Exodus 9: 6, are defined in the third verse (which states the judgment about to be inflicted) as “*the cattle which is in the field.*” The death of “*all the cattle in the field*” would leave a multitude of beasts in various kinds of shelter in cities and farms. When the murrain had destroyed the animals in the fields, those that had not been in the field would, in natural course, be brought out and take their places, and account for those which, not being brought home, were again destroyed in the field, and those taken home would account for the

further destruction which took place when “*all the first-born of beasts*” as well as the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed by the last plague.

The appalling combination of hail, fire, thunder, and tempest, coming so punctually to the arrangement of Moses, had a terrifying effect on Pharaoh. The rage of the elements is awe-inspiring in the Eastern lands in ordinary circumstances; but this was no ordinary disturbance of the atmosphere. It was a disturbance specifically produced under angelic manipulation. It must have been as dreadful of aspect as it was destructive in its effects. The darkened sky poured down a continuous torrent, in which were largely mingled hailstones of abnormal size—hailstones large enough to kill every living thing out of doors, and work havoc on all the works of man; the dull roar of the descending storm (sufficient to drown every other sound) was itself drowned every minute by earth-shaking thunder-peals which crashed upon the startled ear with increasing rapidity, shaking Pharaoh’s palace to its foundation and causing man and beast to tremble in their shelters everywhere. In the midst of the terrific roar of the elements, blinding light was every instant sent into every nook and corner by the forked lightnings which shot from the frowning heavens, and which, with an abnormal coherence, retained their form and power on striking the surface of the ground, running and scattering in all directions, until the earth seemed enveloped in fire.

No wonder that Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said,

“Entreat Yahweh (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer . . . I have sinned this time: Yahweh is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.”

The answer brings out again the object of these awe-striking proceedings:

*“Moses said unto him, as soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto Yahweh, and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail, **THAT THOU MAYEST KNOW HOW THAT THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S.**”*

CHAPTER 13. —THE LAST THREE PLAGUES, AND ISRAEL'S DEPARTURE

Before Moses took leave of Pharaoh, at the interview to which Pharaoh had summoned him (to implore a cessation of the awful hail and thunderstorm, offering to let Israel go), Moses relieved his mind of the feeling which was naturally gathering in him—a feeling of the uselessness and mockery of Pharaoh's penitential professions. He told Pharaoh that he (Moses) was well aware that neither he, nor his servants, would fear Yahweh though quailing before His judgments (Exodus 9: 30). Their compliances had only been in the nature of a creature accommodation to circumstances. A dog will get out of the way of stones thrown at him. Evil men will tack in another direction, to avoid calamity. It is not the spirit of understanding that moves them, but the mere impulse to get out of the way of harm. It is the spirit of understanding that God desires in man. He tells them not to be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding (Psalm 32: 9); and as to the sort of understanding, he wishes them to be "*wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil*" (Romans 16: 19). If Pharaoh had possessed this understanding, he would have recognised the hand of Yahweh at the outset and felt only the solicitude expressed by Saul of Tarsus, in similar circumstances:

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

He would have let Israel go. But it was not so. The divine object required another state of things. It required an obstinate, dark-minded, pagan Pharaoh. There is a time for everything. This was the time for such a man. Here he was, raised up for the purpose (Exodus 9: 16). And who shall deny the prerogative of the potter to work the clay into any shape he pleases? Them man who denies it shows kin with creatures which have no understanding; but which with a strong conceit, and a loud voice, make the air ring with their dissonant notes of various pitch and timbre, according as they have web feet, beautiful plumes, or long ears.

But Moses, though feeling disheartened as to any effect to be produced on Pharaoh and his servants, proceeded to do the part arranged with Pharaoh.

"He went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread abroad his

hands unto Yahweh, and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord has spoken by Moses” (Exodus 9: 33-35).

This chronic instability of Pharaoh’s purpose must have been much more trying to Moses than we can have any idea of. We know the upshot; and we know the precise object aimed at in this divinely-helped fickleness of Pharaoh. We can, therefore, contemplate his inveterate unreliability with calmness. But Moses, at the time of it, was intent only on achieving Israel’s liberation. On this subject he was expectant at every move. Consequently, there must have been a genuine disappointment at every fresh failure in his endeavours. His disappointment finds frequent expression in the lamentations he addresses to Yahweh on his ill-success at various stages. He received, however, the best consolation possible—a divine explanation of the situation. The storm over, the air cleared, the sun again outshining from the blue sky, and a return of cheerfulness in all the land. Pharaoh’s resolution to hold on to the people of Israel was supplemented by this message from Yahweh to Moses:

“I have hardened Pharaoh’s heart, that I might show these my signs before him, and that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy sons and of thy sons’ sons WHAT THINGS I have wrought in Egypt and MY SIGNS which I have done among them; THAT YE MAY KNOW HOW THAT I AM YAHWEH.”

If Pharaoh had not resisted, the signs could not have been shown for lack of occasion, and the knowledge of Yahweh’s existence and power would not have been communicated in the vivid and unmistakable form which the purpose of God, at this stage of the earth’s history, called for. It called forth such a manifestation of the visible and personally-directed power of God as sufficed to convince Israel of Yahweh’s existence and spread His fame and name among the nations of the earth. By this, a foundation was laid for the operations of subsequent ages, the interdependence of which with the Egyptian wonders will become manifest to reflection, and be more particularly and clearly apparent in the day of the clear and open vision that will come with Christ, the prophet like unto Moses.

Having received this explanation, Moses, with a strengthened courage, returns to Pharaoh to renew the divine demands.

“Thus saith Yahweh Elohim of the Hebrews: how long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?” (Exodus 10: 3).

But why, say some, challenge Pharaoh for his obstinacy when it was divinely-helped? The answer is obvious. The question in dispute was not Pharaoh’s character. Pharaoh’s attitude was a minor, though necessary element in the situation. The great matter was this: the public and overpowering exhibition of God’s existence and power for the enlightenment of that and all subsequent generations. To accomplish this effectually, it was needful there should be such an opposition as Pharaoh’s to the divine demands, and to have such an opposition there must be such an opposer, and to have such an opposer, he must be provided and helped. He was raised up for the occasion:

“In very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Exodus 9: 16).

It was not, therefore, a question of Pharaoh’s merits or demerits. But, of course, in the communications necessary to be held with Pharaoh, it was convenient and inevitable that this feature should appear. There is no difficulty in understanding the matter when once the divine point of view is apprehended. Look at it with God’s eyes, and in the light of God’s purpose, and there is no more difficulty about Pharaoh’s raising-up and hardening, than there is about an iron founder hardening, by furnace and steam hammer, a mass of iron intended for fine machinery in a royal steam yacht, while of the same brand he differently treats a portion intended for pocket keys. Look at it with any other eyes, and the matter is environed with all the difficulty that the merely natural-man critic finds or professes to find in it; but to look at it with any other eyes is nothing less than excessively stupid, and logically impossible, for the matter is either divine, or nothing at all. If God was not in these proceedings of Moses, they were impossible, and did not happen, and, in that case, there is nothing to trouble about. If God was in them, there is no difficulty. And we have already seen that it is in reality not an open question as to which of these hypotheses accords with all the facts that have to be taken into account.

Moses, then, appealing again to Pharaoh, tells him that if he persist in his refusal to let Israel go, there will come such a visitation of locusts, that the residue of the field produce that had escaped the ravages of the previous plagues, will be clean eaten up.

“They shall fill thy houses,” said Moses, *“and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians.”*

“They shall cover the face of the earth that one cannot be able to see the earth, and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail.”

“Tomorrow will I bring the locusts unto thy coast . . . which neither thy fathers nor thy father’s fathers have seen since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day.”

If this message made no impression upon Pharaoh, it greatly alarmed all his people who heard of it, and who had learnt by direful experience that the words of Moses were no empty threats. They pressed the matter urgently upon Pharaoh’s attention. They implored him to consent to the requirements of Moses.

“Let them go that they may serve the Lord their God.”

“Knowest thou not yet,” said they (after all that has happened), *“that Egypt is destroyed?”*

Pharaoh, a feeble character, though stubborn, yielded so far to these importunities as to have Moses and Aaron recalled. Brought again into Pharaoh’s presence, Pharaoh tells them they may go and serve Yahweh; but he wishes to qualify the permission to surround it with safeguards:

“Who are they that shall go?”

Moses replied, they must all go:

“Our young and our old, our sons and our daughters, our flocks and our herds.”

To this Pharaoh demurred,

“Not so; go now, ye that are men; for that ye did desire.”

Moses would not consent to a compromise, and so the parley came to an end, and Moses and Aaron were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence, implying considerable emphasis and heat in Pharaoh’s decision. We cannot doubt many of the Egyptians would dolefully lament this rupture of the negotiations. There was nothing for it but to go on with the locust plague, and accordingly the locusts came.

“Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and

Yahweh brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night, and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they. Before them there were no such locusts as they; neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened, and they did eat every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees, which the hail had left, and there remained not any green thing in the trees or in the herbs of the field through all the land of Egypt (Exodus 10: 13-15).

It is one of the many symptoms of the intellectual confusion of the age that it is fashionable, and quite the acceptable thing, to suggest that this was an ordinary visitation of locusts such as is common in the East at the present day. If people would only think, they would see in a moment how perfectly worthless and insulting to the judgment such a suggestion is. If it was an ordinary visitation of locusts, why did Pharaoh “*send for Moses and Aaron in haste*”? (Exodus 10: 16). What possible connection could there be between Moses and an ordinary visitation of locusts? And why were the ordinary locusts so very discriminating as to ravage the Egyptian districts, and leave the region occupied by the Israelites untouched? If it be said, “Oh, that is a mere garnishing of the narrative: Pharaoh didn’t send for Moses, etc.”; then why trouble to explain the locusts at all? If Pharaoh’s hasty summons of Moses and Aaron is a fiction, the locusts are likely to be a fiction too. It would be a much more complete manner of getting rid of the plague of locusts, to simply say there were no locusts, than to say they came in an ordinary way. But then, why offer such explanation at all? Aye, why? It is perfectly gratuitous, perfectly presumptuous, perfectly absurd. There is no ground for it, whatever, except the dogged determination not to believe. The facts compel belief—whether we begin with Christ, who confirms the writings containing the narrative, or study the history of Israel before his time, or consider the inherent character of the whole Mosaic narrative in connection with the appearance of the Jewish nation on the earth. To say the thing was thus and so otherwise than it is written, without any ground for so saying, except repugnance to what is written, is certainly an extraordinary intellectual performance. Yet this is the performance that many people supposed to be intelligent go through every day. In any other matter, it

would be scouted as it deserves. Men seem rational in everything except that which pertains to God. In this direction it is true, whether men like the doctrine or not, that—

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject unto the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

Pharaoh, scarcely recovered from the scare of previous horrors, is brought instantly to his senses by the portentous land-darkening by devouring locust swarms. He *“calls for Moses and Aaron in haste.”* He confesses his sin:

“I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you.” He implores deliverance.

“Forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God that he may take away from me this death only.”

Yahweh Elohim, of Israel, is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness. Consequently such an attitude on the part of Pharaoh could have but one reception. Moses, departing from Pharaoh’s presence *“entreated the Lord, and the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts and cast them into the Red Sea.”* The locusts gone, Pharaoh had time to breathe freely. He concluded all might yet be well if he persevered. Perhaps the readiness with which mercy was extended would confirm him in this thought. At all events, he decided that he would not release Israel. He was not long in this mind. Before he had fairly settled in the enjoyment of his new comfort, a new calamity came upon him without further warning. By Yahweh’s direction,

“Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days, but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”

Nothing was more calculated to oppress the imagination than the prevalence of darkness—especially such a darkness—a *“darkness that might be felt.”* In daylight, men can encourage themselves in any wickedness; but in darkness, from which not even artificial deliverance can be obtained, their high thoughts lose buoyancy, their enterprise is arrested, and general paralysis sets in. Pharaoh gave in once more—at least nearly. He called for Moses,

and said Israel might go, young and old, sons and daughters; but he would like to have a pledge of their return: their flocks and their herds must remain. Moses declared the demand inadmissible. Nothing short of a complete release would satisfy the divine demand. The cattle must go with them, *“not an hoof should be left behind.”* This was more that Pharaoh’s restrained heart could stretch to; his patience snapped here. He ordered Moses out of his presence, declaring he should not see him again, and that if he should dare to present himself, death would be the consequence. Brave but impotent word, O Pharaoh. Thou art in the grip of a higher than Moses. Moses is only a servant—a faithful servant. Moses is able in all calmness to endure the threatening ebullition, and retires. Yahweh informs Moses that the limit of the dreadful programme is now nearly reached:

“Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterwards he will let you go hence. When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.”

Moses having been instructed as to the nature of this visitation, pays a final visit to Pharaoh. He had said to Pharaoh at the last interview that he would see his face no more. The moment was at hand when they would be sundered for ever. As regards friendly parley, it was true at the time of utterance; for Moses now went back to him, not to negotiate, not even to deliver an ultimatum, but to make a final declaration of wrath.

*“Thus saith Yahweh, About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast, that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, ‘Get thee out and all the people that follow thee’; and after that I will go out. **And he (Moses) went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.**”*

No date was mentioned for this crushing calamity. *“About midnight”*

would describe the time in a diurnal sense, but would convey no further information to Pharaoh beyond the general sense that it was impending. It would be some days after the message, for Moses and Aaron afterwards went out amongst Israel to give those instructions that affected them in connection with this final blow, which should result in their departure from the land. Those instructions had principally relation to the holding of the Feast of the Passover. They were to separate a lamb for every family on the tenth day of the month (which was to be to them thenceforward the first month of the year). They were to keep this lamb apart for four days, and on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, they were to kill the lamb, sprinkle of its blood on the doorpost of every man's house, and roast the lamb, and eat with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They were to eat it not at ease and leisure, but in haste, and ready equipped for the journey on which they were about to start. On that night the visitation of the angel of death throughout Egypt would force the Egyptians to expel them without time for preparation. The sprinkled blood on the Israelites' doorposts would secure their exemption from the death stroke, of which, individually, they were just as deserving as their Egyptian neighbours. They were afterwards to yearly observe this same feast of the Passover, with seven days of leisure and eating of unleavened bread added to it. It was to be an ordinance to them for ever, throughout their generations, with the purpose thus made plain:

“It shall come to pass when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses.”

Moses further instructed the people to ask of their neighbours articles of use and ornament—(*“jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment”*). There was need for this, for, as a slave and oppressed race for a hundred years, they would naturally be destitute of such things and such things were to be needed in the manufacture of the tabernacle and its furniture, as afterwards transpired, as well as for their individual wants in a wilderness, where no such things were to be procured. The difficulty some people have made about the “borrowing” of the articles is gratuitous. The borrowing in the case was not in the sense of a contract to restore, but simply asking possession; and in the demoralised and panic-struck condition of peoples' minds in Egypt, it is no wonder they gladly parted with whatever was wanted by a

people whom they were glad to be rid of.

“The Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required, and they spoiled the Egyptians.”

The night arrived for which all these preparations were made.

“And it came to pass at midnight, that Yahweh smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on the throne unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night and said, Rise up and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel, and go, serve ye the Lord as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds as ye have said, and be gone, and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste: for they said, We be all dead men.”

Israel being ready, made a prompt compliance with the demand of Pharaoh, who had thus changed from reluctance to importunity. It was a very hurried departure notwithstanding the notice they had had from Moses. They were unable to make preparatory arrangements for the journey. They had to march as they were, with dough in their kneading troughs, bound upon their shoulders—not the cumbrous trough of Gentile use, but portable articles that are still in use in the East. It must have been a mighty undertaking to marshal six hundred thousand men, besides women and children—an undertaking liable to confusion. But then the angel of Yahweh (who soon put in a visible appearance at their head) was with them to help so that arrangements would have a tendency to ready self-adjustment in a manner not exemplified in ordinary crowds.

“There was not one feeble person among their tribes.”

This is evidence of divine cooperation of a very special sort, which, when taken into account, effectually gets rid of the practical objections that have been raised by such as Colenso as to the mechanical execution of the exodus in detail. If God was in it, there could be no difficulty. If God was not in it, it

couldn't have been done at all. But the wise of this world do not take this simple ground, but in the most stupid way, with all their learning, mix up things that differ, raising difficulties that could not belong to the enterprise at all if it were such as it is proved to have been—the exhibition of the visible power of Yahweh in bringing a nation from the midst of a nation, for the declaration and glory of His name in all the earth.

CHAPTER 14. —THE EGYPTIAN PURSUIT AND THE RED SEA CATASTROPHE

“And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord” (Exodus 12: 41-42).

The reason why the night that witnessed the exodus was to be a memorable night in the national history was not because Israel attained their liberation from the Egyptian bondage: this was but a collateral element in the case. Moses touched the kernel of the event when he said,

*“Remember this day in which ye came out of Egypt: for **by strength of hand THE LORD BROUGHT YOU OUT** from this place.”*

The Passover was established as an annual feast, not to commemorate the achievement of national independence, but to keep in the national view the part performed by divine power in the matter, as Moses explained:

*“When the Lord shall bring thee unto the land of the Canaanites . . . thou shalt keep this service... and thou shalt show thy son in that day, saying, This is done **because of that which Yahweh did unto me**, when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign . . . that the Lord’s law shall be in thy mouth: for **with a strong hand HATH THE LORD BROUGHT THEE OUT OF EGYPT**”* (Exodus 13: 5-9).

The Passover has been observed ever since by Israel in their generations: and this is the meaning of it—that God exists and has a purpose in the earth; for there could have been no Egyptian exodus apart from these facts; and the Egyptian exodus occurred precisely that these facts might be made manifest, as we have seen throughout the Mosaic history of the plagues. The observance of the Passover at this day is a witness of these things having transpired. Let any man who doubts this try to explain the observance of the Passover by Israel during all their history, apart from the explanation of its institution given by Moses. He will find it not possible to give an explanation that will be rational, or that can be reconciled with the facts that have to be admitted by friend and foe. The only explanation that fits the facts all round—and especially that accounts at all for the escape of a slave rabble from the clutch of a powerful military nation, is the explanation given by Moses—that Jehovah miraculously interposed to accomplish the event in order that His name might be known.

The exodus being a miraculous performance, how out of place and beside the mark is that style of criticism which raises objections on the score of impossibility. Is anything impossible with God? The critics themselves would not affirm so insane a proposition. What they vainly persist in doing is trying to find an interpretation of the exodus which shall explain its events, without the element of miraculous performance in it. It is as if some old fogey were to try to account for the performance of the journey from London to Edinburgh in ten hours on the stage coach principle—without any reference to the participation of steam. It is a bootless attempt altogether. Without the steam, or some propelling agent of equal power, the journey could not be made in the time. Without the miraculous, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt could not have happened at all; and if the miraculous were in it, there is no difficulty as to anything connected with it; for the miraculous would be sure not to do the great things well and leave the little things unprovided for. The case stands perfectly plain. The exodus of Israel from

Egypt was the great historic exhibition of the visible hand of God in the earth that God might be known and recognised, and that the foundation might be laid among men for the great purpose He has contemplated for the earth from the beginning: the purpose to make the earth at last the habitation of His praise, and gladness for all mankind.

But God's mighty judgments on the Egyptians were not yet ended. He proposed a finishing stroke which would give a terrible dramatic completeness to the work, and write the intended lesson in the heart of Israel in characters that would not be effaced by the friction of a hundred generations. This, with consummate wisdom, was accomplished by leading Israel into a trap. The marching host was taken—not through the direct and easy route that lay by the Mediterranean seaboard, but by a road turning southwards, which brought them by the western side of the northern tongue of the Red Sea, into a position from which there was no exit—the Red Sea in front, a mountain barrier to the north and south, and the road to Egypt in the rear. They received instructions to *“encamp before Pihahiroth between Migdol, and the sea, over against Baal-zephon.”* This was the “order of the day,” promulgated to the host direct from God, through Moses. The order was carried out, and they *“encamped by the sea,”* in a position from which escape was impossible in case of attack in the rear. Israel were not aware of the reasons for this apparent bungle of generalship; but it was not long before it became apparent to them—at all events, in its first, and not at all comforting, aspect. They discerned in the distance the Egyptian army approaching with speed. Pharaoh, hearing of the route taken by the Israelites, and of the position they had taken up, saw at a glance the fatal mistake they had made, according to all military tactics:

“They are entangled in the land, and the wilderness hath shut them in.”

It was a situation to tempt pursuit and recapture. This was the divine bait, God said to Moses, *“I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them: and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and all his host: that the Egyptians may know that I am Yahweh.”*

And God did so. It required very little divine influence to quicken Pharaoh's pre-disposition in this state of matters. He found himself vexatiously regretting the consent he had given to Israel's departure.

“Why,” said he, *“have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”*

His fermenting feelings soon took shape. He decided to catch Israel in the trap they had walked into.

“He made ready his chariot and took his people with him, and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And he pursued after the children of Israel . . . and overtook them encamping by the sea beside Pihahiroth before Baal-zephon.”

Never was a company of human beings in more perilous position than Israel at this moment. Here was a vast defenceless crowd of men, women, and children, encumbered with flocks of sheep, and herds of cattle huddled into a valley that opened only to the sea; and here, behind them, in compact military order, was rapidly approaching a thoroughly equipped corps of the flower of the army of the most powerful monarchy of the earth. Israel quickly saw their danger, and something like panic seized the assembly.

“When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold the

Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord.”

This crying out was not in the sense of devotion and trust, as the sequel shows. It was the crying out of alarm. There was no faith in it at all, for they taunted Moses with the unreasonable bitterness that most people show in the hour of misfortune.

*“They said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt with us to carry us forth out of Egypt? **Is not this the word we did tell thee in Egypt**, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14: 11-12).*

Could leader be more sorely tried than Moses in these words? Moses knew what the Lord had said to him as to the upshot of this alarming phase of things, and on this he leant. He tried to quiet the people with the faith which he possessed himself. He said:

“Fear ye not: stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which he will show you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”

There is no evidence that Moses knew in what way the Egyptian army would be destroyed. It would rather appear that he did not. He cried to the Lord in the great strait in which they were placed, believing that the promised deliverance would come, but waiting to see how.

“And Yahweh said unto Moses: Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they GO FORWARD. Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch thine hand out over the sea, and divide it, and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”

Here was something new in military history about to be done—but what matters “military history”? Military history is only the history of human fightings, and human fightings are a recent affair upon earth. What are six thousand years in the roll of beginningless eternity? But because we happen to be in the run of the human chapter, just at present, the human chapter seems great and important with nearly all men. It is an insignificant affair, for all that: and God was showing this to Israel, and all men, by the wonderful programme of divine doings that gave Israel an existence among the nations—very small and easy things for God to do, but very marvellous to man, as a spectator—poor, weak, perishing man.

Moses did what he was told (the sum of all virtue in man towards God). But, before he did so, there was a change in the “dispositions,” as military men say, to suit the move about to be made:

“The Angel of God which went before the camp of Israel removed, and went behind them: and the pillar of cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and it was a cloud of darkness to them (the Egyptians), but it gave light by night to these (Israel), so that the one came not near the other all night.”

This brings into view an element of the wonderful journey from Egypt not yet noticed—the fact that the immense procession of the Israelitish host was divinely led in a tangible and visible manner:

“Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light: to go by day and night: he took not away

the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people” (Exodus 13: 21).

In a certain sense, there is nothing to marvel at in such a prodigy. If God was bringing this nation out of Egypt by power miraculously shown (for the manifestation of His name), it was according to the fitness of things that He should do it well and completely: and what better mode could be conceived of guiding a host on the march through an unknown country, than by suspending in their sight in front an object visible to all—as a cloud in the day and fire at night. It was an admirable arrangement of wisdom. It was a miracle—this pillar cloud changed to fire at night; and so was its sailing progress through the air, as the assembly marched; but what difficulty about that? The whole affair of the exodus was a miraculous transaction, or it did not happen at all: and as to which of these alternatives is admissible, we have already seen it is not an open question. The exodus did happen, and it was God’s doing throughout, and therefore all difficulty is absent. Any cloud is a wonder, and any fire is a piece of inscrutability if we will but consider it. Intrinsicly, there was nothing more wonderful in the pillar of day and night than in the formless masses of cloud in the sky; only this cloud was shaped and guided by a direct application of intelligent power, and the others are allowed to shape and adjust themselves on mechanical principles fixed in them when they were originally established for the purpose which they serve. Men talk about this cloudy pillar as “the symbol of the divine presence!” This is a vague and cloudy way of talking altogether. It was not hung out in front of the assembly as a symbol at all, but as a practically useful thing. By it, God went before them to guide. Doubtless it was a token that God was with them, but there were many things beside this that betokened that wonderful guidance. The cloud was not a token in particular, but a means of leadership which the circumstances made necessary.

It is well to notice that while the first account of the cloudy pillar tells us that “*YAHWEH went before them in it,*” the second says it was “*the angel of God that went before the camp of Israel.*” No plainer intimation could we receive—that what we read of as the doings and sayings of Yahweh are often in actual form the doings and sayings of the angels whom He employs, “*who excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word*” (Psalm 103: 20).

The Yahweh-angel having interposed himself between the approaching Egyptians and the alarmed assembly of the Israelites, the safety of the latter was secured while the wonderful movement was executed that was to sink Pharaoh and his army to the bottom of the sea. Night came on during the operation; and while Israel’s movements were facilitated by the flood of light thrown among their ranks from the electric brightness of the fiery pillar, a contrary effect was produced among the Egyptians, to whom the rear side of the pillar was made a cause of increased darkness. This was necessary, otherwise the Egyptians would have gained too rapidly on Israel for the divine purpose. Even as it was, they came on too quickly, and the angel had to moderate their speed by taking off a few of their wheels, in consequence of which “*they drave heavily.*” *

Moses, having done as he was commanded, an extraordinary thing happened. The sea, cut asunder by the east wind, divided in the middle; a path of dry land was thus formed all the way across, the divided waters were congealed, and kept in their place like two sloping banks; and Israel received orders to march. They probably obeyed this order with all the alacrity with

which people usually escape from danger when a way is suddenly opened. The opened channel was soon filled from end to end with rapidly-marching people. The Egyptians were held at bay while Israel got clear. Israel, by and by, began to deploy out of the channel at the other side. The Egyptians “*went in after them into the midst of the sea.*” It was the most natural thing in the world for the Egyptians to do: for seeing the Israelites had ventured into the bed of the sea and were getting along in safety, what could the Egyptians think but that what the Israelites were safely doing, they could do also? Military orders brook no parley, and military ardour, with a flying foe just ahead, does not deliberate much. Ordered to advance, the Egyptians march along the new highway in the waters. Israel had cleared the channel and were standing on the shore on the other side. The Egyptian army was now bodily in the bed of the sea, and making good progress through the channel towards the other side. Ah, Pharaoh! You thought you had Israel in a trap: what a trap you are in! Get out as fast as you can. Alas! your utmost speed is in vain. Moses stands on the shore on the other side. He is the faithful servant of the God who had made all water and all men, and to whom all things belong, and to whom none in heaven or earth can say, “*What doest thou?*” This God has told His servant Moses to bring those waters on each side of you together again. It is the work of a moment. He lifts his rod: the restrained waters are set free: with a quiet, sudden leap from each side, they run together with the plunging sullen roar of the waves that beat the strand, and lo, where is now the army on which you placed your confidence? Struggling in the water—a confused mass of men and horses, shouting in battle with an enemy they did not expect to encounter—fighting with the waters: it is a short conflict. In ten minutes or a quarter-of-an-hour, the sounds of struggle cease; the sea has returned to its strength: the power and pride of Pharaoh and his captains are no more.

“The depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone, Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy . . . The enemy said, I will pursue. I will overtake: I will divide the spoil: my lust shall be satisfied upon them. I will draw my sword: my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind: the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.”

* This was “*in the morning*” (Exodus 14: 24). —C.C.W.

And thus did Jehovah finally put an end to Egyptian hostility, and separate His people Israel for the work to be done. It was a consummate stroke of wisdom. Whichever way it is looked at, it commands our unbounded admiration. It not only destroyed the pursuers of Israel, but it brought destruction in a form that could leave no doubt in the minds of men as to the divine nature of the calamity; for who but God could open a path in the sea for the escape of his people, and hold it open just so long as was needful to allow Israel to get out of it and the Egyptians into it. It was far more eloquent on this point than if the Egyptian soldiers had been destroyed as they stood in their ranks, after the manner of the Assyrian army nearly a thousand years afterwards. Such a destruction might have been put down to an accidental plague: but the catastrophe of the Red Sea was susceptible of no such explaining away. It was as unanswerable as it was complete; and see, also, how effectually, by bringing Israel to the eastern side of the sea, it protected them from all further molestation from Egyptian reinforcements, and left them at liberty for those spiritual exercises to which they were to be subjected in the wilderness of Sinai. It was a perfect triumph of divine wisdom. No wonder Israel broke forth in song;

“I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song: and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation: my father’s God, and I will exalt Him. Yahweh is a man of war: Yahweh is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea . . . Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation. The people shall hear and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold of the inhabitants of Palestine. . . . Fear and dread shall fall upon them: at the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone, till Thy people pass over. O Lord, till the people pass over which Thou hast purchased. Yahweh shall reign for ever and ever” (Exodus 15).

This drowning of a whole army in the Red Sea, which had just been safely crossed by the Israelitish multitude, is the most extraordinary event that ever happened in the history of nations, if we except the interview between God and Israel at Sinai. No wonder that it stands out so boldly in all the Scriptures that come after Moses. It is the beacon seen towering from afar—it is a brilliant light streaming from the days of Moses down all the darkness of the centuries since. David refers to it continually in the Psalms. One example:

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord of Lords . . . to Him which divided the Red Sea into parts . . . and made Israel to pass through the midst of it . . . but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for His mercy endureth for ever”
(Psalm 136: 1-15).

How often is it the subject of allusion in the Prophets? How undoubted is its recognition in the apostolic writings (Acts 7: 36; Hebrews 1: 29). Why is it so faintheartedly and uncertainly received nowadays by those who are ostensibly the religious leaders of the people—by those who profess a nominal allegiance to the Scriptures? Why do they hesitate to receive the testimony of a man like Moses, whom they glorify as a wonderful legislator, confirmed as that testimony is by such an unspeakable wonder as *“the prophet like unto Moses”*—the prophet of Nazareth, Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Why are they so prone to sacrifice unmistakable historic truth at the shrine of human speculation and sentiment? The answer is doubtless to be found in what may be called the Egyptians’ side of the question. There is a feeling to the effect that, while the exodus was a grand affair from the Hebrew point of view, it has a different aspect when looked at in the light of “broad humanitarian principles.” These “broad humanitarian principles”—presuppose a philosophy which writes down every human being an entity of incomparable preciousness. Here is the worm at the root. God’s great and mighty works upon earth are obscured and wrested, because of a false theory of the importance of man. The Greeks held man to be immortal. Christians caught up the pleasing notion; the result has been, to eat away the life and destroy the meaning of the Holy Oracles, and reduce the sublimities of Scripture history to a collection of ancient tales of little further use than to entertain Sunday scholars. Let man be seen in the light in which the Scriptures always place him—as a creature of vanity (Psalm 39: 4-5; 144: 3-4): of the dust (Genesis 3: 19; 18: 27; Psalm 103: 14-16): as grass of the earth (Isaiah 40: 6-8, 15-17): of no consequence in his intrinsic nature (Daniel 4: 35; Ecclesiastes 3: 18; Psalm 49: 12-20)—let frail man be seen thus in his true light of smallness, and worthlessness, and ephemerality, and God in His true position of sole and sovereign power,

greatness, and immortality, and the Mosaic narrative springs into its place of stupendous truth and significance. Let man be recognised as the clay, and the operations of the Potter will be easily discerned. The Egyptians were “*but men*” (Psalm 9: 20), the property of God (Ezekiel 18: 4), in whose hand their breath was, and whose were all their ways (Daniel 5: 23). Like Belshazzar, they had not glorified Him: they knew Him not: they were sunk in ways and practices that were abominable to Him (Deuteronomy 18: 12). Therefore, as God says concerning the Sodomites,

“I took them away as I saw good” (Ezekiel 16: 50).

He did with them as with the entire race of man, except Noah’s family, before the flood: He drowned them. They were only fit for drowning, and He had the right to drown; and their drowning was made a means of furthering the great purpose of wisdom and goodness He had conceived concerning the earth. Where is the difficulty? There is none except such as is created by supposing a lie to be the truth. If we suppose man to be immortal, and the drowning of them in judgment to be a sending of them to Dante’s hell, then there is great difficulty. The difficulty has been felt by those who believe this to be the truth; and the effect is seen in the general tendency manifested in all educated circles to make out Moses to be a fabulist and the wonderful works of God in Egypt the legends of ancient superstition. Get rid of the lie, and the truth asserts its great and glorious place, and we are enabled to respond to David’s invitation to praise the Lord for the judgments He executed on Pharaoh and his host in the day He brought Israel out of Egypt. It also places us in the position of being able to look forward, with intelligent solicitude for the further exhibition of the visible hand of God, of which God Himself has spoken by the prophet Micah:

“According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their (Israel’s) might; they (the nations) shall lay their hand upon their mouth: their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent: they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth. They shall be afraid of the Lord our God and shall fear because of thee” (Micah 7: 15-17).

CHAPTER 15. —SUPPLIES IN THE WILDERNESS

The visible hand of God in the deliverance of Israel did not cease with the overthrow of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea. If it had, the work in hand would have been abortive. That work was not merely the exhibition of the existence and power of God in the eyes of all the earth, but the establishment of a nation for Himself, as the basis of His ultimate purpose with the earth and mankind. Had God ceased to show His hand, this work would not have been accomplished. It must have miserably failed. The delivered nation must have perished in the sterile country to which the march through the Red Sea had introduced it; or, failing that, the purpose must have been frustrated by the mutinous discontent of an assembly that disliked the new circumstances in which they were placed, and lacked sympathy with the object of those circumstances. More than once, they rose in rebellion, which nothing but the direct and destructive intervention of divine power prevented from being successful. More than once, they proposed a return to Egypt, which they would certainly have accomplished, if God Himself had not prevented it.

We have, therefore, to follow them from the shore of the Red Sea to Sinai, and from Sinai to the land of promise, and note the various further exhibitions of the visible hand of God, by which the inevitable failure of so weak a human instrumentality as Moses and the congregation of the Israelites was prevented, and Jehovah's name planted successfully in a national form on the mountains of the land of promise.

The very first case concerned the urgent question of supplies. Here was an enormous assembly of people. How was food to be forthcoming in a barren region like the eastern shore of the Red Sea? On this question alone the enterprise must quickly have collapsed in disaster, had nothing but natural resources been available. The difficulty began to press early. They had not been six weeks out of Egypt when the supplies brought from Egypt being exhausted, the whole congregation were threatened with famine. How Moses regarded this prospect we are not informed. He probably supposed that God would make a way for them out of the difficulty. At all events, the people were in no such mood of faith. They "*murmured against Moses and Aaron.*" They indulged in the most bitter and faithless recriminations.

“Ye have brought us into this wilderness,” said they, “to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” “Would God,” said they, “we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt.”

Nothing, perhaps, makes a man more impatient or unreasonable than hunger; and here was a vast multitude with empty stomachs calling to mind, with loud regrets, the fleshpots and the bread supplies of Egypt. It was a most trying situation for Moses—a situation full of threatening peril in every way. There was not natural relief within reach. The situation must have ended in disaster if God had not helped miraculously. What other help could have availed to avert famine from 600,000 men, besides women and children? The help came with effective preliminary. Yahweh having informed Moses of His purpose to supply the assembly with bread from heaven, Aaron, by the command of Moses, addressed himself to the assembly,

“Come near before Yahweh, for he hath heard your murmurings.”

Aaron’s summons might have had little effect upon a hunger-stricken, discontented mob; but at that moment the pillar of cloud, which at a distance accompanied them, blazed forth with the glory of God. Their attention thus riveted, a voice from the cloud addressed Moses,

“I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel. Speak unto them, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread, and ye shall know that I am Yahweh, your Elohim.”

Pacified with this message, reported to them, they awaited the arrival of evening, when the supply of flesh duly arrived, in the shape of a multitude of quails, which had been collected and drawn to the camp by a divine attraction, and deposited around about the camp within easy reach of the hungry multitude. For the bread they had to wait till the morning. When the morning came, the bread had come with the dew, but the people did not recognise it.

“When the dew was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness, there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoarfrost on the ground.”

The people saw the small round thing; but they did not suppose it was the promised bread.

“They wist not what it was” (Exodus 16: 15).

They asked, “What is it?” Moses informed them:

“This is the bread which Yahweh hath given you to eat . . . Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less.”

This was Israel’s first introduction to the manna, the solution of the famine danger, and the standing marvel of the nation’s history. It was a miracle—this supply of bread from heaven. It was a necessity. Nothing but a miracle could have saved the assembly from destruction by a famine in a barren district. If some in our day have a difficulty in realising the possibility of such a mode of supply, it is because they do not sufficiently realise the wonderful nature of ordinary food supply. What is there less wonderful in the growth of grain in the fields? In a very important sense, every sackful of grain that goes to be ground by the miller has come down from heaven. Where would the grain be if there were no sunlight, no showers, no fresh air? Or, suppose a farmer having sown his fields, were to cover the face of them with oilcloth, how many sacks of grain would he have to send to the miller at the end of the year? No! the stuff that goes to make his grain steals invisibly from the sky, day and night—he knows not how—and few men stop to think. All men are accustomed to it, and, therefore, it does not strike them as a wonderful thing. But it is a wonderful thing for all that—an annual miracle which men do not call a miracle because they are accustomed to it.

The circumstances of Israel did not admit of this mode of supply: and, therefore, another was resorted to, for the resources of divine wisdom and power are inexhaustible. The stuff to be eaten was supplied ready-made—manufactured in the air, and let fall on the ground. Could an inquisitive experimentalist have brought the process to the test of his tubes and retorts, and solutions, he would have found nothing different from other created modes and substances, except the proportions of the elementary chemicals, as the production of a special food required. God is as much the artificer in what is made by process of nature as in what is miraculously produced. The only difference is in the way the power is applied. In the natural sphere, things have been endowed with self-acting affinities, as the very existence of such a sphere requires; in the extra-natural, the same results are produced by the direct manipulation of created ingredients when circumstances call for

the exercise of such a power.

Israel grew accustomed to the manna, as men in general are accustomed to the wonderful ways of nature. The most wonderful miracle conceivable ceases to be a miracle in the common estimate, when it is continuous; to men of a wise heart (they are not as plentiful as mulberries), the ways of nature are always as wonderful as the most striking miracle. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the ways of nature and miracles: the ways of nature are phenomena resulting from established dynamical conditions, which are mechanically inter-active: miracles are the same results produced by the divine volition which originally established the ways of nature. There are times for the exercise of this volition, and there are times for the operation of natural conditions. We are not at present contemporary with the former; because we are contemporary with the latter, fools imagine there are no other than natural operations. This folly will shortly be blown off the face of the earth by the coming breeze of divine work resumed. The advent of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the overthrow of armies, will show men everywhere that the God of Israel is a living and a true God, the maker and possessor of heaven and earth.

In their anxiety to get God out of the Mosaic narrative, some have tried to explain the manna by some kind of farinaceous stuff occasionally to be found blowing about in the wind in eastern climes. The best answer to these fabulating critics is to ask them if they would be willing to try the experiment of subsisting on such stuff. Let them allow themselves—a very small party, a dozen, say—to be turned adrift in the Sinaitic Desert, without food, and forbidden to resort to any ordinary supplies for six months; and if, at the end of the time, their bones are not bleaching in the sun, they will at least be able to form a good idea of the likelihood of a million people being able to make shift in such circumstances.

No, no! natural supply is entirely out of the question. If it were not excluded by the results of practical test (to which our fabulist critics would not be willing to submit), it is utterly disproved by one or two things plainly appearing in connection with the supply of the manna. First, a double supply fell every sixth day, and none at all every seventh day; so that Israel might be enabled to keep the Sabbath law, which prohibited all manner of work on the

seventh day (Exodus 16: 29). On the sixth day, every man gathered the bread of two days, and on the seventh day none was to be found (Exodus 16: 5-27). If it was a natural supply how came it to be so very discriminating as to perform those two remarkable feats of intelligence—come in double quantity of Saturday, and stay away altogether on Sunday—to use modern phrase? Secondly, on ordinary days, the manna was to be consumed on the day it was gathered; if it was kept over to the second day, “*it bred worms*” (Exodus 16: 19-20); but when kept over from Saturday to Sunday, “*It did not stink, neither was there any worm therein*” (Exodus 16: 24). Thirdly, all the while Israel were in the wilderness, even forty years, the supply of manna continued regularly, but as soon as they entered the land of Canaan, and came within reach of natural food, the manna ceased (Exodus 16: 35; also Joshua 5: 12). If the supply was natural, how came the manna to possess such extraordinary sagacity as to keep good on Sundays but spoil on other days? How came it to keep on coming down for forty years, so long as it was wanted, and then stop?

And then our friends turn stupid. They profess to have just grounds for being sceptical as to these details. They say, “How do we know that such things happened?” O, foolish people, how inconsistent you are! You admit the manna on the authority of Moses, but deny the details which stand on the same authority. You had better throw the manna overboard altogether. It will be less trouble. Give the lie to Moses flat on all points: deny the exodus: deny the deliverance of Israel: yea, deny Israel’s part in the history of the world altogether: and say the scattered Jews are Calumchs, or improved Esquimaux. This would be a dignified attitude compared with the contemptible charlatanry, which, under the pretence of superior discrimination, picks out just what it chooses to believe, and rejects everything that won’t fit in with its theory, though standing on precisely the same authority.

“How do we know?” Ah, there is a very full answer, though this class of critic is impervious to it. We know it in too many ways to be said in a breath. Settle the case of Christ, and you settle all, even if the rest seemed a little unsettleable on its own ground, which it is not. Christ tells us of the manna, and of Moses, and of the wilderness, and of the Scriptures (John 6: 32, 49; 5: 47; 10: 35). If Christ rose from the dead, here is a settler to all your

cavils, even if they could not otherwise be disposed of. And that Christ rose from the dead, is a matter proved by the evidence, to such as can estimate the force of evidence. Consequently, the manna is proved, and all connected with it; and Israel's otherwise inexplicable subsistence in a barren wilderness accounted for.

This manna was *“like coriander seed, white: and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”* It was cooked in various ways (Exodus 16: 31; Numbers 11: 8). The taste of it was like the taste of fresh oil. The people tired of it, which was natural. They said,

“Our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes.”

Their discontent was so strong that—

“The people wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?”

“Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased” (Numbers 11: 4, 10).

There is something about this that yields one or two considerable reflections. There is a self-manifest truth about it; for had invention been at work in accounting for Israel's subsistence in a barren land, invention would have done the right and creditable thing, while about it, and would have given us a picture of God, in His partiality for Israel, supplying in lavish abundance, every good thing, by stupendous miracle, from day to day—roast viands of all sorts, fruits, and confections, and every desirable dainty, consumed in a chorus of thankful praise. Whereas here is the meagrest fare compatible with life, and a chronic discontent in the whole assembly. What is the meaning of it? The first meaning is, it happened; for nothing but its happening could account for such a narrative. Its second meaning we get in answer to the question, “Why did God, who could have fed them much otherwise, put His people upon such prison rations?” Moses answers this question in his rehearsal at the close of the forty years:

*“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness . . . He **humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger**, and fed thee with manna which thou*

knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Yahweh” (Deuteronomy 8: 2-3).

A spiritual result was aimed at in this ascetic rigour. Israel was made to know experimentally that men have not been brought into existence merely to indulge their appetites; that these appetites are but means; that they are only in their place when they are ministrant to the ultimate end of being: that this ultimate end is to serve the Lord with gladness in the worship of His greatness, and in the exercise of mercy and truth to fellow-man. In this employment of created life, God, the Creator, receives pleasure, and man, benefit. The taste for such an employment of life is liable to be blunted, and finally destroyed, in the possession of abundance. Israel, luxuriating in plenty, would never have learnt the lesson which prepared their second generation for entering the land of promise as an accepted worshipping nation. In poor, but sufficient living, they came to perceive that not bread alone, but the words and worshipping of Jehovah were a staple in truly civilised life; that bread alone made a man a barbarian, and left him without hope for the beyond; while the words of Jehovah, added to scanty fare, added nobility to his humility, and super-added the hope of that higher life from which Adam was excluded in Eden; after which, there is a lingering aspiration in every normally-constituted human breast; but of which nature “*bread alone*” contains no promise; and which is only to be obtained by the word of Jehovah known, received, rejoiced in, and obeyed.

These principles have a present application. They were intended for such—as Jesus makes manifest in his quotation of these very words, in answer to the suggestion of his tempter that he should eat when it was wrong for him to eat. They furnish a general key to the, at first sight, inscrutable fact that Christ calls his brethren from among the poor and not the rich, and subjects them to suffering in their present experience, instead of according them the gratifications of prosperity. They are a valuable aid to us in our endeavours to obey his command to “*Labour not to be rich,*” and (if God commit riches to our trust) that we “*make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;*” by using it liberally in the divine service (the dissemination of the truth and the help of the poor) as “*good stewards of the*

manifold grace of God,” instead of following the example of the world around who hoard everything away in faithless store for themselves or their families.

The manna supplied one need, but there was another. When the congregation, journeying from the Wilderness of Sin, pitched in Rephidim, *“there was no water for the people to drink”* (Exodus 17: 1). Here was a new difficulty. The people, not yet tamed by the discipline which afterwards subdued them, became unmanageable on the subject. They gathered round Moses and upbraided him:

“Wherefore is this, that thou hast brought us forth out of Egypt to kill us, and our children, and our cattle, with thirst?”

Moses reasonably appealed to them, *“Why chide ye with me?”* It was not he who had brought them into that predicament, except as an obedient instrument. As he said on the subject of their discontents about food:

“What are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the Lord!” (Exodus 16: 8).

But a headstrong people, goaded by want, are impervious to the appeals of reason. Moses did not know what to do in the midst of their turbulence, and in the face of their manifest need of water.

He *“cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.”*

And if Moses had had no other than his own resources, he never could have got out of the difficulty. How can mortal man provide water in an arid wilderness? And how can leadership be maintained in the absence of the commonest wants of nature? As already remarked, the whole affair must have ended in blank disaster if it had been a human enterprise. But it was not a human, but a divine enterprise.

“The Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock of Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

This marvel was repeated further on in another place, with evil results to Moses.

CHAPTER 16. —AT MOUNT SINAI

The most wonderful of all the marvels that have marked the history of Israel —(and no other nation upon earth)—was the delivery of an address by Yahweh Elohim from the summit of Mount Sinai to the assembled nation in the plain below. There never was such an event in the history of the race of Adam. Moses emphasises the greatness of the occasion in referring to it after forty years' interval:

“Ask now of the days that are past,” said he, addressing Israel on the plains of Moab after their forty years' wandering—*“the days which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one side of heaven to the other—whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? **DID EVER PEOPLE HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD SPEAKING OUT OF THE MIDST OF FIRE, AS THOU HAST HEARD, AND LIVE?**”* (Deuteronomy 4: 32).

That this was no figure of speech, but the plain description of a literal event, is made certain by the particulars that are recorded concerning the event.

It happened in what we may almost call natural order. It will be recollected that it was at Mount Horeb that Moses received his original commission. It was there that the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush unconsumed, and, in the communication that passed at that time, Moses was informed that, in token of the verity of his mission, when he should have brought forth the people out of Egypt, they would serve God on that mountain (Exodus 3: 12). The work of deliverance had now been accomplished. The nation had crossed the opened Red Sea; had had their wants provided for in a way suitable to their wilderness life; they were on the march, and were now approaching the rugged district where Sinai sternly reared its head at an altitude of 9,000 feet. In the third month after leaving Egypt, they *“departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai and had pitched in the wilderness: and there **Israel camped before the mount**”* (Exodus 19: 2). So far, Moses had executed the work entrusted to him. He had been sent from Sinai to bring Israel to God, and he had done so. Here he was at the place from which he had been sent; and Israel with him,

encamped in their thousands at the base of the mount. What more natural than that Moses should ascend?

“Moses went up unto God and Yahweh called unto him out of the mountain.”

The words spoken to him were words of message unto Israel.

“Say to the house of Jacob . . . Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings and brought you unto myself.”

This was a matter of fact most natural to be brought into the foreground on the occasion of the arrival at Sinai. Here was the nation, brought by a series of extraordinary interpositions of divine power from Egypt, and set down at the base of Sinai in the divine presence. Yahweh challenges their attention to the fact, with a view to the proposition to be submitted to them. What was the aim, as regarded Israel, of this whole extraordinary episode of the Egyptian deliverance?

“Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice, indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine (as much as to say, ‘It pertains to Me to do as I will’), and ye shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”

Moses, descending, called the elders together, and submitted this brief but pregnant message to them.

“And all the people answered together, all that the Lord hath spoken we will do.”

Moses, having received the answer of the people, re-ascends the mountain, and reports it to Yahweh.

The basis of the first covenant having thus been laid, Yahweh intimates to Moses His purpose to speak in the hearing of all the people. This wonder of wonders was not to be performed merely as a prodigy, or to gratify the curiosity of the people; it was to be done with a very distinct object in view; it was to place the divine authority of Moses beyond all cavil or doubt.

“Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, AND BELIEVE THEE FOR EVER” (Exodus 19: 9).

Apart from the display which was about to be made in the presence of the

whole nation, it might have been whispered, by the seditious in the camp, that the messages Moses brought from the summit of Sinai were pretended messages; that he saw nothing, and heard nothing, when he went up, but concocted the messages himself, and went to the top of the mount merely to give colour of divine authority to what he had to say. Such a view, once whispered, would be quickly caught up, and sent round, and loom large in the eyes of subsequent generations of unbelievers as such things generally do, with the result of destroying the authority of Moses for ever. Any spiritual rot like this was effectually prevented by what was about to be done. The worst that could happen afterwards (and that did happen) was disobedience to the Law of Moses: the cry could not be, and was never raised that God had not spoken by Moses. Israel in all their generations have been of the mind expressed by the Pharisees when disparaging the claims of Jesus:

“We know that God spake unto Moses” (John 9: 29).

It will not appear marvellous that such profound and ineradicable conviction should have been produced in the heart of Israel when we consider the means adopted to produce it.

Yahweh appointed a day for the wonderful exhibition.

*“Be ready against the third day, for the third day **Yahweh will come down IN THE SIGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLE UPON MOUNT SINAI.**”*

The people having prepared themselves in the way prescribed, the third day arrived; and early in the day, there were portentous preliminaries to the sublime event.

*“In the morning there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the Mount and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that **all the people that was in the camp trembled.**”*

The people had been apprised beforehand of the purport of this manifestation, so that, though deeply overawed by the strange convulsion, they submitted themselves to the hands of Moses.

“Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God: and they stood at the nether part of the Mount.”

As they stood there, the scene grew more vivid and impressive.

“Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke.”

The moment of supreme expectation arrived:

“Yahweh descended upon the mount in fire, and the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mount quaked greatly. And the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder.”

The first symptom of divine intelligence in the heart of this tumult of the elements was the summons to Moses (addressed to him in the hearing of all Israel) to come up. And Moses went up.

“And Yahweh said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through to gaze, and many of them perish.”

Moses also received instructions to the priests, and then went down and awaited with the people the stupendous occurrence of a speech from God. They had not long to wait. From the midst of the cloud, and the smoke, and the flame (in a momentary pause of the attendant thunder-peals and trumpet sound, as we must suppose), there came the clear pealing tones of the divine voice, reaching to the utmost part of the vast concourse of people, and making the solitudes of Sinai ring:

“I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water that is under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them: for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments,”
and so on, to the end of the ten commandments.

When the voice ceased, the thunderings, lightnings, and trumpet sound resumed, and the people gave way to the fear with which they were inspired at the very commencement of the dread proceedings.

“They removed and stood afar off.”

They said to Moses,

“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us lest we die.”

Moses tried to rally them. He said,

“Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”

But the people could not be tranquillised.

“The people stood afar off.”

Moses did not stand far off with them, but “*drew near unto the thick darkness where God was*” (Exodus 20: 21). Then Yahweh addressed Himself to Moses:

*“Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, **Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.** Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold,”* etc.

After this, it was natural that Israel should receive implicitly all that Moses had to say to them in the name of God. It is inconceivable that it could have been otherwise. They had had overpowering demonstration of Yahweh’s reality, and of His selection of Moses as His servant in all things. It is impossible to conceive a demonstration more complete. The things they had seen and heard were all beyond the power of man. Who can envelop a mountain with cloud and fire? Who can set the thunders loose? Who can make Sinai shake to its base? And who can speak from half the height of the Alps and be heard? These things had been done in their presence, and had filled them with fear. Even Moses shared their trepidation (Hebrews 12: 21). The stoutest heart might well quail at such a terrible manifestation of the presence of God. It was terrifying, but necessary. It made the people see, as they could not otherwise have been made to see, that the work of Moses was not “*of his own mind*” as he said (Numbers 16: 28), but was the work of the Maker and Possessor of heaven and earth working through him. It did its work effectually; it established a law which has never been altered by man from that day to this. It established the authority of Moses over Israel for ever, as was intended (Exodus 19: 9).

It was all in the nature of “miracle”; nothing else could have served the purpose; how were the people otherwise to become persuaded that the law delivered to them by Moses was of divine authority? But in saying it was a “miracle,” are we to understand the magical unreality suggested to the popular mind by the word? Far otherwise. It was all reality. The fire, and the smoke, and the thunder were as real as any ever seen or heard by mortal sense; so with the earthquake and the sound of the trumpet. There was nothing unusual in them, and the difference between them and ordinary

phenomena of sight and sound lay merely in the specialty of causation. They were the same in essence, but not produced as ordinary phenomena are—by the mechanical interaction of the established affinities of nature: they were directly produced by the power evolving all nature at the beginning. God was present by the angels of His power (Acts 7: 38; Hebrews 2: 2): by His will angelically exerted, which is the ultimate explanation of everything, the mountain shook, became enveloped in flame, and hid in dense masses of cloud and smoke. By the same power, the trumpet voice sounded long and loud, and the ten commandments were pronounced. This power, the will-power of essential Deity, is the potent cause of all things. Morally expressed, it is what the Father wishes men voluntarily to do: but, physically exerted, it is a force irresistible, either for creating or destroying. We are apt to think of it in the former, or passive, sense. When we realise it in the latter, the idea of difficulty vanishes, and we utter a fervent amen to the saying of Christ,

“With God nothing is impossible.”

The exhibition of the divine presence on Sinai, in the sight and hearing of assembled Israel, stopped short of the actual vision of the divine person at work. The people saw the tokens and heard the voice of personal presence, but they saw not the speaker, as Moses was careful afterwards to remind them:

“Ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice” (Deuteronomy 4: 12).

But what the congregation at large were not permitted to see, a select number of the heads of the people afterwards did with their eyes actually behold by special privilege, on the occasion of the ratification in blood of the covenant made between God and the people. On that occasion,

*“Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, went up, and **they saw the God of Israel**, and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness”* (Exodus 24: 9-10).

This was a distant vision so far as concerned the seventy elders. This appears from the direction to Moses just before the vision was granted.

*“Come up unto Yahweh, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and **worship ye afar off**. MOSES ALONE SHALL COME NEAR YAHWEH: but **they shall not***

come nigh” (Exodus 24: 1-2).

This “*seeing of the God of Israel*” would, therefore, not be of that close and intimate character vouchsafed to Moses himself on a still later occasion. It would be a general and distant view, in which the divine person would appear more as a nucleus of the glory seen than as a distinctly discernible figure.

“*The sight of the glory of the Lord,*” we are informed, “*was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.*”

We are further informed that—

“*Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount.*”

The reason of his so doing is to be found in the following words addressed to him by Yahweh:

“*Come up to me unto the mount and be there, and I will give thee tables of stone and a law and commandments which I have written: that thou mayest teach them* (Exodus 24: 12).

Ascending into the mount in compliance with this command, Moses remained in the mount “*forty days and forty nights*” (Exodus 24: 18), during which “*he did neither eat bread nor drink water*” (Exodus 34: 28; Deuteronomy 9: 9).

This is one of those statements which the temper of the present age considers it weak to believe. In so far as the temper of the present age is a temper leading to the careful discrimination of truth from fable and tradition, the said temper is to be respected; but when it goes beyond this discrimination, and sets itself solidly against manifest truth in one department because it has discovered some modicum of possible truth in another, then it is not to be respected, but set aside with decisive resolution. The truth of Moses stands on strong foundations that cannot be overturned; and we are not to disregard those foundations because we are presented with something in his case that is out of the way of our experience. It is true that we cannot live forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. Not even Dr. Tanner did this: he drank water regularly and copiously, and was barely in life at the end of the period with even this material help. But why are we to say that, because poor mortals of the 19th century cannot subsist without being nourished with food and water, therefore Moses could

not, who was nourished another way? Why are we to say that there is no other way of keeping the nerves supplied with the energy of life except by the digestive apparatus? What is food at the foundation but invisible energy made concrete by power and wisdom? Shall we say that God could not supply this invisible energy direct, but must first put it into the form of food before it can be utilised in the upholding of the animal economy? Shall we say that God who made the human machine from the foundation, can only work it in one particular way? The questions suggest the absurdity of the position so congenial to the “temper of the present age.” The sole question is, whether God had to do with the matters we are considering. If He had (and there are no two sides in reality to the question—for two sides means two ways of looking at a subject, equally reasonable, equally probable, equally uncertain, and there are no two such ways in the case of the Mosaic transactions; they are intelligible in only one way of looking at them, and that is, in recognising God’s participation in them as recorded). If God had to do with them, then there is no difficulty at all about a forty days’ fast. The supply of food would have been inconvenient on the summit of Sinai for so long a time; and the power of God was there to dispense with it, by providing the life supply another way than by eating. If our strength were kept up from any source, we should not require food. A babe’s existence before birth is an illustration. The strength of Moses was kept up from the source of all strength; and it was, therefore, in reality, not a marvel that he was able to do without food for forty days, and that he was none the worse at the end of the period.

Another preternatural circumstance was visible at the end of a second forty days similarly occupied a little later on. When Moses came down from Sinai with the two tables of testimony in his hand, Aaron and all the children of Israel “*saw that the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him*” (Exodus 34: 29-30).

“And Moses called unto them: and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterwards all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face” (Exodus 34: 31-33).

There is an allegory in this circumstance, as Paul gives us to understand (as

in all other circumstances and institutions of the Mosaic law). But we are not concerned on the present occasion to look at the allegorical significance. (Some day we may devote some chapters to this department of the subject.) We look at it as a literal circumstance, which it was in the first case; and we say there is nothing very marvellous, if there be something which people call “miraculous” about this shining of the face of Moses. Any man steeped (and sustained without food) in the effulgence of the divine glory for a period of forty days, would be likely to retain, in his physical fibre, somewhat of the lustre of that state. It is according to the nature of things. All creatures assimilate to the colour and conditions of their surroundings. Even the tree insect takes the colour of the leaf on which it feeds. All creation is the incorporation of the divine power and wisdom. This power is a reality: it is physical though invisible: it is the first form of every substance; the only real ultimate substance, for it is eternal, and all things are “*out of*” it. Is it a marvel then that Moses, basking in the full flood of the divine luminosity for six weeks, should have his skin impregnated with glory? It would have been a marvel if he could have escaped such a result. It is a circumstance both according to the fitness of things and illustrative of the nature and reality of the divine power and ways. Orthodox theology has deranged many things and erected gratuitous barriers in the way of the reception of the Scriptures.

To Moses, was granted a closer intimacy and a plainer vision of God than to the “*seventy nobles of the house of Israel who saw God, and did eat and drink*” (Exodus 24: 11). It was granted at his urgent request. Moses said, “*I pray thee if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way that I may know thee . . . I beseech thee, **show me thy glory.***”

God answered,

“*Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live. It shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen*” (Exodus 33: 20-23).

On the day appointed,

“*The Lord descended in a cloud, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord . . . and Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped.*”

There is a grandeur in these circumstances that is not approached by anything recorded in the whole course of human history, except the ascension to the Father of the prophet like unto Moses. The difficulty the mind conceives in the idea of the Eternal Father having thus been seen on the summit of Sinai, disappears in view of the plain intimation we have that it was the Father in angelic manifestation that Moses saw (Acts 7: 38; Hebrews 2: 2). If this appears to create another difficulty, that the personage seen by Moses speaks with the absolute prerogative of the Eternal, and refers to the angels as His instruments (Exodus 23: 20), we must remember that there are grades among the angels, as appears from Gabriel's allusion (Daniel 10: 21; Luke 1: 19), and as illustrated by the superiority of one of the three who visited Abraham, over the other two (compare Genesis 18: 1-2, and 19: 1). There being grades, if one is selected in particular to be the mouth-piece and representative of the Omnipresent Father, and constituted as such, not by oral instruction—as man delegates man—but by impulse and inflation of the Universal Father-spirit, then such selected name-bearer of Yahweh is practically Yahweh to all with whom he may have to do, and other angels are as subject to him as to the Father. This is illustrated in the case of Jesus, to whom "*angels and principalities, and powers are made subject.*"

These ocular manifestations of Yahweh were of frequent occurrence in the process of the establishment of the first covenant. They distinguished the case of the work of Moses from all that came after in the history of Israel under the law. Yahweh himself thus distinguishes the case of Moses from that of all other even contemporary prophets:

"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. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. WITH HIM WILL I SPEAK MOUTH TO MOUTH, EVEN APPARENTLY, AND NOT IN DARK SPEECHES, AND THE SIMILITUDE OF THE LORD SHALL HE BEHOLD" (Numbers 12: 6-8).

The record of the death of Moses also informs us that—

"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34: 10).

In this he pre-figured, "*the prophet like unto Moses*" who, alone of all the household of God, has approached the presence of the Creator in the

capacity of a high priest over that house.

In its literal aspect, the exhibitions of Deity to Moses must strike reason as an appropriate and a necessary thing. It left no element wanting in the evidence of the divinity of the work he was called upon to do. When a man had received audible instructions from the midst of a burning bush unconsumed, and had seen performed by his unconscious hand in the Name of his Interlocutor, a variety of works of power impossible to ordinary nature, and had heard the voice of God on various occasions from the accompanying cloud and otherwise, and had seen all His words verified in actual occurrences, what remained to complete the chain of self-evidence but the sight of the wonderful Being that had accompanied and worked with them in so wonderful a manner for so long a time? It was natural that Moses should desire to see His glory. This remaining link in the chain of connection was supplied, and thus the whole work of Moses was established upon a rock of fact, from which it was impossible anything could afterwards remove it. We live in an interregnum (but a fast-closing interregnum) of that work, and when it is resumed—when the song of Moses and the Lamb fills the heart of Israel with gladness—it will be as real a work to the eye, ear, heart, and sense as was every part of the wonderful work of bringing Israel out of the land of Egypt, 3,300 years ago. The word, and work, and person of Christ will no longer be what it is in the ears of this generation—an idle tale, but the stirring and awe-inspiring, and world-affecting fact of the hour.

CHAPTER 17—THE LAW OF MOSES, THE TABERNACLE, AND THE MUTINY OF THE CONGREGATION

Moses was with the Israelitish host for forty years subsequent to the manifestation of the glory of Yahweh on the summit of Sinai in the presence of their assembled multitude. During those forty years, there were frequent occasions for the further exhibition of the visible hand of God—occasions calling for and requiring that further exhibition, without which, notwithstanding the stupendous display of power in Egypt and at Sinai, the purpose of God in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt must needs have fallen short of realisation. At the principal of these cases we will look, with a view to the discernment of their bearing and their significance even to this late generation when God is once more about to interpose for the salvation of His people, and the glory of His great Name.

First, and obviously, there was the communication of the law. The visible and audible demonstration on the summit of Sinai, already referred to, was only preliminary to this. The ten commandments orally addressed to Israel were not the law in its entirety, but the foundation merely, recited in the hearing of Israel that they might believe Moses in all the further communications to be made. After the ten commandments, came “*all the commandments and the statutes, and the judgments*” which Moses was commanded to teach all Israel,

“*That they might do them in the land which I give them to possess it*” (Deuteronomy 5: 31).

These are numerous and diverse; all put together, they constitute, with the ten commandments, “*the law of Moses,*” called by his name merely because he was the mouth-piece, and not at all because it was of his own devising. Moses never claimed and never received the credit of this law in Israel. It is only in these later hazy-minded generations that the enormous mistake is made of attributing to a man, who repudiates its authorship, a legislative code which a man could not have devised, and which is of manifestly divine production—manifest to the generations which witnessed its production, and manifest even in our day to any ordinary intelligence that will take the pains to look at it and candidly estimate all the facts of the case.

Certain general features strike at a glance, features extraordinary, and not intelligible except on the recognition of the divine authorship. Here is a code of laws complete at the start of a nation's history—adapted to every national emergency, and providing for every need of individual and social life. How much in contrast is this with the case of other nations who have either no laws at all at their beginning, or only a few rude traditions which slowly crystallise into recognised laws, and even then, which have to be modified or changed, or added to or taken from, or repealed altogether, as circumstances change from year to year. Look at the British nation standing foremost (as is supposed) among all nations past and present, in political development; every year in every century, the wisest heads it can collect are brought to Westminster to labour for seven months out of every twelve, and sometimes longer, in the endless work of legislative cobbling. Then, this law of Moses has not been changed since the day it was handed by Moses to the priests of Israel for deposit in the Ark of the Covenant, to the present day of Israel's world-wide dispersion. It remains unalterable. It is part of the law itself that it is not to be interfered with in any way.

“Thou shalt not add thereto or diminish aught therefrom” (Deuteronomy 4: 2).

Such a fact and such a command are alike inconceivable on the supposition of a human authorship. Had Moses wished such a thing, there could have been no aim in enjoining it: for if Moses was such a wonderfully-gifted man as to have contrived this law by his own sagacity, he would also have been sagacious enough to know that his human prescience was unequal to the anticipation of all the future wants of Israel, and humane enough to recognise that he would be doing an unwise thing to tie the hands of coming generations, and prevent them from legislating for their own needs. But God, being the author of the law, none of these difficulties arise. And then the wonderful nature of the law is conclusive evidence of its miraculous origin. When the Psalmist exclaimed,

“Oh how love I Thy law; it is my meditation all the day;”

He did not give utterance to a merely “pious” platitude: he expressed a feeling which has its foundations in deepest reason. It is some time before the mind arrives at an estimate of the excellence of the law of Moses. We cannot judge, in the first stage, of the needs of man, in his social relations, for lack of that discernment of what those needs are, which can only come

with actual experience of the workings of things. After a while, we begin to see. Thomas Carlyle's works illustrate the impression made upon a penetrating mind of the first-class by the system of law in vogue among the nations of the current century. This impression is, without doubt, a correct one, though valueless in the absence of a remedy, which Thomas Carlyle confessed himself unable to apply, or even to suggest. When one has lived long enough, and had opportunity sufficient to see as he saw, one is then prepared to estimate the superlative and the unutterable excellence of the law of Moses, which, while tempering justice with mercy, prudence with liberality, and human occupation with the constant recognition of God, also provided the nation with institutions, which made poverty an impossibility (by ensuring the distribution of wealth among all classes), and which secured the purity and joy of public and private life, by imposing the obligation of periodic seasons of travel and feasting, in connection with the most ennobling of national duties, and the glorification of the most magnificent ideals. It would be a grateful and profitable occupation to analyse some day, in chapters like these, the law of Moses in its practical details, with a view of exhibiting its excellence in these particulars. Some day, should the Lord's continuing absence allow it, this may be done. Meanwhile, for present purposes, it is sufficient thus to allude to the manifest divinity of the only national law that ever came direct from God to man, and whose communication is the most signal feature of the many miraculous occurrences characterising the beginning of Israel's history in the earth.

The deliverance of the law, —statute by statute, precept by precept, commandment by commandment—took place by oral communication from Yahweh to Moses, face to face on Sinai's summit and in the seclusion of the sanctuary afterwards reared in the midst of the assembly. Moses wrote the law so communicated to him (Deuteronomy 31: 9). He did so by divine command (Exodus 34: 27; Numbers 33: 2); and it remains to this day unaltered as delivered—the most obvious and palpable form of the visible hand of God discernible in the whole range of human history. The Law of Moses as it exists in our Bibles today, is, when rightly discerned, the visible hand of God itself. There could not have been such a thing if God had not wrought and spoken as recorded. If there were nothing else in the world, we should have an undeniable monument of God's interposition in the affairs of men. It is its own witness. Well might Jesus say,

“If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

The men who speak of invention, or fabrication, or forgery, or imposition, or even of increment of ages, by accumulation of human traditions as accounting for the existence of the Law of Moses, speak in ignorance either of the Law of Moses, or of the habits and peculiarities of human faculty. They probably suffer, in addition, from incapacity to judge of either.

Passing from the law as a whole, we look at some details in which the hand of God was directly visible. Moses was directed to make a portable Tabernacle (capable of being taken to pieces) of gold-covered boards of shittim wood, standing on end and covered in with curtains and coverings. It was to be about 50 feet by 14 feet, and standing about 15 feet high—in round numbers. The interior was to be partitioned off at one end with a veil within which was to be placed an ark containing the law, and covered with gold and surmounted by a mercy-seat, having a cherubic figure with face inwards at either end. It is the use to which the ark and the mercy-seat were to be put (placed thus in a curtained interior) that calls for attention—not as to its spiritual significance (which is profound, but belonging to another branch of enquiry), but as to the literal manifestation of the divine presence of which it was the vehicle. This is the matter being considered in these chapters—the literal, actual, visible, “miraculous” exhibition of the visible hand of God: the allegorical significance of the tabernacle and its appurtenances may engage our attention another time. The manifestation of the divine presence is to be noted, both in connection with the tabernacle as a whole, and in connection with the mercy-seat as the kernel of the whole arrangement. The former manifestations have to do with the whole assembly of Israel, and the latter with Moses, in that face-to-face intercourse which he alone was privileged to hold with the Deity.

Taking the latter first, Moses when being directed as to the making of the mercy-seat, received this information concerning its practical utility:

“There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (Exodus 25: 22).

This meeting and communing was of a very real sort. It was not a mere

musings on the part of Moses, such as is popularly understood to constitute the act of communion. It was as real an intercourse as takes place between two men who meet in the same room. The form of the intercourse is thus plainly described:

“When Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then HE HEARD THE VOICE OF ONE SPEAKING UNTO HIM FROM OFF THE MERCY-SEAT, that was upon the ark of the testimony from between the two cherubims” (Numbers 7: 89).

In connection with the tabernacle as a whole, the intercourse with Moses took place in a form that was visible to the whole congregation. It is thus described:

*“When Moses went out unto the tabernacle, all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass as Moses entered into the tabernacle, **the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle**, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose up and worshipped every man in his tent door, and the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend”*
(Exodus 33: 8-11).

The visible intercourse through the medium of the tabernacle, played an important part at several vital turning points of the journey in the wilderness—so important as to have turned the scale against rebellion, which must otherwise have been successful. Take the effect produced by the report of the spies on their return from viewing the land at the beginning of the forty years (Numbers 14). The spies reported the land good, but impregnable on account of the prowess of the inhabitants and the strength of their fortifications.

“And all the people lifted up their voice and cried: and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! . . . And

they said to one another, Let us make a captain, and let us return unto Egypt.”

Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves helplessly in the presence of the tumult. Joshua and Caleb—the minority of the twelve spies who were in favour of an immediate advance into the land on the strength of Yahweh’s promise—expostulated with the people. It was no use. The people were deaf to reason. They proposed to stone Joshua and Caleb, and were about to put their threat into execution when—

“THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED IN THE TABERNACLE OF THE CONGREGATION, before all the people of Israel.”

The brightness thus blazing forth upon them arrested their madness, and Yahweh angrily addressed Moses thus:

“How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe Me for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.”

Moses entreated Yahweh to turn from this purpose on account of the reproach which would arise against His name if Israel failed to enter the land. Yahweh listened to Moses so far as concerned the bulk of the congregation; but the spies who had disaffected the minds of the people were struck dead on the spot; Joshua and Caleb alone surviving of the twelve (Numbers 14: 37-38). Even the whole congregation, though they escaped the summary vengeance they so richly merited, were not allowed to escape the consequences of their rebellion. The sentence against them was that—

“All those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness,” and yet “have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice,” “in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die” (Numbers 14: 23-35).

They were directly addressed thus:

“As ye have spoken in Mine ears (they had expressed a wish they had died in the wilderness, rather than have been called upon to invade the land of the Amorites), so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness . . . from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land concerning which I sware to make

you dwell therein . . . but your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised . . . your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the Wilderness.”

Supposing Moses and Aaron had not been thus supported against the mutiny of an unreasonable and discontented multitude, what could they have done? Must they not have succumbed? Must not the rebels have had their way, and relieved themselves of their unwelcome leaders by the easy process of stoning them? Must they not have succeeded, under other leadership, in getting back, as they proposed, by the nearest road, to the country of the Pharaohs, where they had all been born and bred—the desirable land of fish, leeks, melons, and garlic—where they felt more at home, even in the capacity of serfs, than in a strange land, in the quixotic enterprise of attempting the subjugation of seven well-armed and war-like nations by means of an untrained rabble? These questions touch the most miraculous part of the whole work of Israel’s transference from Egypt to the Holy Land. Bringing them out of Egypt was a stupendous feat of power, but to manage a restless and untrained multitude, under the irksome circumstances of wilderness life, was the most difficult part of the enterprise, especially when the prospect of entering the land was entirely withdrawn from them. That it was accomplished—that Israel, after forty years’ wanderings, emerged from the seclusion of the desert as a military nation, under Joshua—is the strongest proof there could be of the presence of a divine repressive control in their midst, keeping them down by strong acts of discipline, such as took place in connection with the report of the spies.

No more signal instance of the visible hand of God can be quoted than this sentence of a whole generation to death in the Wilderness within a period of forty years. The sentence was not only passed, but carried out. When the multitude was renumbered, at the end of the forty years, just before their entrance into the land, it was found that not a single man who had taken part in the rebellion, over twenty, was among the survivors. We read (Numbers 26: 63-64) that they were numbered by Moses, and Eleazar the priest (Aaron having died) in the plains of Moab, by Jordan, near Jericho; and—

“Among them, there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel, in the wilderness of Sinai.”

Moses, referring to this in his rehearsal on the plains of Moab, said that they had wandered in the wilderness—

“Until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord sware unto them: for indeed **the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed**”

(Deuteronomy 2: 14-15).

There must have been a divine interposition to have entirely extirpated within 40 years a generation of men of whom many thousands must have been just over twenty at the commencement of that period. The natural chances would certainly have preserved some of them to an age beyond 60. The whole episode is self-manifestly divine. It is impossible to get away from the evidence of it: for if the objecting reader were even to fall back on the fond thought of unbelief, that the Mosaic account is mythical, he is confronted with the impossibility in that case of giving a reasonable account of the object in writing such a purposeless and nationally-insulting narrative, and of the fact that such a damaging history should have been preserved for ages by the very people on whom it throws so little credit.

The Tabernacle, as a medium of visible intercourse, comes prominently into view, also, in the case of Aaron’s and Miriam’s mutiny against Moses. That there should have been such a mutiny may appear strange; on second thought, it will appear perfectly natural, in view of the grounds of it. They said:

“Hath Yahweh, indeed, spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?”

(Numbers 12: 2).

This is human nature to the life. Aaron and Miriam had become familiar with the occurrence of divine communication, and with divine works and wonders; they even stood within the elect and privileged circle that stood officially related to these wondrous events. Familiarity had blunted perception of the true relation of things, and feeling came into play. They did not receive the amount of personal respect and consideration shown to Moses. For this reason they were hurt, and began to argue for an equality

that, in the nature of things could not exist. Moses had not aimed at personal elevation; he had aimed strenuously at the accomplishment of the objects associated with the divine work in their midst. The deference shown to him sprang out of this earnest, faithful, self-abnegatory attitude, and the deference was a thing he did not value. Aaron and Miriam were not so earnestly bent on divine objects, and, consequently, could not command the deference which disinterestedness alone calls forth. They were more susceptible than Moses to considerations of personal importance, as the natural result of being less in love with wisdom, and its work and aims; consequently, the overshadowing influence wielded by Moses was disagreeable to them; it was hurtful to their dignity. The result was the use of argument where argument was altogether irrelevant. *“Hath not the Lord spoken also by us?”* Yes: But you are not what Moses is: Moses is *“faithful in all Yahweh’s house”* (Numbers 12: 7). You are only faintly faithful, and more faithful to yourselves than to Yahweh, and therefore less powerful than Moses to influence others or to please Yahweh. But argument with Aaron and Miriam would have been powerless: you cannot silence feeling by argument except where feeling is the offspring of reason, which it rarely is. Envy is unappeasable, and requires the harsh voice of authority.

*“Yahweh spake suddenly unto Moses and unto Aaron and unto Miriam, **Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation; and they three came out. And Yahweh came down in the pillar of the cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle and called Aaron and Miriam. And he said, ‘Hear now my words, 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. My servant Moses is not so WHO IS FAITHFUL IN ALL MINE HOUSE. To him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold. WHEREFORE, THEN, WERE YE NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK AGAINST MY SERVANT MOSES?’** And the anger of Yahweh was kindled against them, and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle, and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow.”*

In this way, mutiny was stifled in the very heart of Moses’ family circle; the divine voice speaking thus in its reproof was adequate to its stifling; but had there been no such voice, what could have stopped it? Moses himself could

not, and there was no man in the camp higher than Moses. If there had been no divine presence in the camp, it would not have been stopped, but would have smouldered until it had broken forth as a raging fire to the destruction of all concerned, and the dispersal of the whole congregation in anarchy, as has happened countless times in Gentile experience. But in that case there would have been no congregation to disperse, for had God not spoken by and worked with Moses, there would have been no departure of Israel from Egypt, and no assembly to guide through the wilderness, with deference shown or no deference.

Another interesting and instructive case, in which the tabernacle of the congregation was the pivot of operations, relates to the appointment of helpers to Moses. Moses felt the burden of the leadership greatly, when the people murmured all through the camp at having nothing but manna to eat. His appeal to Yahweh on the subject is most pathetic.

“Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that Thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which Thou swarest unto their fathers? . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness” (Numbers 11: 11).

Nothing more forcibly illustrates the genuineness of the Mosaic narrative than this appeal. Had Moses been the personal originator and director of the Israelitish enterprise, such an appeal could not have come into existence either in fact or in writing, for Moses, in that case, knew there was none to appeal to, and the commonest of political expediency would have precluded him from incorporating in the national archives such an evidence of faintheartedness on his own part, and such a reflection upon the character of the nation, as a lamentation of his inability to cope with the discontent and mutiny of the people. It is impossible to conceive of such an incident either arising or being put on record, apart from the fact that God had devised the work and entrusted it to Moses, and that Moses was finding it more than human strength was equal to. Any theory that denies the divine initiation of

the work, and the divine cooperation from the beginning throughout, creates many insoluble problems in the Mosaic history, of which this is one. But this denial appears the more and more impossible at every stage. The existence of the Mosaic narrative and the performance of the Mosaic work become more and more explicable on one principle only, namely, that the narrative is true in all its parts. They cannot rationally be accounted for on any other principle.

It is the response to the appeal of Moses that brings before us the further case of the supernatural use of the tabernacle, which it was introduced to illustrate.

“Yahweh said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. And I will come down and talk with thee there; and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them: and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.”

We are informed that Moses complied with this direction. He went out to the people, selected the seventy men required, and set them round about the tabernacle; and that which Yahweh promised was then performed.

“Yahweh came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him and gave it unto the seventy elders.”

The reality of this spirit-transfer to the seventy elders was manifest in the effect produced upon them:

“They prophesied and did not cease.”

It was illustrated in a still more signal way in the case of two of the seventy who were absent, Eldad and Medad, who, for some reason not recorded, though nominated in writing, remained in the camp instead of repairing with the others to the tabernacle. Of these we are told that *“they prophesied in the camp.”* The spirit-operation performed upon the sixty-eight surrounding the tabernacle, affected these also in their retirement, because they were included in the intended effect. In this, we have a glimpse of the all-discriminative, penetrating, and limitless power of the Spirit of God, whose laws are inscrutable to mortal man. The laws of modern electrical discovery help to make them credible to our poor intellects—not that our

understanding is assisted; for the electrical laws are as inscrutable as anything could be. But when men are familiar with facts, which would be incredible unless known, they are the more capable of believing other authenticated facts, though equally inscrutable.

This prophesying in the camp, on the part of these isolated units of the seventy, seems to have struck bystanders as an abnormal and improper thing. A young man ran out of the camp and reported the circumstances to Moses. Joshua, who was the companion and servant to Moses, suggested to Moses to forbid this prophesying on the part of Eldad and Medad. The response of Moses to this suggestion is worthy of the largest record and the profoundest reflection—it involves so unutterably much as to the character of Moses, and therefore the nature of the whole work of which he was the central figure!

“Enviest thou for my sake? Would God all Yahweh’s people were prophets, and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them.”

CHAPTER 18. —STRIKING DEATH OF AARON'S SONS; REBELLION OF KORAH, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM

There were further exhibitions of the visible hand of God during the wilderness journey of Israel under Moses, which deserve attention, before we cross the Jordan under Joshua's leadership, and behold the wonderful display of divine power by which a country fortified to heaven was subdued by the unmilitary congregation of the children of Israel. Some of these have a special significance, in addition to their interest as acts of miraculous interference.

Foremost, we may take the summary death of Aaron's sons while engaged in the service of the sanctuary. The incident occurred in connection with the initiation of Aaron and his sons into the office of priesthood. The required offerings having been made and accepted by fire, Nadab and Abihu proceeded to offer incense. They took their censers and put fire in them from some other source than the one prescribed. The commandment was that they were to take "*burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord*" (Leviticus 16: 12); but, either in ignorance or in negligence, they "*offered strange fire before the Lord*" (Leviticus 10: 1-2). It was an express breach of the ordinance. Yahweh had "*commanded them not*" to do this thing. The disobedience was undoubted, and it was severely visited.

"There went out fire from the Lord and devoured them."

Their dead bodies were immediately afterwards carried out of the camp by near relations. Following this, here is a noticeable item. It was Aaron's duty, in the service marred by this incident, to eat the appointed portion of the goat of the sin-offering. When the time came for this eating, Moses found the goat flesh to be eaten had been burnt. The fact was, Aaron was not able to eat, for grief at the death of his sons, and had burnt all. This was Aaron's answer to the sharp reprimand of Moses on discovering the omission (Leviticus 10: 19). The circumstance is worth noting as a casual evidence of the genuineness of the narrative—apparent at every step. It is a touch of nature which never could have found its way into an invented story, and it is a story that never could have been invented; for all invention has an object, and it would baffle the most ingenious imagination to suggest an object in

representing Aaron as remiss in the offices of the priesthood. If not an invention, it is a true account—that Nadab and Abihu were smitten dead in the precincts of the sanctuary for a violation of the law regulating their office.

It was a miracle, but as real a performance in nature for all that, as when a couple of labourers are struck dead by the forked lightning in the field. The difference lay in the fire of the sanctuary being specifically directed, which ordinary lightning is not. There was a very specific object in view. A principle had to be asserted against the negligence of Nadab and Abihu at the supreme moment when the Mosaic schoolmaster-discipline of the law was being established. This principle is defined in the explanation addressed to Aaron by Moses:

“This is it that Yahweh spoke saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Leviticus 10: 3).

A miracle was necessary in the circumstances to enforce this necessity for extreme deference and punctilious obedience in approaching to God. In the absence of miracle, Nadab and Abihu’s dereliction would have become a precedent and a habit, and the institutions of the sanctuary would soon have fallen into disuse. They had no basis but the divine appointment; and if the earnest terrible reality of that appointment had not thus promptly been shown in the presence of disobedience, they would never have been planted in the midst of Israel at all. These and other severities established the fear of Yahweh for several generations: and though Israel in their history has in the main proved disobedient, to this day is to be seen, in their fear of Yahweh’s name and law—(slavish and superstitious though it be)—the effect and the proof of the reality of those measures by which in the beginning the foundations of obedience were laid.

The tragic incidents of the rebellion of the priests and princes exhibit another instance both of this discipline and the necessarily miraculous nature of the means employed to enforce it. The jealous feeling entertained by Aaron and Miriam towards Moses, considered in the last chapter both as to its origin and suppression, was largely shared by several influential men in the congregation, whose disloyal spirit infected quite a numerous body of the princes, and spread extensively in the camp. The feeling spread and fermented until it took shape of a formidable deputation of over 250 men,

headed by Korah, a leading priest, of the family of the Kohathites, and Dathan and Abiram, leading princes in the camp of Reuben. These men (all *“princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown,”*) came formally into the presence of Moses and Aaron with a mutinous challenge:

“Wherefore lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”

The proposed grounds of this challenge were of the usual sort. The truth was not put in the front. In reality the challenge was the offspring of ambitious aspiration in the part of the challengers—men small-minded enough to aspire to headship, but not large-minded enough to be qualified to exercise it, which, had they been, they would not have desired it: for the men fit to exercise authority are not those who find a personal gratification in it. But the real grounds are never put forward in such a case. Consciously or unconsciously men in such an attitude play the hypocrite. They put forward pleas that are serviceable, but not sincere—sincere enough as regards the earnest use made of them, but not sincere as regards the real motive at work. And they usually take the garb of a professed regard for somebody else’s rights, or for justice in the abstract—to both of which, in ordinary circumstances, the class in question exhibits a total indifference.

“All the congregation are holy, every one of them; and the Lord is among them: wherefore, then, lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”

Such was the speech in which Korah, Dathan, and Abiram sought to call in question the work of Moses, aggravating their insinuation further on with this question:

“Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?”

Here was the revolt of democracy very early in the world’s history—the cause of “the people” versus government divinely appointed; and the Lord’s “people” too: for it was quite true what the insurgents said—that the congregation was the congregation of the Lord, and holy every one—in the sense of having been separated and sanctified to the divine use. The revolt, therefore, against the “one-man-system” of Moses would, superficially, seem a very legitimate and worthy affair. We shall see how it appeared in the divine eyes, with whom nothing is less in favour than the loud-praised

modern thing, called “the voice of the people.”

“When Moses heard it, he fell on his face.”

What could he do? The situation demurred to by these malcontents was not of his creating, as we have seen times without number. He was certainly in sympathy with the work which God was accomplishing by his hand: but as for his personal part, it was none of his seeking, and so far from being the gratifying thing the insurgents imagined, it was the cause of much burden and mortification of spirit. Moreover, he knew the congregation were now placing themselves on the brink of a volcano. Past experience had shown him the heat of the anger glowing under the surface of the divine patience with wayward Israel: and he could not but fear that the catastrophe he had averted by personal entreaty on the summit of Sinai, would now burst forth and consume the whole congregation in a moment. No wonder he was overwhelmed in the presence of the mutinous attitude of the princes.

“He fell upon his face.”

Rallying to the duty belonging to the situation, he proposed an arbitration which could not fail of a satisfactory settlement.

“Tomorrow the Lord will show who are his . . . This do: take your censers, Korah and all his company, and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy.”

There is no evidence that Moses knew what was to transpire on the morrow. The succeeding narrative would rather suggest that he did not know, but merely acted on the confidence that Yahweh, who had vindicated his appointment against the murmurings of Aaron and Miriam, would in some way indicate his mind in the more serious crisis now forming in their midst. If they all appeared before Yahweh on this issue: “*whom hath Yahweh chosen for the priesthood?*” Moses did not doubt that the question would receive some palpable and conclusive answer. He had no doubt on the point in his own mind; how could he, after all that had transpired? But he desired the malcontents to receive their answer. Therefore he made this proposal, not altogether without the reproof which their attitude called for:

“Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi . . . Seemeth it but a small thing unto you that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to

do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And He hath brought thee near to Him, and all thy brethren, the sons of Levi with thee; and seek ye the priesthood also? For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron that ye murmur against him?” (Numbers 16: 7, 9, 11).

These words were addressed to Korah, the priest, and his company. Dathan and Abiram, their sympathisers of the Reubenites, were not present at the time. Therefore Moses sent a message to them to arrange for tomorrow's test-assembly. But they refused to come, and sent back a scornful answer, at which Moses was angry, saying to God,

“Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.”

To Korah and his company Moses said they were not to fail to present themselves next day, with all their sympathisers, before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Next day arrived. Korah was duly at his post, with his 250 priestly supporters, each man furnished with his censer, and stationed with erect and brazened confidence. Not only that, but Korah had been through the camp in the interval, making known what was in question, and found nearly the whole assembly in a mood to take part with him. The result was the gathering of an immense concourse of the people, along with Korah and his abettors, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. *“All the congregation,”* we are told, were gathered against Moses and Aaron. They had every disposition to revolt, as they showed on several previous occasions; and now that the priestly families themselves were moving in this direction, they doubtless felt a wonderful liberty in the matter—a kind of feeling that revolt became sacred under such leadership, and alacrity in their evil cause a matter doubly sweetened by inclination and sanction. Moses and Aaron stood in their midst—possibly feeling somewhat nervous in the presence of such a powerful opposition. It was not for long.

“The glory of Yahweh appeared unto all the congregation.”

This was the exciting moment. Expectancy would grow to a great pitch. The shining out of the divine glory would make one and all in that immense

assembly feel that the matter in debate was recognised as worthy of divine adjudication. But on which side? That was the question. For a moment doubtless, the rebels—standing in the presence of the divine brightness—all illuminated with the glory to the utmost fringes of the multitude—would feel justified in their cause, and expectant of a divine endorsement: not for long.

*“Yahweh spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, **Separate yourselves from among this congregation that I may consume them in a moment.**”*

Brief but tremendous utterance on the case! Korah and his company were the complainants: the congregation of the people but sympathised: here was a decree to destroy one and all, and Moses and Aaron advised to step aside for safety! It is a fearful thing to fight against God. Moses and Aaron did not desire such an appalling vindication. They recognised that, as regarded the bulk of the assembly, they were misled—that the true offenders were the priests and princes of the people, who ought to have known better. They were overwhelmed in the presence of the divine anger.

“They fell upon their faces and said, ‘O God, the Elohim of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?’”

God respected the intercession of Moses, and relaxed the sentence against the people. Determining, however, on the total destruction of all the priestly rebels, and their immediate abettors among the princes. He instructed Moses to order the people to get away on every side from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were not among the company of Korah. They would not honour Moses so much as to come to the trial of their own complaints against him. With callous obstinacy, they remained within their tents, and laughing, doubtless, with their wives and families, at the commotion they had raised, refusing to recognise the discussion of the question in any way—insisting only on their unreasonable objections, without any concern for a rational settlement. (Such men are still to be met with). But if they would not go to Moses, Moses now comes to them—not, however, with words of conciliation—the time for that is past; but with words of warning to all the people about them:

“Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.”

The people about them showed themselves not insensible:

“They gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and

Abiram on every side.”

Dathan and Abiram showed their foolhardy bravery by coming outside their tents, and standing there with their wives and families, trying to look unconcerned as the manner of such is. It was but for a moment. Moses addressing the people, said,

*“Hereby ye shall know that **Yahweh hath sent me to do all these works: FOR I HAVE NOT DONE THEM OF MY OWN MIND.** If these men die the common death of all men, then Yahweh hath not sent me. But if Yahweh make a new thing and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up with all that appertain unto them and they go down quick into the pit, then ye shall understand that these men have provoked Yahweh.”*

Thus the nature of the issue and meaning of the events being enacted were very precisely defined. The lesson so sharply taught on the occasion remains good to this day. Action followed quickly on these ominous words:

“It came to pass as Moses had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up and their houses and all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods. They and all that appertained unto Korah and all their goods. They and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation.”

As for the phalanx of the “two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown,” drawn up in front of the tabernacle, lightning flashed from the divine presence and struck them dead on the spot, and their brazen censers, scattered in the burning, were, by divine direction, gathered and converted into plates to cover the altar in remembrance of the dire calamity, and in token to Israel,

“That no stranger which is not of the seed of Aaron come near to offer incense before Yahweh.”

But the rebellion was not yet at an end. In a fictitious narrative, such a visitation as that just described would certainly have been represented as a complete settlement of the discontent of the people. But in a record of facts, we have the characteristics of human nature veraciously illustrated. While the destruction of the princes had cowed the people and sent them to their

tents, a night's rest gave a new turn to their rebellious thoughts. They could not deny what their eyes had seen—the destruction of a formidable body of influential rebels; but now they refused the reasonable lesson of the fact, and gave a colour to it in harmony with their own feelings:

“Ye have killed the people of the Lord.”

They could not deny the killing; but instead of accepting it as God's act, they imputed it to the power of Moses and Aaron, and made it only a new reason for discontent. Their insubordination was incorrigible. They were inclined to reopen the question so dreadfully settled on the previous day.

“They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord.”

Again the clouds gathered threateningly. Again they were dispersed by miraculous interposition. The glory of Yahweh again shone from the tabernacle: Moses and Aaron, making hasty obeisance in the presence of the glory, were adjured to get away from the midst of the congregation that they might be destroyed. Moses, in the promptitude of faithful and earnest fear, enjoined on Aaron the making of an immediate atonement for the congregation, in accordance with Yahweh's own previous appointments, declaring to Aaron,

“There is wrath gone out from Yahweh: the plague is begun.”

Aaron, with kindled censer, ran into the midst of the congregation, and made an atonement, as commanded. He found the plague making dreadful ravages. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed, but not till 14,700 persons had fallen victims.

The concluding incident of this terrible episode ranks prominently among the exhibitions of the visible hand of God. The miraculous budding of Aaron's rod was no frivolous or wizard feat, such as it is apt to appear when mentioned as an isolated fact. It was a reasonable measure adopted for an earnest purpose. The object is thus stated:

“I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel.”

To accomplish this Moses was directed as follows:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod, according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes, according to the house of their fathers, TWELVE RODS: write thou every man's name upon his rod . . . And thou shalt lay up

in the tabernacle of the congregation, before the testimony where I will meet with you. And it shall come to pass that the man's rod whom I shall choose shall blossom."

The rods were accordingly collected and laid up in the tabernacle; and next day, the rods being brought out, it was found that—

"The rod of Aaron, for the house of Levi, was budded, and brought forth buds and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds" (Numbers 17: 8).

"And Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord unto all the children of Israel" (there were no concealments or demands for "confidence" in the measures that established the authority of Moses) *"and they looked and took every man his rod,"* except Aaron, whose budded rod was ordered to be laid up in the tabernacle, and *"kept for a token against the rebels."*

The people had no answer to such demonstration of the divine choice of Levi for the service of the priesthood. But they were not pacified. They retired into the caverns of a silent and gloomy discontent, muttering,

"Behold, we die; we perish; we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die."

Yahweh might then and there have righteously annihilated the incorrigible murmurers at a stroke; but He had patience with them for the sake of His ultimate purpose, which would have been hindered by their destruction. *"For my name's sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain for thee that I cut thee not off;"* an explanation admitting us to this consoling reflection, that the prosperity of godless men is only a part of the necessary programme of the divine work upon earth; and, with comforting firmness, commanding *"patience"*!

On the nature of these miracles it is unnecessary to say more than has been said in other cases. With all of them men are already acquainted in the operations of nature. The thunderbolt or the forked lightning slays in a moment, at any time; and as for the yielding of leaves, blossoms and almonds, who is not familiar with it every year wherever an almond tree is planted in the earth? The only difference is that in the case before us, the fire was intelligently directed, and the almond blooms quickly instead of being slowly formed. What wise man will say that fire intelligently formed, cannot

be intelligently directed? and that the process of vegetable formation cannot be accelerated to any degree of speed that the Inventor of vegetable growth sees fit? Fools, who are in a large majority according to Mr. Carlyle, may demur readily enough; but even they have to admit that fire is subject to even human manipulation, and that the hothouse forcing of fruit and flowers is not an unknown phenomenon.

CHAPTER 19. —MANNA IN THE DESERT; MURMURING; BALAAM

The necessity for the miracles noticed in the last chapter will be admitted on the most common reflection. The insubordination of the Israelitish assembly could not have been terminated without them. The law could not have been established in their midst. The wilderness journey could not have been brought to the intended conclusion; God's purpose to plant His name in the earth through the divinely-directed military triumph of Israel over the Canaanites, and their national occupation of the land of Palestine, would have been completely frustrated if God Himself had not carefully guarded the execution of that purpose at its several vital points, in feeding the assembly from heaven, speaking to them audibly from Sinai, and exterminating the rebellion, root and branch, from their midst, by the overthrow of the company of Korah.

One or two remaining incidents will complete our survey of the wilderness incidents. We have already considered the manna, and the people's weariness with it. We look now at one result of their murmuring on this head, at a later stage in their history. They said—

“Our soul loatheth this light bread.”

Their murmuring was, perhaps, not unnatural. They had subsisted upon manna for many years: they were nearing the close of the forty years' wandering in the wilderness; they were approaching the confines of Edom: the way was rugged and sterile: there were no smiling cornfields, or inviting vale or wood. All was stern and desolate. Moses describes it as—

“That great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought; where there was no water.”

No wonder we read that—

“The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way

(Numbers 21: 4).

As little wonderful was it that they complained of the light monotonous diet on which they fed. They were fed on such diet for a reason which we have already had to consider. The reason was good; but the process was irksome to flesh and blood, as all trial for divine ends is. They gave way under trial.

“They spake against God and against Moses.”

They murmured at the manna diet.

“And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.”

This would be very wonderful, and very sad, if it stood alone; but that which came after takes away the sadness, while it increases the wonderfulness. The people in the agonies of the serpent plague, realised the position, and they *“came to Moses and said, **We have sinned:** for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee: pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.”* It was this that led to the exhibition of the visible hand of God in a more signal form than the serpents.

*“Yahweh said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass that **every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live.**”*

Here was merciful kindness in the midst of the rigour. The rigour of the serpent visitation had brought them to their knees. It had broken the stout heart, and that waywardness which springs from that mere enjoyment of created things which leaves the Creator out of account. In this frame of mind, men are unthankful in the possession of privilege, and full of murmur and insubordination when trouble comes. Is it not so in our own day? Men, lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God, are *“unthankful, unholy.”* What is the object of those dispensations of chastisement which have been meted out to the house of God from the beginning, even as now, but to teach them that God must be first in their eyes, and that in themselves, they are but permitted and dependent forms of life, to whom the only reasonable frame of mind is that of gratitude when mercies are allowed, and resignation when trouble is sent.

“And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole; and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.”

Here was healing dispensed to the obedience that came from faith. If Moses had had no faith, he would not have made a thing in which a merely natural man would have said there was no use; if the children of Israel had had no faith, they would not have taken the trouble to come near the serpent-surmounted pole, in which there could be no virtue by any natural principle. They believed it would be as God had said, for no other reason than because

He said it. Therefore they did what they did. Their faith brought forth works; and their obedient faith secured for them the healing blessing of Yahweh. It was a miracle—i.e., an unusual work of God. There was no virtue in the brass of the serpent or in the shape into which the brass had been wrought. At a later stage of Israel's history, when Israel worshipped the brazen serpent, under a mistaken idea of its power, Hezekiah, with the divine approbation, broke it in pieces, calling it "*a piece of brass.*" The healing performed on the looking Israelites was performed direct by God. The brazen serpent had nothing to do with it except as supplying the form of obedience appropriate to the case. The miracle was necessary for the spiritual object of making God visible to the congregation in His moral relations to them. Its nature is illustrated every time a cure of any kind takes place: for the only difference between a miraculous cure and a natural one is that the miraculous cure is effected by power directly applied, and therefore instantaneously operative, while a natural cure results from a slow rectification of the disturbed conditions through the working of the natural power that has been made a part of the organization. Disease is a question of chemistry and physiological structure: both, when interfered with, can be affected more or less by appliances operating in conjunction with the *vis medicatrix* of the system; but they can be much more thoroughly and quickly affected when acted on by the underlying controlling power that holds all things in itself. Men easily believe in the natural because they see it: they with difficulty credit the miraculous because they have not seen. Intrinsically, there is no more difficulty in receiving the one than the other. A truly rational frame of mind will limit a man's question to whether the thing has happened: not whether it can happen. The question of "can" takes a poor mortal out of his depth. But of course there are those of whom Solomon speaks: men of shallow mind, smart but superficial—wiser in their own conceits than ten men that can render a reason. He dismisses them with a graphic epithet "*fools.*" The race has by no means died out. Unhappily, the case stands the other way: the garden, for want of tillage, is overgrown with weeds, thriving and robust, and so accustomed to be let alone as to have imagined that they are the veritable crop for which the garden exists. Alas for them, but to the blessedness of the world, a remedy is at the door that will clear the ground of the noxious tangle, and establish the garden of the Lord, in all the glory of diversified colour and enchanting fragrance, filling the earth with gladness and praise.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

So said Jesus in the days of his flesh. This justifies the discernment of an analogy in the Mosaic incident, to things relating to ourselves in the gospel. The analogy is almost glaringly obvious in every feature. We have been bitten because of our sins. To Christ crucified we are asked to look for healing, the look in our case not being a literal act as with the Israelites, but the discernment of what was accomplished in Christ, and the obedient submission thereto in the act of baptism. The healing is no more in the cross than it was in the literal serpent. It is no more in baptism than it was in the literal turning of Israelitish eyes. It comes from God. Yet as it came not to the Israelite who did not look at the uplifted serpent, so it comes not to us if we do not receive Christ, and put on his name in the way appointed. What God appoints for men to do as the form and occasion of their obedience, with a view to His blessing, is as indispensably vital for them to do as if the blessing came directly from the institutions themselves. Where this principle is recognised, there is an end to the foolish modern difficulty about the essentiality of the gospel and its requirements.

Before leaving the wilderness, it will be serviceable to glance for a moment at the second instance of the miraculous provision of water. The first occurred in Rephidim, shortly after the crossing of the Red Sea, before the congregation had met God at Sinai. The second was in Kadesh, long after that event, even after they had completed the circuit of camping stations enumerated in Numbers 33. In the first instance, Moses was commanded to strike the rock—(Exodus 17: 6)—upon which the water came out in abundant supply. In the second, he was commanded to speak only to the rock, with the assurance that the rock so spoken to, would “*give forth his water.*” But in this case, Moses went beyond his instructions. He spoke to the rock truly; but he did more.

*“Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock; and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses **lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice, and the water came out abundantly**” (Numbers 20: 10-11).*

What was the motive in Moses thus exceeding his instructions, we are not

informed. Possibly, he may have been influenced by the fact that he smote the rock on the first occasion by divine direction. It is evident from his words to the people that he acted under a state of irritation. At all events, the deviation from the directions given displeased Yahweh. It is the very next matter placed on record that—

*“Yahweh spake to Moses and Aaron, Because ye **believed me not**, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them”* (Numbers 20: 12).

Unbelief, it seems, was at the bottom of the miscarriage—momentary unbelief—a feeling that it would not be sufficient to speak to the rock: that it was necessary to smite it. The effect of smiting instead of speaking to the rock was to divert attention from Yahweh’s participation in the act of providing the water, and this effect would be heightened by the words of Moses,

“Must WE (Moses and Aaron) fetch you water out of this rock?”

(This was drawing attention to Moses and Aaron: it was standing between God and the people instead of exhibiting and honouring God before them. It was a grave offence, as evidenced by the immediate abbreviation of the commission of Moses in punishment. As regards Aaron, the punishment was more prompt. At the very next stoppage of the assembly, after leaving Kadesh, Yahweh said,

*“Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye **rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah**. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up into Mount Hor, and strip Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar, his son, and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded, and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount; and Moses and Eleazar came down from the top of the mount”* (Numbers 21: 24, 29).

This melancholy termination of Aaron’s career—(brought about what

men would consider so slight a cause)—was the enforcement of a lesson much disregarded in our day. So also was the consequence following to Moses—in his case even more melancholy: for he, more than Aaron, had been “*faithful in all his house.*” The consequence was similar, but did not come so quickly. It was some time afterwards, when the work of subjugation had actually begun, so far as the Amorites in Gilead and Bashan (to the east of Jordan) were concerned, not long before the crossing of the Jordan.

Yahweh thus addressed Moses:

*“Get thee up unto this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel, and when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my **commandment** in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes”* (Numbers 27: 12).

Moses made no demur to this decree. His only anxiety was about the position in which the vacant leadership would leave the people.

“Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation who may go out before them; that the congregation of Yahweh be not as sheep which have no shepherd.”

His anxiety on this point was allayed by the nomination of Joshua. His own desire to see the promised goodness in the land of Canaan revived, however, in the presence of the victorious events by which Bashan and Gilead had been placed in Israel’s hands. He made it the subject of petition, if peradventure the divine decree might be relaxed. So he informed Israel at the final rehearsal on the plains of Moab:

*“I besought Yahweh at that time, saying, O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy mighty hand . . . I pray Thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. **But Yahweh was wroth with me for your sakes, and WOULD NOT HEAR ME:** and Yahweh said unto me, Let it suffice thee: speak no more unto Me of this matter”* (Deuteronomy 3: 23).

There is something unspeakably sad in this allusion to the matter. David puts it well in Psalm 106: 32:

“It went ill with Moses for their sakes, because they provoked

his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.”

The lesson is one that is totally forgotten so far as the mass of mankind are concerned. It is this, that Yahweh is greatly to be held in reverence, and that His word—His commandment—His appointment—His will—is of fearful force; that it is not to be abridged or altered in any way to suit the fancies of men, but to be strictly upheld and implicitly obeyed with child-like docility and godly fear. The lesson has been several times inculcated in striking form. Nothing could exceed the opening incident of human history, in this respect. Adam, for one breach, was driven from Eden (and we in him) to exile and death. We are invited to approach Him in reconciliation and forgiveness in Christ, in whose bloodshedding his righteousness has been declared: but this does not mean there is any slackening of this first of all first principles. It is, rather, an illustration of it, that we cannot approach Yahweh except with the blood of His slain Lamb sprinkled upon our consciences in the belief and obedience of the truth. Men will find under the Gospel, as under all dispensations of His will, that God is a great King, and dreadful (Malachi 1: 14), and that He will not be mocked (Galatians 6: 8); that He will be sanctified in them that approach unto Him (Leviticus 10: 3). It is still a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10: 31; 12: 29). Those who are not thus attempered to the fear of God will discover that there is no use for them in a kingdom where Yahweh’s glory is the highest aim and the brightest light.

Before leaving Moses, we may take a parting glimpse of the visible hand of God in the contemplation of the case of Balaam. This was in the nature of a side event after the conquest of the Amorites by Moses. Of this conquest we are told that—

“Moab saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites; and was sore afraid,” and that Balak, their King, *“sent messengers, therefore, unto Balaam, the Son of Beor of Pethor . . . saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people: for they are too mighty for me”* (Numbers 22).

Balak sent this request by the hand of influential messengers, on whose arrival, God said to Balaam,

“Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed.”

Balaam, receiving this command, sent the messengers away, and they, returning to Balak, said:

“Balaam refuseth to come with us.”

Balak, not understanding the nature of the refusal, sent other messengers of higher rank, saying:

“Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me, for I will promote thee unto very great honour.”

Balaam, who ought to have dismissed these messengers at once, received them in the hope that God would alter His mind, and allow him to go.

“And God came to Balaam at night, and said, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them.”

With all alacrity, in hope of the rewards Balak was prepared to bestow, and without any earnest concern for the purpose of God in the matter, Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his ass, and set off with his visitors to Balak. These communications were themselves instances of the visible hand of God, such as the present age is not permitted to experience: but it was on the journey that the most remarkable instance occurred. Though God had given Balaam permission to go (intending to turn the curse into a blessing), still, contemplating the unholy and avaricious haste with which Balaam pursued his journey, God’s anger was kindled, and—

“The angel of Yahweh stood in the way for an adversary, against him.”

Balaam was not allowed to see the obstructing angel, but the beast on which he rode saw the brightness, and shied out of the path into the field by the side of the road. Balaam incensed at this, *“smote the ass, to turn her into the way.”* The ass returned into the way and the angel moved on ahead to a place where the path went through vineyards between two walls. Here the angel stood, and, on the ass arriving at the spot she shied again, crushing Balaam’s foot against the wall. Balaam, angry at the animal’s unusual waywardness, beat the unoffending creature, and the angel went on further, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn right or left. Arriving there, the ass refused to proceed, and fell down under her avaricious master, who started belabouring the animal with a stick. Here the marvel occurred: Yahweh opened the mouth of the ass, and the animal spoke to her enraged owner.

“What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times?”

Balaam replied that the creature had mocked him, and that if he had a sword, he would kill her. The ass enquired if she had ever been in the habit of so behaving in former times. When Balaam had answered in the negative,

“Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way.”

He at once prostrated himself in the presence of the angel, who upbraided him that he (the angel) had come out to withstand him because of the perverseness of his way, and that if the ass had not stopped short in the way for which he had punished her, the angel would have killed Balaam. Balaam abashed, pleaded his ignorance of the angel’s presence, and offered to return at once if his journey was displeasing. The angel told him to go on, but to speak only the words he should be instructed to speak.

Peter (2nd Epistle 2: 15) refers to this incident, speaking of Balaam as a lover of *“the wages of unrighteousness,”* who *“was rebuked for his iniquity, the dumb ass, speaking with man’s voice, forbidding the madness of the prophet.”* It was a miracle—a wonderful miracle—but presenting no difficulty if miracle in any case be admitted.

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

This was Yahweh’s own question to Sarah when she was incredulous at the promise of her having a son in her old age. It is a question that settles all difficulty connected with the case in question. Though it is beyond the ordinary action of ass-nature to speak, why should we conceive it impossible that the ass-mechanism should yield to the impulse of speech when the impulse was divinely upon it with that intent? A man must either take the position of a fool and say there is no God; or he must admit that anything is possible with God, and that therefore it was just as easy for Him to impart the gift of utterance temporarily to a four-footed creature, as to endow some other creatures with it permanently who show no special aptitude for its wise use. Of course, the anatomical technicians would be ready with their difficulties. They would tell us of the construction of the larynx, and the impossibility of accommodating the ass throat to human sound. We need not stay to debate with their arrogant learnedness. Whatever modifications were necessary, it would be in the power of God to produce for the moment: and it would not be beyond His power to use an ass throat in the enunciation of

human speech without any modification whatever. It is credibly testified that the ass spoke: and before this, all questions of improbability and mechanical difficulty must fly to the winds. The account is embedded in the Mosaic narrative, and the Mosaic narrative received the seal of Christ, and Christ rose from the dead. The adversary has to dig away the foundation before he can bring down the standing ground of that which is on the top of the building: and destroy the foundation, he cannot.

The incident was by no means unsuitable to the situation. Israel were on their victorious way in the execution of Yahweh's work: here was an intrigue on the part of the enemy against them: it was an interesting triumph of divine wisdom to turn it thus to the confusion of those who were concerned in it.

The position of Balaam has been a difficulty with many. He was evidently a believer in the true God, which surprises many in view of his character as a soothsayer. This need not occasion surprise when it is remembered that the true faith existed in the family of Noah. From that family, the faith of the true God would descend to some of those who came after, though it might be in a corrupt form. Traces of it are found in the case of Abimelech, king of Gerar (Genesis 26: 26-29). Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God in the days of Abraham, is an illustration of it in its purity.

But Balaam was also a soothsayer (Joshua 13: 22), a practiser of magical arts, so called, and a pretended reader of destiny. This profession is often referred to in the writings of the prophets, and always denounced as an imposture, and its practisers as false prophets, though some of them might sincerely imagine that the magnetic power which they possessed to influence those subject to them for good or evil (which all men possess in a greater or lesser degree) was a divine faculty conferring authority. Balaam had acquired a great reputation in this line of things among the Moabites and other idolatrous nations. Balak shows this in the remark,

"I wot that whom thou blessest is blessed, and whom thou cursest is cursed."

Balaam used his imaginary gift for gain. Avarice actuated him in his occupation: this is manifest from all the allusions to him. Though he believed in Yahweh as the only true God, he was not animated by the

enlightened love and fear of Him, or inspired by a desire to do His will or bless his fellows. Self-enrichment by the exercise of a supposed divine gift was the peculiar feature of his case. Yahweh had nothing to do with Balaam's natural gift of soothsaying, except as He has to do with natural power. It was merely the life-energy natural to Balaam's animal organization, concentrated and applied in a particular way with results having a certain reality about them which fostered the illusion that he was divinely endowed. He might suppose that Yahweh, in whom he believed, had to do with it, and that he was the object of his favour and the depository of his power. The same thing is exemplified in witches and spiritualists in our day, in another form. When, however, he (Balaam), was summoned to curse a nation who was under Yahweh's protection. Yahweh did speak to him by His angel, to deter him from the enterprise, and afterwards to turn the curse Balaam wished to imprecate for hire, into a blessing.

As for the "meeting of God," alluded to throughout the narrative, Balaam's retiring from Balak would be as when a man retires to pray. He would retire for privacy, and not that there was a particular place or spot where God was accessible. God is everywhere present, and can manifest Himself anywhere; but the man receiving the manifestation naturally withdraws from contact with other objects of attention. Balaam would not be surprised at the manifestation, because, so far as his perceptions went, it would seem akin to what he was accustomed to. When a man of high electrical power throws himself into a trance for preternatural perceptions, he is subjectively in a state similar to that in which a man is thrown when the hand of God is really upon him by the Spirit. The difference lies in the impressions mad upon him in that state. In natural trances there are no impressions beyond those that come from nature, which are as useless for real prophecy or any other spiritual purpose, as the perceptions of the faculties in their normal state. "*In the spirit,*" God speaks to the man with a result very palpably different in the nature of the communications he receives. Balaam was in the hand of God, and felt he was powerless to direct his thoughts or speech in opposition to the afflatus upon him, but it would not strike him as an extraordinary practice of divination, and in view of his belief in Yahweh.

CHAPTER 20. —MOSES' PARTING GIFT— YAHWEH'S PROPHETIC SONG OF WITNESS

Before taking final leave of Moses, we will do wisely to look at the visible hand of God in the Memorial Song which he left in the mouth of Israel as his parting gift, before ascending to his unknown resting place on the summit of Nebo. This song was a prophecy; and therein lies the visibility of the divine hand; for no man can prophesy. But it was not only necessarily divine because prophetic; it was ostensibly and authentically communicated in a remarkable way as God's own forecast of their history for His own justification in aftertimes in the attitude He should take to them. All prophecy is the visible hand of God; but there are features about this prophecy that mark it off in a way different from others as self-evidently and uncontradictably divine. The time it was delivered, the circumstances of its delivery, its unsparing disparagement of the national character, its true foreshadowing of the actual course of their history, and the evidence of its fulfilment before our eyes at the present hour, are aspects of the matter that combine in the exercise of a capable discernment, to mark it with a peculiar pre-eminence among the many unmistakable exhibitions of the visible hand of God that have characterised the history of the Jewish nation.

As already stated, it was at the very end of Moses' life that the Memorial Song was delivered. His work all done, he was abruptly summoned by Yahweh to present himself at the tabernacle of the congregation along with Joshua, for a few finishing words, in which Yahweh was the sole speaker. The two presented themselves without delay, and Yahweh appeared in the pillar of cloud over the door of the tabernacle in the way already noticed several times (Deuteronomy 31: 14-15). Wonderful were the words addressed to Moses, such as no man could have conceived in his heart to say; that is, when the meaning of the words is considered:

*“Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land whither they go, to be among them, and **will forsake me and break my covenant, which I have made with them.** Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will **hide my face from them**, and they shall*

*be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us? . . . Now, therefore, write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: Put it in their mouths that **this song may be a witness FOR ME against the children of Israel.***”

Yahweh proceeded to inform Moses that “*when many evils and troubles*” should befall the nation, on account of their apostacy from Him, “*this song shall testify against them as a witness: for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed.*” Here is an extraordinary patriotic song—a song established at the very start of a nation’s history as a testimony against the doings of a nation in advance, and incorporated as a permanent reproof of their iniquity in the national constitution (for that it has been permanent, we who live at the present day are witnesses). Such a thing is absolutely unheard of in the history of any other nation; such a thing is inconceivable and unaccountable, apart from the fact that it was a divine doing. With what human motive, either at the commencement of their history or at any other time, could the leaders have introduced such a literary monument into the archives of the nation? Introduced it was; for there it is, and has been, ever since these documents were known to the world. Human imagination is fertile sometimes; but it would puzzle the most prolific to hazard a plausible explanation of such a passage in Israel’s history, apart from the view that it stands there in simple truth as a piece of naked historical veracity.

Moses having received and written the wonderful literary composition that was to put Israel’s condemnation in the mouth of posterity, convenes the Levites in no complimentary or even conciliatory mood, and addresses them in this strain, inexplicable on every principle except that he was acting as the agent of God:

“ I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death, ye will utterly corrupt

yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you: and evil will befall you in the latter days: because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.”

With this introductory sternness—yet not the sternness of petulance, but the calm sternness of a sad perception of truth—Moses rehearses the MEMORIAL SONG which occupies the first forty-three verses of the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. The interested reader will read the song. It will not be necessary to do more here than indicate the leading features.

Firstly, there is an entire absence of the patriotic sentiment to be found in the literature of all other nations. There is nothing here to glorify the race or its achievements; quite the reverse—in which alone there is evidence of an extra-human origin; for the Jews are no exception to the Gentiles in their tendency to be impressed with the superiority of their racial stock and to glorify the deeds of ancestors or vaunt contemporary greatness. Verses 1-2 arrest the attention with promise of discourse that shall distil gently and purely as the rain.

The first note struck is the kernel of all Jewish constitutions and institutions and renown—GOD.

“Ascribe ye greatness to our God”—verse 3.

Not without reason: He is declared—

“THE ROCK, his work, perfect; his way without iniquity”—verse 4.

But as for Israel,

“They have corrupted themselves . . . they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite Yahweh, O foolish people and unwise? . . . hath He not made thee and established thee?”

Then follows a rehearsal of God’s goodness to Israel, culminating in the strange climax:

“But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked . . . he forsook God which had made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.

*They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger . . . When Yahweh saw it, HE ABHORRED them. . . . And he said, **I will hide my face from them; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.** . . . I will heap mischiefs upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger and devoured with burning heat and with bitter destruction . . . for they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.”*

Here is a predicted career of disobedience and trouble. Israel would forsake God; God would hide His face from them, and trouble, sent by Him, would overtake them. The song in which these things are written is more than three thousand years old. Has it not been verified in Israel’s history? If men were not in ignorance of the Scriptures—ignorant of the common history of the Jews since the days of Moses, they would be astounded at the exact correspondence between the course of their of their (Israel’s) national life and the outline exhibited prophetically in this Memorial Song. Things have come out exactly as the song fore-shadowed. Israel turned aside from the commandments God had given them, and has come through such a sea of trouble as no other nation upon earth has passed through. The wonder is they are not extinct. That they have not been overwhelmed and destroyed by the troubles that have befallen them is directly due to divine prevention, as this song testifies—Verse 26,

*“The sword without and terror within shall destroy both the young man and virgin, the suckling also, with the man of grey hairs. 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: YAHWEH HATH NOT DONE ALL THIS.**”*

Israel’s punishment—not their destruction—has been the object of the tribulation sore and great that God has brought upon them. He thus speaks by Jeremiah:

“Though I make a full end of all the nations among whom I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee, but will correct thee in measure and not leave thee altogether

unpunished” (Jeremiah 30: 11).

Their subjection to foreign nations has been God’s doing; but foreign nations know this not, and are inclined to say, as this Song represents,

“Our hand is high: Yahweh hath not done all this.”

This is an additional reason for Yahweh not allowing Israel’s total extirpation from among the nations of the earth. At first sight, it seems strange that the Creator, or His angelic representatives, should be at all affected by the foolish opinions of the enemy; but we get to learn higher views of Yahweh’s relation to men as we increase in age, knowledge, and wisdom. Yahweh is not only pleased with the intelligent adoration of the creatures He has formed in His own image: He is displeased with the irrational fumes and attitudes of ignorant men. Can any man show why He should not be the one and the other? The objector can only bring to us his transcendental—(i.e., imaginary, self-evolved) conceptions as to what God ought to be, which no more affect the facts as they are than a man’s opinion of the moon affects its constitution. Yahweh *“feared the wrath of the enemy”* in fearing both the enemy’s boasts and the indefinite postponement of His own glorious purpose upon earth, had he allowed *“Israel to be scattered into corners, and their remembrance to have ceased from among men.”* Yahweh’s purpose turns upon the house of Israel. *“Salvation is of the Jews,”* as Jesus said. Consequently, to have suffered them to be annihilated would have been to give entire place to *“the wrath of the enemy.”* God’s anger with Israel has been restrained for His own purposes. As He said by Isaiah,

“For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee that I cut thee not off. . . . For mine own sake, even for mine own sake will I do it; for how should I give my name to be polluted?” (Isaiah 48: 9).

The preservation of the Jews in the midst of the nations is therefore a guarantee to every man who can see with an enlightened eye that the ultimate purpose of Yahweh in their choice will be realised. Their temporary exile from the God of their fathers has meanwhile been the occasion of another dispensation of Yahweh’s will, which has also been made contributive to the working out of that purpose when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory. The turning away of Israel has been made the occasion of inviting the Gentiles to divine relationship and hope. We refer to this here

because it is a matter visible in this prophetic Memorial Song. At verse 12, we read:

“They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God: they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”

Without apostolic guidance, we might be at a loss how to understand this intimation. Enough would be obvious to prepare the way for their application of this announcement. To excite to jealousy is to pay attention to another object of love than the first. Israel was the object of Jehovah’s long attention for many centuries, during which, the Gentiles were left to themselves (Acts 14: 16; 17: 30), without God and without hope (Ephesians 2: 12). How was this intimation to be fulfilled—that when Israel’s apostasy should prove incorrigible, He would excite them to jealousy by them that were no people—except by making advances to the Gentiles who had beforetime neglected? This is what happened in the apostolic age. To the Jews first, the gospel was preached after generations of disobedience; and the Jews rejecting it, the apostles, by divine direction, turned to the Gentiles (Acts 22: 21; 26: 17-18), in which character Paul frequently put himself forward (Romans 11: 13). Thus Paul, referring to the matter, brings this very Memorial Song to bear (Romans 10: 19), and remarks:

*“Through Israel’s fall **salvation is come unto the Gentiles, to PROVOKE THEM TO JEALOUSY**”* (Romans 11: 11).

Consequently, here is a matter included in the scope of this Memorial Song which comes to our own day and touches ourselves. Wherever there are Gentiles rejoicing in the hope of Israel and approaching God as His people, there is this Song verified; there we have a monument of the visible hand of God as shown in this Song; for who but God could have foreseen, and at the very beginning of Israel’s history foretold such a thing? The Gentiles, however, have carried the thing a little too far. They are much too complacent of their position before God. By the power of immortal soulism and other errors, they have come to feel themselves as much entitled to divine recognition as ever Israel was, and more: and the standing of Israel as an affair far down out of their sight. The nations of the Gentiles are destined to have a rude awakening on this point. They have forgotten the words of Christ by Paul to them:

*“If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief, they were broken off, and **thou standest by faith**. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, **take heed lest he spare not thee**. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **if thou continue in his goodness: OTHERWISE, THOU ALSO SHALT BE CUT OFF**” (Romans 11: 17-22).*

The end of the times of the Gentiles is upon us, and the world is gradually verging, and that not very slowly, towards the moment when the entire Gentile polity, with all the pretensions and arrogance and unrighteousness of its people, will be violently wrenched from its position of privilege; and the old stock of Israel will have a wonderful reviving, with a graft from heaven, in the manifestation of the countless immortal sons of God in their midst. Thus invigorated and watered from above with the richest of heaven’s blessing, the old and rejuvenated tree, replanted on the hills of Palestine, will grow and flourish and fill the face of the world with fruit. In that day, Gentile greatness will have passed away as a dream, to return no more, but for a moment at the hour of its final extirpation from the earth (Revelation 20: 7-9).

This wonderful consummation is also contained and shadowed forth—and that not dimly—in this wonderful Memorial Song. Bringing down the history of Israel to the point at which all their power is prostrate, and the enemy everywhere triumphant, the Song breaks away on a new line which exhibits vengeance as the final dispensation in store for the prosperous adversary:

“To me belongeth vengeance; their foot (the foot of the enemy) shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For Yahweh shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants when He seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left.”

Then there is an appeal to their experience as to the vanity of their historical idolatries—an appeal that may yet be made in a very real way with thrilling effects. The lesson is forced home:

“See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with me, I kill and I make alive: I wound and I heal. . . . I lift up my hand to heaven and say, I live for ever.”

There is something more than a declaration of power in the words:

“I kill and I make alive: I wound and I heal.”

It is an enunciation of His purpose towards Israel, as well as the assertion of His greatness. He has killed and wounded Israel in their generations past, and His purpose is to heal and make alive when the time comes for His power to be recognised. This appears from what immediately follows:

“I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.

Rejoice, O ye nations with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, AND WILL BE MERCIFUL UNTO HIS LAND AND TO HIS PEOPLE.”

Here the song ends—with the return of mercy to Israel’s land and people. We have remarked on the evident divinity of its composition. See how the fact brings the Hope of Israel with it, borne aloft through all the confusion and tears of ages. Israel’s history, as here outlined, has unfolded and realised itself in the past wilderness of human life on earth. The prophetic Memorial Song has been vindicated in the desolations of the scattered race and down-trodden land. It stands monumentally as God’s witness in the earth. Witness to what? Not only to the truth and justice of His demands on the seed of Jacob—not only to His right to all He has asked and His justice in all He has brought upon them, but a witness to His purpose to overthrow the kingdoms of men—(the power of the adversary); and a witness to His purpose, written for ages and generations, to be *“merciful to His land and to His people.”* As surely as the body of the song has been verified, so will its glorious ending. Mercy will return to the race of Israel, and with it, blessedness for all the world called upon, after judgment, to rejoice with the race now scattered, then restored to favour and to joy. This is

also pledged in the song which (placed on record by Moses at the divine dictation over 3,000 years ago) is the veritable miracle of literature—an explanation and vindication of the wrath which has been Israel's portion in the weary centuries of their exile—and a pledge of the cloudless day of glory that in the purpose of Yahweh awaits all the world, when the fullness of the time has come.

CHAPTER 21—ISRAEL’S INVASION OF CANAAN UNDER JOSHUA

Moses having confided Yahweh’s memorial song to the priests for preservation, delivered his parting blessing to the tribes, and ascended “*the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah,*” and there yielded up his life and was buried,

“And no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. . . . And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 34: 6-11).

But the work of which Moses was the most signal instrument was yet unfinished. Israel yet sojourned on alien soil, and the land of promise was occupied by seven powerful nations with “cities walled to heaven,” the cup of whose iniquity was come to the full. It was needful that these should be destroyed, for such was Yahweh’s decree; and it was needful that Israel should be peaceably settled in their stead under the institutions which had been delivered to Moses on Sinai. How was this to be done in view of all the natural difficulties of the case? A continuance of divine cooperation was needful if the enterprise upon which Israel was embarked were not to end in disaster and ruin to the whole congregation. And this continuance was provided for. Joshua, who had been divinely nominated to the successorship of Moses, and upon whom Moses before his death laid his hands, was thus addressed by Yahweh:

“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. . . . There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.”

Joshua, having received these and other words of exhortation, bestirred himself executively. The first thing was to arrange for the crossing of the Jordan. On this point Yahweh’s directions to him were explicit. As an

ordinary operation, it would have been difficult for a miscellaneous multitude to have got over a broad flowing river, especially at a time of year when Jordan overflowed all its banks (Joshua 3: 15). Yahweh determined that this difficulty should be miraculously overcome by stopping the water above the place of the passage, and so leaving a channel of the river dry for Israel to get over. The performance of this work of power was associated with faith and obedience on the part of Israel. Israel was to prepare beforehand: the priests, bearing the ark, were to advance to the brink of the swollen river, and step into the water; and the water was to be stopped in its downflowing current as soon as the feet of the priests touched the water. The water would then soon drain away, and the passage would be clear for the crossing of the assembly. It so came out: and the multitude passed over while the priests stood in the centre of the dry channel.

Two things were accomplished by this, both necessary—one more than the other. An obstacle was removed from the path of Israel's work; but more important and essential than that, in the presence of the recent removal of Moses, so long the head of the assembly, Joshua was publicly acknowledged and commended to Israel as their appointed leader. This was Yahweh's own interpretation:

“This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee” (Joshua 3:7).

This object it realised most effectually, as it was well calculated to do: and that such an object was a necessary one, will be apparent when it is realised that Israel's willing compliance was necessary for the execution of the work about to be done—the subjugation of the seven nations of Canaan, and the establishment of a divine civilisation through all the land in their place. A third object was accomplished akin to the whole purpose of the Egyptian marvels. This was thus defined when the passage of the Jordan was accomplished. Twelve stones taken from the midst of the Jordan having been pitched in Gilgal, Joshua said:

“When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord, your God, dried up the waters of the Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the

Red Sea, which he dried up from before us until we were gone over, THAT ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH MIGHT KNOW THE HAND OF YAHWEH, THAT IT IS MIGHTY; THAT YE MIGHT FEAR YAHWEH YOUR GOD FOR EVER” (Joshua 4: 20-24).

This was the great object aimed at in all the miraculous cooperations of Yahweh with Israel. The miracles were no idle display of power. They were not like the prodigies of heathen fable, or the pretended miracles of impostors of every kind and hue. They accomplished very practical objects in a dignified and effectual manner, and they aimed at a result—the result defined in the capital letters above—which such means, and such means alone, were calculated to establish. As we saw in the earlier chapters, God’s existence could only be made palpably apparent in works of intelligently directed power; and only on the undoubted fact of His existence could authority be obtained for the commandments and promises delivered in His name. Israel’s history is a history of this operation among men—with results which have already largely affected the fortunes of mankind, but which are only the foundation for a more effective work in its next stage at the return of Christ to the earth in power and great glory.

A number of other manifestations of the visible hand of God in the days of Joshua will be sufficiently dealt with in a rapid summary. On the re-circumcision of Israel, after crossing the Jordan, the invisible angelic leader of the host showed himself to Joshua (Joshua 5: 13) by which Joshua’s individual faith was strengthened for the difficult enterprise upon which he was entering. Jericho, the first fortified city attacked, was given into Israel’s hands after a brief investment of the most unmilitary character that ever took place. Jehovah directed them to walk round the place, once every day for six days, led by the priests, blowing seven trumpets of rams’ horns, and headed by the armed men; and on the seventh day to do the same, seven times. On the accomplishment of these appointed peregrinations, the walls (undermined by the disintegrating force of the divine will) fell down, and Israel had but to go forward and do the appointed work of destruction on the city. By this, Israel were made to see that God was with them under Joshua, as He had been with them under Moses: while a knell was sent through the hearts of the doomed inhabitants in all the land.

At the next stage of the campaign, Yahweh discomfited a coalition of the Canaanites in the open field at Gibeon, “*casting great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah so that they were more which died from the hailstones than they which the children of Israel slew with the sword*” (Joshua 10: 11). On the same occasion, to expedite the work of judgment, the diurnal motion of the earth was arrested at the petition of Joshua, or else the sun’s rays were broken at an increasing angle, with the desired result that—

“The sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day” (verse 13).

This is one of the things that in our generation a man is considered foolish for receiving. There is no reason why it should not be received. It is testified in books proved divine, by Christ’s endorsement, and in many other ways. The wise of this world think the thing recorded is an impossibility. What is this but dogmatism? How do they know it is impossible? The fact that they have not seen such a thing is no proof that it never occurred, and cannot occur. It is absurd to maintain that the power that holds the universe in the iron grip of a common law cannot modify the action of that law in detail, if there is a need. It is a question of fact and not of philosophy. Philosophy is shallower than its mediocre worshippers imagine. Even the laws of mathematics only amount to the observation of the ordinary relations of the universe. They can throw no light on the questions of whether other and higher relations are possible. The speculation that the arrest of the earth’s revolution would have deranged the movements of the entire universe presupposes that there is no regulating power, which is not to be conceded on the mere strength of the inability of scientific observation to discover such a power. God is undiscoverable to human search, because His greatness is too vast and subtle for human detection, and because He fends off all the prying of curiosity and human presumption, as shown by all the lessons of revelation. Finally, it may be that the earth’s revolution was not arrested, but that the sunlight was gradually deflected at a slowly-increasing angle, with the effect of causing the sun to appear to remain stationary. God has many ways of working. It is only a question if He doubled the length of the natural day for the thorough performance of Israel’s work. He could do it; we need not trouble about the how; we could not understand much about it if we were told, for even the common light of the sun, and all the ordinary operations of nature, are utterly beyond our comprehension as to the how. We only know

them as facts. It is the height of presumption to assert that there are no other facts than we know, or that we are not to receive an authenticated fact if it happens to be outside the narrow circle of our experience. It was also in the nature of miracle to—

“Harden the hearts of the kings, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that He might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses” (Joshua 11: 20).

This, however, would not be obviously miraculous. The nations would simply exhibit that disposition of reckless disregard, which is by no means an uncommon spectacle among mankind. There would, nevertheless, be a difference. The common indiscretions of men are due to what they are in themselves, while this would be generated by divine influence operating upon them, as came to pass in the case of Israel themselves afterwards in later ages, when, as Josephus testifies, the Jews seemed to act under a divine fury, impelling them to such wild attitudes and courses towards the Romans, as brought on their complete destruction.

The infatuated Canaanites were powerless before the sword of Joshua, and it came to pass in five years or so, that—

“Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said unto Moses: and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war” (Joshua 11: 23).

Then another scene presents itself. When Israel settled in the peaceable possession of the land, the visible hand of God was for a while withdrawn, except in so far as the divine presence was in the tabernacle of the testimony at Shiloh, where it was pitched. At first, Israel were obedient to the law which had been given them. So long as Joshua lived, and all the elders who overlived him, *“who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel,”* Israel faithfully served the Lord; but when these had passed off the scene, the next generation became restive under divine restraints, and not only disobeyed the commandments that concerned their own ways, but actually discarded the worship of Yahweh, and turned aside to the idolatries practised by the surviving Canaanites whom they had disobediently failed to exterminate. The next exhibition of the visible hand of God was, therefore, one of anger. An angel of Yahweh came to Bochim, and, reminding them of

what Yahweh had done for them, asked them why they had disobeyed His voice in making a league with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land. The angel's words produced a momentary sorrow, which found vent in national tears (Judges 2: 5). But the tears soon dried away, and the people soon relapsed into their apostate ways, in punishment of which Yahweh raised up trouble for them, and gave them into the hands of their neighbours, who brought them into deep affliction. In their trouble, they returned to Yahweh, and He had mercy upon them, and raised up deliverers. This happened several times. In the course of these deliverances, the visible hand of God was shown several times. The case of Gideon is peculiarly interesting.

In his days,

“Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.”

The first response to Israel's cry was a message by a prophet, upbraiding them with their disobedience. But next (for Yahweh is merciful) *“there came an angel of Yahweh, and sat under an oak,”* at a spot in Ophrah, where Gideon was threshing wheat in concealment from the Midianites. The angel saluted Gideon with these words:

“Yahweh is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.”

Gideon, not knowing his visitor was an angel, but supposing he was only a man, asked why evil had befallen them if Yahweh were with them, and where all the miracles were, of which their fathers had told them. Whatever answer (not recorded) may or may not have been given to this question, the angel informed Gideon that he (Gideon) was to effect Israel's deliverance from the Midianites. The intimation filled Gideon with surprise, on account of his smallness and family obscurity. The angel rejoined in Yahweh's name,

“Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite Midian as one man.”

Gideon, realising the character of his visitor, desired some evidence of the reality of the matter, that he might be sure his senses did not deceive him:

“Show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee and bring forth my present.”

The angel consented to wait, and Gideon went into his house and got ready a meal of cakes, meat and broth, to set before the angel. On his return with the food prepared, he found the angel sitting in the same position (under the oak). The angel directed him to put the flesh and cakes on an adjacent rock,

and to pour out the broth. Gideon did so, and the angel then touched the articles of food with the end of a staff he had in his hand, upon which an instant and complete combustion of the whole occurred. The cakes, flesh, and broth disappeared in flame, and the angel disappeared at the same moment. The object of this wonder was powerfully attained. Gideon, whose faith it was necessary thus to fortify as the instrument of the impending deliverance of Israel, "*perceived that he (his visitor) was an angel of Yahweh,*" and he instantly set to work to take the necessary measures for achieving the work assigned to him. As the result of those measures, "*all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east gathered together.*" Gideon also gathered the Israelites; but his force was so small compared with the mustering masses of the well-appointed enemy, that he naturally felt a twinge of misgiving, and a desire to have some further guarantee that there was no mistake about the divine origin and support of his enterprise.

"He said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand as thou hast said, Behold I will put a fleece of wool on the floor: if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand as thou hast said."

God is not unreasonable: He desired Gideon to be quite certain that the angelic message was a reality. Therefore He complied with Gideon's request. Early on the morrow Gideon, going out to the fleece, found it drenched with moisture, while the ground on which it lay was dry. He wrung out of it a bowlful of water. But Gideon had again a misgiving. Perhaps some one overheard his prayer, and wet the fleece in water and put it on the ground. He would like to make assurance doubly sure. If he could have the sign reversed—if the ground might be wetted while the fleece should remain dry (he knew no man could do that)—but he was afraid to propose it. He said to God,

"Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once";

And he spoke, and made his proposal.

"And God did so that night, for it was dry on the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground" (Judges 6: 40).

There is no more distinct illustration of the object of miracle in all the Scriptures than this. It is either to make His power known, as in the case of

the Egyptian plagues, or (as in this) it is to give warranty of the divinity of any work in which God proposes to employ the voluntary cooperation of man.

The next instance of the visible hand of God is similar. It was about a hundred years later on when, Israel having been a long time in bitter servitude to the Philistines, the time had arrived when God would deliver them. The angel of Yahweh appeared to the wife of Manoah, of the family of the Danites, in Zorah, and informed her of the coming birth of Samson, for this purpose, and of the need for bringing him up as a Nazarite. The woman, without knowing the nature of her visitor, described him to her husband as “*a man of God (with) countenance like the countenance of an angel of God—very terrible*” (Judges 13: 6). Manoah entreated Yahweh that the man might return to them to instruct them how to bring up the child that should be born. Manoah’s request was granted, and the angel returned and repeated the message, with instructions how the mother was to treat herself. Manoah, who “*knew not that he was an angel of Yahweh,*” asked the man’s name, and pressed him to accept their hospitality. The angel declined on both points, but consented to remain while Manoah offered an offering to Yahweh.

*“And Manoah took a kid with a meat offering and offered it upon a rock unto Yahweh. And the angel did wondrously. And Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass when the flame went up toward heaven that **the angel of Yahweh ascended in the flame of the altar.** . . . Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of Yahweh”* (Judges 13: 19-21).

Afterwards came the birth of Samson, who was tended, in accordance with the angel’s instructions, with all the scrupulous care which such a prelude to his birth would generate.

When Samson was grown to manhood, he evinced a super-natural strength which enabled him single-handed to work his will upon the enemies of Israel, and finally to deliver his people. The record of his exploits is a record of miracle, in so far as his great strength was miraculous; but in so far as those exploits were natural to great strength, the narrative need not particularly engage our attention. Suffice it, that the whole episode was one of many instrumentalities by which the feeble and struggling nationality of Israel was divinely kept alive in the midst of unfriendly surroundings, which,

left to themselves, would have destroyed it from the earth, as in the case of all other nationalities of that time. The miraculous was a necessary element occasionally brought to bear in the process by which this result was achieved. The agencies employed were in the main natural, but, in the right manipulation of these, the visible hand was necessary at certain points, and the time of Samson was one of these.

CHAPTER 22. —ISRAEL UNDER THE JUDGES

After the death of Samson, Israel remained for a time in subjection to the Philistines, Eli being high priest at Shiloh and judging the people according to the law. The corruptions of the priesthood were great and grave, and there was a hiding of the divine countenance. We are told (1 Samuel 3: 1) that *“the word of the Lord was precious in those days: there was NO OPEN VISION,”* or, as it is worded in connection with another time, *“there was no answer from God.”* The record of such a fact brings very important inferences with it for those who have any doubt of the divinity of the Bible record. Why should it be stated *“there was no open vision”*? There was no object to be served by such a record. It is a record of that kind that could only come to be made because it was true: and if made because true in this case, would it not have been made in all other cases where true? The theory of unbelief is that there never was open vision; that revelation is a thing that never took place: and if this theory is true, how is it to be explained that the Bible writers discriminate between times when there was no open vision and times when there was? The recognition and acknowledgment of times when revelation was non-occurrent afford a strong guarantee that the same testimony speaks truly when it records revelation as active. Not that genuineness of revelation depends upon this argument, because we have the things revealed and the many involved circumstances, spread over a great length of time, to which they stand related, and we know that no other view than the genuineness of the revelation will suit or explain the whole case. Nevertheless, it is important to note the powerful significance of a little circumstance like this, that the writer should say, *“there was no open vision”* at a certain time in Israel’s history. It has its companion in another circumstance of like significance, that the prophets who prophesied foretold a time when there should be no prophecy: a time when men should search in vain the earth around for the word of active revelation (Micah 3: 6-7; Amos 8: 11-12). Such a prophecy is inexplicable on any principle, except that the prophets prophesied by the Spirit of God. If the prophets prophesied by enthusiasm, fanaticism, rant, or natural gift, their prediction of the cessation of their own office is the most wonderful and unintelligible of all their prophecies; still more, in view of the fact that it has come true, as all their other prophecies have, in so far as they belong to the past. The idea is

inconsistent with all experience. It is excluded by all the facts of the case. It is the wild and absurd attempt of unbelief to get rid of incorrigible truth.

But the time was at hand for the word of revelation again to be heard. Samuel was to be the channel of utterance. He was at present a child, who “knew not the Lord”; who had, by providential circumstances, been placed under the care of Eli, to whom he ministered in little offices connected with the tabernacle in Shiloh.

“The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Yahweh and also with men” (1 Samuel 2: 26).

By and by there came from God an intimation of Samuel’s coming elevation, by a man of God with heavy message to Eli:

*“Thou honourest thy sons above me. . . . I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now Yahweh saith, Be it far from me, for **them that honour me I will honour**, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. . . . Thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation in all the wealth which God shall give Israel, and there shalt not be an old man in thine house for ever. And I will raise me up a faithful priest”* (1 Samuel 2: 30).

Shortly after this, there was a commencement of that divine communication to Samuel which led up to his appointment as the faithful priest. The circumstance is so interesting in itself that it has become famous wherever the Bible is in circulation, and the subject of many a picture. “*Samuel was laid down to sleep*” (in his place in the environs of the tabernacle) when Yahweh called him by name. Samuel supposed it was Eli that called, and went to him. Eli told him he had not called, and Samuel lay down again. Yahweh called him again. Samuel again went to Eli saying, “*Thou didst call me.*” Eli said, “*I called not my son; lie down again.*” Samuel lay down again, but the voice a third time brought him to Eli, and “*Eli perceived that Yahweh had called the child.*” He directed him to return to his place of rest, and should the voice again call, to respond, “*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*” Samuel did so, “*And Yahweh came and stood*” (that is, the angel came and stood), and called again. Samuel answered, and the angel delivered a message concerning the judgment impending over the house of Eli because of their sins. Samuel afterwards “*told Eli every whit, and hid nothing.*”

“And Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him and did let none

of his words fall to the ground.”

The fact became known to all connected with the service of the tabernacle, and the knowledge of it spread through those who came to the tabernacle from far and near.

“And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Yahweh. And Yahweh appeared again in Shiloh, for Yahweh revealed himself to Samuel, in Shiloh, by the word of Yahweh.”

Thus was the hand of God made visible again in the midst of Israel after an interval. It was the visible hand in the form of direct revelation, both by angelic message and the inspiration of the Spirit. The nature and bearings of these modes of divine manifestation have already been considered in chapter three, and therefore may be passed over. We pass on to the incidents that succeeded in the course of Samuel’s life. Some time after his establishment to be a prophet of Yahweh, Israel made an attempt to throw off the Philistine yoke. They raised an army and went against them. The Philistines met them, and defeated them. Israel then called a consultation:

*“Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? **Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.**”*

This proposal to fetch the ark was carried out; and there is a good deal of significance in the circumstance, especially when taken in connection with what came of it. What came of it was simply this—no help at all, but utter ruin, for on a renewal of the battle, Israel was completely routed, and the ark itself taken. But how came Israel to have the idea that the ark would save them? There must have been a history of the ark to justify such a thought. We have such a history in the case of Moses and Joshua. Marvels were wrought in connection with it in their day: allow these, and the divinity of all that follows (to the last verse in Revelation) is established. Deny these, and the confidence of Israel that the ark would save them is without explanation. Not only Israel, but the Philistines had great expectations from the ark, which must have had the same substantial foundation. We read,

“When the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout,

they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, and they said, Woe unto us! . . . who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with the plagues in the wilderness.”

Here were the Philistines afraid and Israel exultant, and yet Israel met with a disastrous overthrow in the battle that ensued. Thirty thousand of Israel's finest troops fell on the field, and the rest fled in utter rout. On this there arises a very obvious reflection. An event like this would not have been recorded in Israel's history, by any class of recorder, if it had not occurred. The record of such a humiliation is a monument of unvarnished veracity. True, say one and all—true, true. Israel was undoubtedly defeated. The enemy joins in this recognition—the enemy who would have us regard the record as a lying one in the main. He forgets to note that the veracity shown in the record of a humiliating defeat is a guarantee of veracity on the other occasions when it is victory and not defeat that is described—described, too, in terms of equally colourless candour. If the ark was no protection to Israel on this occasion, what about the opening of Jordan's waters, when the feet of the priests bearing the ark touched the brink of the river at the time of the crossing under Joshua? The truth of the no-help narrative is a pledge of the truth of the all-help narrative. If the latter was the result of vain-glorious invention, the same influence at work would have precluded the writing of the former. If superstitious reverence for the ark was the cause of attributing triumph to the ark, the same superstitious reverence would have prevented the record of Israel's defeat and the capture of the ark by the Philistines. The tenor of the narrative itself excludes the idea of invention or gloss. The Philistines regarded the ark superstitiously, and the unenlightened portion of Israel did so, saying,

“Let us fetch the ark, that when IT cometh among us, IT may save us.”

But the writers of all these Scripture narratives attributed nothing to the ark, but all to the power of God present with them. On this very occasion, when trust was placed in the ark, instead of God, whose symbolic presence it was, the narrative shows us the ark a discredited and helpless piece of furniture in the hands of the enemy—a fact inexplicable on any theory except that of simple truth. This conclusion imparts interest to the scenes next exhibited,

which show us the ark a plague in the hands of the Philistines. The Philistines brought the ark in triumph to Ashdod, and placed it in the temple of the idol Dagon. *“They set it by Dagon,”* in token of Dagon having got the upper hand of the God of Israel, which they superstitiously considered the ark to be. This was a change in the situation of things, which evoked a corresponding change in the divine attitude. Though God dishonoured the ark when disobedient Israel clung to it idolatrously as a charm against evil, the case was different when it was used to the dishonour of His own name, and the exultation of a heathen idol. He would not suffer this insult. He pulled the idol from its pedestal during the night, and flung it prostrate before the ark with a violence that broke off its head and hands. In addition to this, he plagued the inhabitants of the place with a painful disease. The inhabitants rightly interpreted the omens, and refused to allow the ark to remain with them. At a public conference, it was decided to send it to Gath. It was sent to Gath, but the Gathites could not do with it any more than the men of Ashdod. The Gathites suffered exactly as the men of Ashdod had done,

“And the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction.”

It was next sent to Ekron, and the plagues that destroyed Gath followed the ark to Ekron,

“And the cry of the city went up to heaven.”

These journeys of the ark occupied seven months. By the end of that time, the Philistines resolved to send the ark out of the country. It was not without some reluctance that the chiefs consented to this surrender of the important conquest which they had made. It was partly due to the expostulations of the Philistine *“priests and diviners.”*

“Wherefore do ye harden your hearts,” said they, *“as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go and they departed?”*

(The tradition of the Egyptian plagues had gone far and wide, and lingered among the eastern nations, as is the wont with such matters in the East to the present day). These Philistine priests made a proposal which should satisfy the objectors (if there were any, which there must have been from the nature of their proposal)—satisfy them, that is, as to whether the plagues afflicting them were attributable to the hand of the God of Israel, or were *“a chance*

that had happened unto them.” They proposed that the ark should be placed on a new cart (made for the purpose, and, therefore, without such affinities as might be feared would attach to one that had been in use in some particular way); and that to the new cart should be yoked two cows in milk, whose calves should be taken from them and secured at home; and then to leave the cows undirected to take what route they liked. The route for the land of Israel lay in one direction, and the road towards the calves in the opposite. In the ordinary working of nature, the disposition of the cows in such circumstances would have been to make straight home to the calves. Would they make towards the calves, or would they take the road to the land of Israel? The Philistines agreed to make the result turn on this.

“If the cart goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then Yahweh hath done us this great evil, but if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened unto us.”

This was certainly a severe test, and it worked out with unmistakable simplicity and directness.

“The kine took the straight way to Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.”

The fact is, the animals were divinely impelled, and could no more resist the inclination to make toward Bethshemesh, than in the ordinary circumstances they could resist the inclination to go to the calves. Their decided preference for the route contrary to nature satisfied the lords of the Philistines, who followed them to Bethshemesh, and restored the ark to the land of Israel.

Arriving at Bethshemesh, we have another exhibition of the visible hand of God, which unites signally with the features of the case already considered, in establishing the divine character of the whole transaction. The ark was welcome to the inhabitants, as we may well imagine.

“They saw the ark, and were rejoiced to see it.”

An imaginary narrative must needs have taken the form of depicting a degree of blessedness attending the progress of the ark in its own country corresponding with the distress inflicted on the Philistines while an exile from home. Instead of this, on the arrival of the ark in the midst of Israel,

“Yahweh smote the men of Bethshemesh, and the people lamented because Yahweh had smitten of them with a great

slaughter. And the men of Bethshemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?'”

Why was this?

“Because they had looked into the ark of Yahweh” (1 Samuel 6: 19).

The cart had come to a stand in the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite; and the people in the surrounding hills and valleys, seeing it, assembled, and made demonstrations of joy, offering burnt offerings and sacrificing sacrifices. But they also pressed familiarly near, and did that which was forbidden by the law. It was an appointment of the law that none but the high priest and sons were to look on the holy things on pain of death (Numbers 4: 15, 20). This law was broken at Bethshemesh; and a destructive manifestation of Yahweh’s displeasure was the consequence. If this happened then everything is established, from Genesis to Revelation. If it did not happen, it will baffle ingenuity to explain why a narrative so candid, so circumstantial, and so clear, should invent such a thing—a thing so discreditable to the nation for whom the record was written, and throwing so harsh a light (as looked at from a human standpoint) upon their own God. There might be a degree of plausibility in attributing the record of the ark plagues among the Philistines, to the Jewish vanity of the recorder; but what is to be said about the record of destruction and disaster among the Jews themselves on the return of the ark? Such a record is only intelligible on the principle of its being true—a remark which increasing acquaintance with the Bible will endorse with increasing emphasis, concerning every separate part of the Bible, and especially concerning the Bible as a whole.

The Israelites of Bethshemesh, like the Philistines of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, were anxious to be rid of the ark which had been the occasion of such calamity in their midst. They therefore sent messengers to the Israelites of Kirjathjearim, apprising them that the Philistines had returned the ark, and asking them to take charge of it. The Israelites of Kirjathjearim complied with their request. They *“came and fetched up the ark of the Lord and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill.”* Here the ark remained in quietness twenty years. Meanwhile, *“all the house of Israel,”* becoming aware of their deserted condition, *“lamented after Yahweh.”* Samuel, responding to this condition of mind, assembled them and pointed out that the first thing to be done was to put away the strange gods which many of

them were worshipping in imitation of the heathen. Israel complied with Samuel's directions and "*served Yahweh only.*" Shortly afterwards affairs remaining in affliction with them, he summoned them again at Mizpeh, and mad them confess their sins, and prayed for them. The Philistines, hearing of this assembly, and fearing a revolt, came up against them to battle. This put the assembled and defenceless multitude in great fear. Samuel prayed yet more earnestly.

"Samuel cried unto Yahweh for Israel, and Yahweh heard him."

The result was soon manifest. While the Philistines were on the point of attacking the assembly,

"Yahweh thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them."

The army, thrown into confusion, broke up and fled, and Israel pursued them with results so disastrous to the Philistines, that "*the Philistines came no more into the coast of Israel*" during the days of Samuel. Thus God can help and did help by the display of His visible hand. If such displays do not take place now, it is because the Gentiles are in the ascendant and His honour in the dust. The day for the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is near at hand; and when it arrives, there will arrive with it the re-manifestation of the visible hand of Yahweh in the decision of military conflict in a form and on a scale that will eclipse all former puttings forth of His power, and confound mankind to the end of the world.

Samuel judged Israel during the rest of his days in peace, making a yearly circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpeh. When he was old, an immense national deputation waited on him, petitioning him to appoint a king over them, after the manner of the surrounding nations. They had been in the land nearly five hundred years, and had never had a king. This is something worth thinking about. Why hadn't they a king? If Israel had been a nation of human origin, kingship would certainly have characterised them from their beginning: for it was the universal institution, and Israel always showed an innate propensity to imitate those around them. Egypt, from whence they came, showed them the example: so did the Canaanitish nations whom they subdued on their arrival. So with Assyria and every nation known, and yet for nearly five hundred years, Israel were without a king. It is impossible to account for this apart from the fact exhibited in their Scripture history, and

which came out prominently in connection with this deputation to Samuel, that they were a divinely organised and governed nation; that the high priest was but an intermediary between them and God; and that the judge, or governor for the time being, was but an administrator of the law given them by Moses: that, in fact, God was their king. It was the fact that God was their king that made Samuel grieved at their request that they should have a human head like the surrounding nations. While Samuel was chafing under the displeasure excited by their request,

*“Yahweh said unto Samuel . . . they have not rejected **thee**, but **they have rejected ME, that I should not reign over them.***

According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so they do also unto thee” (1 Samuel 8: 7-8).

Consider the significance of such an incident in the fifth century of Israel’s national existence. Consider the meaning of such an utterance as this, written ineffaceably in the very heart of their national archives. If the incident did not happen, if the utterance be not true, the existence of such a narrative in Israel’s official records is inexplicable. Because, in that case, we should have to assume that Israel’s transactions and Israel’s records of them were all of human nature and origin; and we should in that case have to explain how such a passage of official history came to be inserted in their records by men writing with human aims and human views of things. Judging from the performances of human nature in all other instances—Jew or Gentile, ancient or modern—this would be an impossibility. The mere existence of this history necessitates its truth; and if true, then God brought Israel out of Egypt, and gave them a law that kept them distinct from all nations in political form for five hundred years. In that case, the Bible is established throughout, from Genesis to Revelation.

Yahweh directed Samuel to comply with the wishes of the people, intending through his compliance to lay, afterwards in David, the foundation of His ultimate purpose to set up over Israel and all nations that blessed ruler in the fear of Yahweh, whom in the 2nd Psalm he styles, “*My King.*” Samuel, divinely directed, appointed Saul over them—a king whom Yahweh “*gave them in His anger, and took away in His wrath*” (Hosea 13: 11). When Saul had been established as king, Samuel, whose end drew near,

assembled Israel to bid them farewell, and to deliver a parting reproof. He said,

“Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you, and I am old and grey headed . . . Now, therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before Yahweh of all the righteous acts of Yahweh which He did to you and to your fathers.”

Samuel then briefly rehearsed their history from the day of Jacob’s descent into Egypt to the time of their asking a king. In the course of his remarks, he then told them,

“Your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of Yahweh in asking for a king.”

He proposed to make this manifest before their eyes by the exhibition of the visible hand of God. He said,

“Is it not wheat harvest today? (that is, a time in that climate when thunder and rain were out of the course of nature). I will call unto Yahweh, and He will send thunder and rain, that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great.”

(What public leader, ancient or modern, ever addressed his constituents in such terms? They are only natural to a man who acts by the authority of God.) And Samuel did as he said. He called unto Yahweh, and Yahweh sent the demonstration requested. (It is easy for God but impossible for man to manipulate the elements that go to make the weather.)

“Yahweh sent thunder and rain that day”:

And the people, as was natural, were afraid. They humbled themselves before Samuel, crying,

“Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.”

Samuel responded comfortingly, yet in words of unflinching faithfulness. He said—

“Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following Yahweh, but serve Yahweh with all your heart . . . for Yahweh will not forsake His people, for His great Name’s sake, because it hath pleased Yahweh to make you His people.”

CHAPTER 23. —SAUL AND DAVID

Saul proved an unfaithful king. What that means will be discerned by those who understand the difference between faithfulness in its common acceptation and faithfulness towards God. A man is faithful in the common acceptation who performs what he undertakes as between man and man; but a man faithful to God is one who aims at carrying out the appointments of God for no other reason than that they are the appointments of God. Such a man has such an aim, because he discerns, and is deeply impressed with the fact, that all things belong to God, and that God only has the right to appoint what is to be done. Because he so discerns, and because the wisdom and excellence of God are lovably manifest in him, he “*delights in the law of God after the inward man,*” as Paul expresses it. “*I delight to do thy will, O my God,*” as David has it. Such a man is faithful to God, because his first consideration is, “What is the will of God? What is His appointment?” In this sense, Paul informs us that Christ was “*faithful to him that appointed him*” (Hebrews 3: 2). This also was the distinguishing excellence of Moses as a servant, as Yahweh Himself pointedly declared (Numbers 12: 7-8). More or less, it is the characteristic of every accepted son or daughter in every age. This, in fact, is the faithfulness of the faithful to be manifested and acknowledged in the day of account: a controlling susceptibility in reference to the divine will: an anxiety to know it; a zealous readiness to do it.

The Saul class are by no means distinguished in this way. They are governed by their own impressions and feelings as natural men. They are unsusceptible of solicitude towards God. They conceive of things, and do things merely as creatures possessing a certain power of observing facts and reasoning on them. They have no active sense of God’s prerogative; no tender zeal for His will: no jealousy for His rights or regard for His name. Nay, they have not even a practical sense of His existence. The things they see and the things they feel form the boundary line of their philosophy. They are insensible to the higher aspect of things as the embodiment of the Father’s power for the Father’s purposes. They are strictly creatures of sense —“common sense,” as it is called—which is all very well for the regulation of matters that are to be discerned only by the ear and eye: but out of place

when applied to things that we can only know by revelation, such as the will of God and the nature of duty.

Saul showed himself a thoroughly natural man in these respects on more than one occasion. One case may suffice to illustrate all. He was sent to destroy the nation of the Amalekites. His instructions were specific, very precise, and thorough:

“Go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

We will not stay to discuss the humanitarian view of these words—the view, namely, that they are inhuman, barbarous, bloodthirsty words—words by no possibility divine. This view has been sufficiently disposed of several times over by the exhibition of the truth that the Creator as the Proprietor may, when He sees fit, with righteousness become the Destroyer of men; and that a man who receives a command to destroy in such circumstances, performs a work of righteousness in performing the commanded work of destruction, as Joshua did in the utter extermination of the Canaanite population that came into his hand, and as Christ and the saints will do when they “*execute the judgment written*” and destroy the wicked from the earth. Saul, not realising the divine point of view in the case, only partially executed his commission. He and the people spared the king of the Amalekites, and also “*the best of the sheep and of the oxen, and of the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy THEM, but **everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly***” (1 Samuel 15: 9).

This was acting the part of the natural man as distinguished from the spiritual man. To destroy the “*vile and refuse*” was to destroy because vile and refuse, and not because God had commanded. To save “*the best of the sheep and oxen*” was directly to disobey God—not perhaps out of a desire to disobey, but from a natural sense of the desirability of preserving “*the best of the sheep and oxen.*” When Samuel, on Saul’s return, found fault with this, Saul sought to palliate his offence with a plea which made matters worse.

“The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God: the rest we have utterly destroyed” (1 Samuel 15: 15).

Samuel's rejoinder touches the pith of the matter:

"Wherefore did'st thou not obey the voice of Yahweh?" (1 Samuel 15: 19).

Saul repeated that he had obeyed, and that what had been preserved had been preserved for God's own service in sacrifice. Samuel's answer shuts Saul's mouth:

"Hath Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to OBEY is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of Yahweh, Yahweh hath rejected thee from being king."

Upon this Saul revealed the true secret of his proceeding.

"I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."

He confessed he had sinned in the matter, but it was the confession of a man who finds himself in the custody of the law—caught in the act. It was the withdrawal of the crown that brought him to his knees. When left to act without compulsion, he acted from merely natural considerations—the fear of man and the desire to possess eligible spoil. He did not act from a recognition of the sacred and terribly binding obligation of the divine commandment. He acted exactly as Adam and Eve did; disobeyed from good motives as such are reckoned by the merely natural man. In this is to be found the answer which those need who say they cannot see in what way Saul was so bad a man. He was not a bad man according to the human standards of action. He was a bad man according to the divine standard, which is the eternal standard. He did not recognise the divine will as the rule of action, but acted from human impression of what was nice, and convenient, and useful, which is all very well where the divine will has neither prescribed nor prohibited, but which is the reverse where God has commanded. On this same principle, we may easily discern how it is that many men are "good" men according to human estimate, but not good according to the divine estimate. The first ingredient of goodness towards God, without which goodness has not begun, is obedience, springing from knowledge which generates love and fear. It was in this sense that Saul (though a tall man, "*a goodly man to look to,*" and an amiable good-natured sort of man that would be popular with the world) was by no means a man after God's own heart, as his successor was.

It became necessary, in the circumstances narrated, to choose his successor: and, in the choosing, we have the hand of God made visible. It was no mere operation of Providence that elevated David from the sheep-fold to the throne, though Providence afterwards cooperated in the process. The finger of God visibly pointed him out. Samuel received direct command thus:

“Fill thine horn with oil and go, I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons” (1 Samuel 16: 1).

“And Samuel did that which Yahweh spake, and came to Bethlehem.”

Arrived at Jesse’s house, he would have been helpless in the selection without the visible hand of God. He called the sons of Jesse one by one. The first to stand before him was Eliab, the first-born, tall, and of good countenance. Samuel, impressed by his appearance, concluded that this was Saul’s successor. Samuel, without the directing voice of God, external to himself, was as incapable of divine discernment as any other natural man.

*“Yahweh said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature: because I have refused him, for Yahweh seeth not as man seeth, for **man looketh on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looketh on the heart.**”*

So another of the sons was sent for, and Abinadab stood before Samuel, but with the same result:

“Neither hath Yahweh chosen this.”

The third was sent for, and a like declaration refused him. The whole seven passed in this way, and none chosen. Samuel was at a loss. He enquired of Jesse:

“Are here all thy children?”

The answer revealed a “youngest”—too insignificant to have been thought of—a boy keeping the sheep. Imperative command of Samuel brought him into the house. As he came in, *“ruddy, withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to,”* Yahweh said to Samuel,

*“Rise, anoint him, for **THIS IS HE.**”*

Samuel did so: and the Spirit of Yahweh came upon David from that day forward. Thus was the visible hand of God employed in the nomination and anointing of the founder of that royal house, which is the basis of God’s everlasting arrangements on earth; for the house of David was afterwards by

covenant made the house of the Kingdom of God, on the throne of which, when rebuilt in the earth, the Son of David will reign for ever, surrounded by all his brethren, including David himself, and probably several of his interim successors, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc.

Saul reigned several years after David's nomination to the kingdom. They were years of chagrin, envy, and mortification to Saul. Naturally so to such a man. Had he been sensitive to the divine will, it would have been otherwise: for such a man would have recognised and acquiesced in the appointment of David with alacrity, and even zeal. But a man who has not God before his eyes, but finds enjoyment in a position or occupation of honour in itself, is the man that is unfit to fill it for God, and certain to become the subject of consuming jealousy of others. A man who seeks to do the will of God is not liable to be affected in this way: for it is his joy to see the work of God done, by whomsoever, so that it be the work of God, and not the work of the devil under a guise, as it is always liable to be in this age of the devil's supremacy—a mere ministering to self-gratification, instead of the doing of those things that are well-pleasing to God. Saul was a merely natural man, and therefore he "*eyed David from that day forward,*" and "*sought to slay him.*" Saul's malady was aggravated by a divine interference with his tranquillity: "*an evil spirit from Yahweh troubled him.*" In this is another glimpse of the visible hand of God at work—a negative and not blessed form of work for Saul, but almost the only form in which he was permitted to know it henceforward; for—

"When Saul enquired of Yahweh, Yahweh answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets," the divers manners in which he signified his mind supernaturally in that age (1 Samuel 28: 6).

In this distress, he had recourse to a necromancer, "*the witch of Endor,*" through whom also the hand of Yahweh was negatively operative towards him. Necromancy was an imposture in the sense in which spiritualism is, and astrology. There was a certain kind of reality in it, but the nature of this reality was so misunderstood as to become the basis of claims and pretensions utterly groundless. The necromancers professed to rouse the dead and make them appear, whereas they but mirrored, on natural principles, the images existing in the minds of those applying to them, and reflected these impressions as in a dream—the reflection appearing a reality

because seen and reported to them by another who, on ordinary principles, could not be supposed to know. Samuel was dead, and Saul, having no longer access to divine guidance, wanted to get at him for a word of counsel in the straits he felt in the presence of a formidable army of the Philistines. He therefore had recourse to a woman to whom popular rumour ascribed the power of bringing back the dead.

What happened is commonly believed to justify the popular impression, and to prove the popular doctrine of the death state. It is commonly believed that Samuel *appeared*—not bodily, yet really and apparently, that is, in a form objective to the eyes of anyone who had been there. If this was so, why did not Saul, as well as the witch, see Samuel? Saul had to ask the woman what sort of a person was coming, showing that the perception was limited to the woman as a practiser of the necromantic art, and, therefore, that the Samuel which appeared was not an apparition of the order of popular theory, which would have been seen by both: but a vision subjective to the woman herself. Again, the person seen was an old man, with a mantle, by which Saul identified him as Samuel: do “spirits” of the apparitional order have the shape of the bodies they leave? And when a spirit or ghost leaves the body, does it take away a ghost of the clothes the body wears? Samuel’s ghost in this case had a ghost of Samuel’s clothes, which is intelligible enough in view of the nature of the apparition as the spectral impression of Samuel in the woman’s brain reflected from that of Saul. On the same principle, we see friends in dreams with their clothes. The difference in this case was that the impression was borrowed or reflected from the brain of Saul, and made abnormally visible to the woman in a waking state through her peculiar constitution. But how is the ghost of the clothes to be explained on the supposition that Samuel was really there? Furthermore, Samuel said (through the woman) “*Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?*” which is inconsistent with the view that brings Samuel “down” from paradise. Finally, Samuel said, “*Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me,*” which must be a difficulty with those who believe that while Samuel is in heaven, Saul and his sons went to hell. The fact is, the whole performance was a feat of necromancy, in which there is no raising of the dead or miraculous performance whatever but merely the exercise of brain and nervous power in an unusual way. But, doubtless, Saul was permitted, through this medium, “to get his answer of doom.” That is, the

mere spectralities of a necromantic operation were supplemented by divine information of a prophetic character, to the effect that Saul's final calamity was about to overwhelm him. This was doubtless done on the principle frequently enunciated throughout the holy oracles, that God chooses or employs the delusions of the wicked to their own confusion.

Saul's death on the field of battle the following day left the field clear for David, in whose case the hand of God was visibly shown on several occasions. We pass over the conflict with Goliath, which, though doubtless a case of God' direct cooperation, is not so manifestly supernatural as to be serviceable for the illustrations of the subject in hand. Cases of the supernatural are, in fact, not numerous in the case of David, except in the sense that his whole life was a development of the ever-present Spirit of Yahweh, which came upon him on the day of his anointing by Samuel in the house of his father Jesse, and inspired his pen as well as guided his sword, till the day of his "*last words*," when he testified that—

"The Spirit of Yahweh spake by him and His word was on his tongue"

(2 Samuel 23: 3).

In this sense, his whole life was a blaze of supernatural light and guidance, but as regards what may be called the scenic exhibition of the miraculous, the cases are few. One marked the inauguration of his career as actual king. The Philistines, hearing that David had ascended the throne of Judah, assembled their forces and invaded the land. David enquired of Yahweh what he should do, and received the directness of answer refused to Saul. Yahweh said:

"Go up: I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand."

David went up and overthrew the invading host. But the Philistines rallied and came into the country a second time. David again enquired of Yahweh as to his course, and was very precisely advised:

"Thou shalt not go up (that is, not in a direct manner to Rephaim, where they had assembled), but fetch a compass behind them and come upon them over against the mulberry trees" (exact spot indicated; but even here he was to wait a signal—a divine signal!).

"Let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of

the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall Yahweh go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.”

And David did as directed, and the result was an entire rout of the Philistines—a very important event for David at that time, in the very depressed state of Israel consequent on the Philistine victory over Saul’s host, and the very weak and sapling condition of the kingdom of David in the presence of an old established and strong power like the Philistines. It required a very direct divine taking of David by the hand in the way indicated to save the new and young kingdom from total annihilation.

The next case was of a different order. David having repelled the attacks of his enemies, proceeded to consolidate his kingdom, with which view he arranged to bring the ark from the resting place it had found for twenty years in the house of Abinadab, at Kirjathjearim, after its destructive peregrinations as a captive in the land of the Philistines. He made the ceremony of its removal an occasion of great public joy and feasting, on which, however, a cloud was thrown by the exhibition of the visible hand of God in an unfriendly form. In the midst of the rejoicings, while the procession was wending its way in the direction of the city of David, headed by David and a host of musicians and dancers, Uzzah, one of the men in charge of the ark, was smitten dead in the act of handling it. The cause was that the oxen drawing the cart containing the ark stumbled, and Uzzah, afraid apparently that the ark might fall out of the cart, “*put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it.*” The incident affected David most painfully:

“David was displeased because Yahweh had made a breach upon Uzzah . . . And David was afraid of Yahweh that day, and said, How shall the ark of Yahweh come to me? So David would not move the ark of Yahweh unto him unto the city of David: but David carried it aside unto the house of Obedom, the Gittite”
(2 Samuel 6: 8, 10).

To this incident, the remarks already made on the slaughter among the rejoicing inhabitants of Bethshemesh on the arrival of the ark in their midst from the land of the Philistines, are entirely applicable. The explanation of the occurrence is to be found in the breach of Yahweh’s appointment in the law, which David afterwards recognised (1 Chronicles 15: 13). The truth of the occurrence is evident from its mere record, for the record of such a thing

could not be accounted for on any hypothesis short of its truth. And from the fact of its occurrence follows the divinity of the entire history of Israel, and, therefore, of the apostolic testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The next case of miraculous interposition was likewise of an untoward character. It is not the next in order. It is, perhaps, the last in this sense. Strictly speaking, we ought to look, before it, at the covenant communicated to David, through the prophet Nathan, concerning the perpetual stability of his throne in the hands of a Son who should reign for ever. This was the visible hand of God in the life of David, in its most important form in one sense; as also was the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit with him, which made his glowing psalms the effusions of prophecy, and which exalted to the dignity and authority of an oracle, his “*last words*” concerning the “*everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure.*” But these most precious exhibitions of the visible hand of God are all in the nature of revelation by inspiration, to which attention has already been given early in these chapters. They do not, therefore, now call for that specific consideration which the miraculous destruction of nearly a hundred thousand men naturally challenges.

David, in a moment of human complacency, had the number of his fighting men enumerated.

“And God was displeased with this thing.”

And God sent this message to David:

“I offer thee three things: choose one of them, that I may do it unto thee . . . Either three years’ famine, or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee, or else three days the sword of Yahweh, even the pestilence in the land, and the angel of Yahweh destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel” (1 Chronicles 21: 10-12).

Concerning this also, the remark so frequently suggested by these narratives has to be made, that the occurrence of such a passage in the national archives of the house of Israel is inexplicable on any other hypothesis than its truth. If God were not in the matter, it is inconceivable that the numbering of the people should have come to be considered an offence: for on no principle natural to men left to their own thoughts would such a thing be regarded in that light. To glory in one’s greatness is universal among natural men—a

thing done and accepted as the right thing to be done in all countries, and in all ages of which history furnishes any record. Even boasting is not viewed as a crime; and as to ascertaining the exact extent of your resources, the idea of its being a censurable thing would be scouted in every land—in every age. M mere affair of innocent statistics! But here it is put down on record as a crime against God. That the king should be represented at all in the national records as falling into error is conclusive evidence of truth, in view of the universal disposition of courtiers of all sorts to be flatterers, and, at least, to be smooth spoken, and say nothing about the king's faults. But that such a thing should be represented as a punishable offence is not at all to be accounted for on the notion that we are dealing with an invented narrative. No man could suggest even a plausible notion of how such a narrative could come to be put on record if it were not true. Its truth admitted, all is clear as noonday.

David is greatly embarrassed by the fact of his having sinned in the matter (*"I have sinned greatly because I have done this thing . . . I have done very foolishly."*) But much more is he embarrassed by the choice of evil offered him. *"I am in a great strait,"* he says. He ends the strait by a choice which is also very eloquent of many things.

"Let me fall now into the hands of YAHWEH, for very great are His mercies: let me not fall into the hand of man."

Here is a distinction very real and practical to David in a moment of great trouble—

- 1, falling into the hands of Yahweh;
- 2, falling into the hands of man.

How came David to make the distinction, and to choose the former in preference to the latter? According to the view which is so very popular today, and becoming daily and rapidly more and more so, there was no "falling into the hands of Yahweh" to choose. That was a mere illusion, and any choice of that sort must have ended in nothing. If so, how came it on this great state occasion to be a practical alternative offered to David—by whomsoever? The thing offered him was not that God in providence should go against him; in such a case as that, it might be supposable that a merely human occurrence might be erroneously and superstitiously described as falling into the hands of Yahweh. The thing offered him was offered in contrast to that: he might have that if he liked—discomfiture before his

enemies or famine; but the third thing offered and which David chose, was a thing out of the order of natural occurrence altogether, and beyond the power of any priests or conjurers to manipulate, that an angel should go through the land with ravaging pestilence for three days. And the question pressingly returns and returns; how came such an alternative to be offered to David, and David to choose it, unless the matter were a matter of fact and truth, and no illusion at all? David expressly stipulated that he should “*not fall into the hand of man.*” Is not this evidence of a very practical discrimination on the part of David? He had experience of man, as we all may have; and he found, as we may all have found, that man in power is unmerciful and false. Here is no roseate idealising of human nature—so common to human books, but so foreign to the one divine book on earth, which Carlyle calls “the truest of all books.” Here rather is the flat colourless record of truth—that man was not to be trusted as the administrator of punishment.

“*Let me fall now,*” exclaims David, “*into the hands of Yahweh.*”

He gives his reason:

“*Very great are Yahweh’s mercies.*”

How came he to make such a choice for such a reason if he had had no practical experience of the thing lamented by Jonah on a certain occasion, that Yahweh is “gracious and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth of the evil?” (Jonah 4: 2). Ah, but he had had practical experience of it, and Israel before him for hundreds of years, and, therefore, he chose as he did—and wisely.

“*So Yahweh sent pestilence upon Israel, and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem, to destroy it, and as he was destroying, Yahweh beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. . . And David lifted up his eyes and **SAW the angel of Yahweh stand between the earth and the heaven**, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? Even I it is that have sinned and done evil, indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, O, Yahweh my God, be on me and on my father’s house, but not on*

Thy people that they should be plagued.”

Then followed certain directions from the angel, concerning the sacrifices suitable to the awful manifestation of the visible hand of God that had taken place. With these directions, David complied with great and humble alacrity, offering on a neighbouring (indicated) threshing floor occupied by one, Ornan, which afterwards became the site of the temple—offering there instead of before the tabernacle, because the way to the tabernacle (at that time at Gibeon) was barred by the interposing and sword-bearing angel of Yahweh (1 Chronicles 21: 18-30). With the offering of the appointed sacrifices, the terror-inspiring episode came to an end, and David proceeded to arrange for the building of the temple—afterwards erected by Solomon.

CHAPTER 24. —DAVID AND THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

David not only proceeded to arrange for the building of the temple as regards the accumulation of materials, but he handed over to Solomon the plans of the edifice, which were themselves the exhibition of the visible hand of God. They were plans that David got ready, but they were not plans of David's contriving. They were plans communicated to him by inspiration. Of this we are informed by those same records which tell us plainly of David's faults, and which have a right to be listened to when they speak to us thus—

*“David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof. . . . **The pattern of all that he had by THE SPIRIT.** . . . All this, said David, **Yahweh made me understand in writing BY HIS HAND UPON ME, even all the works of this pattern**”*

(1 Chronicles 28: 11, 19).

The plans for such a building must have been very elaborate, and have involved an amount of skilled knowledge rarely to be met with in those days, and least of all, in a warrior-king like David, who had spent most of his days in the field. The nature of the case called for inspiration, even as regards the natural difficulties of the case—how much more the purpose of the building. It was to be used as a dwelling place of the divine name and honour: a place where Israel should acceptably approach Yahweh in worship. How could such a building be of human contrivance? How could man know what would please God? When Israel came out of Egypt, the portable tent or tabernacle of worship that went with them in their wilderness journeyings was of divine contrivance, down to the very pins for holding the cords which held the court-curtains in their place. How much more needful was it that an immense and solid structure like the temple should be of divine workmanship? These considerations become especially urgent, in view of the fact that both tabernacle and temple were but architectural parables of the final temple-state which Yahweh purposed in Christ to establish among men, as the normal and everlasting relation between Himself and the population of the earth. Man could only mar such a plan in any contribution to its architecture. Man consults only the taste for the beautiful, whereas this structure, though not lacking in the beautiful, was to embody, in allegorical architecture, the

relations between God and man, which are only truly perceived from the divine standpoint. This is not the place to trace the allegory, but merely to point out the necessity for divine authorship of the temple plans, and to emphasise the fact that, in a certain sense, Solomon's temple was itself the visible hand of God in the midst of the earth.

Not only was David the architect of the temple, Solomon himself, was wisdom-filled in the same way:

“God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore, and Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kings 4: 29).

This was no mere excess of natural endowment; it was the result of express divine communication in fulfilment of promise.

*“Yahweh gave Solomon wisdom, as **He promised him**”* (Chapter 5: 12).

The promise was precise. It was given in answer to Solomon's choice. Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, when asked *“what shall I give thee?”* had said,

“Give Thy servant an understanding heart.”

“And the speech pleased Yahweh that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life . . . behold I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee” (1 Kings 3: 5, 12).

Thus, in the builder of the temple, also, we have an exhibition of the visible hand of God. How else could the temple have been carried to a divine completion? The divine doing of the work was a necessity. And the divine presence in the doing of it was manifested in all the large-hearted, enterprising, opulent arrangements of the Kingdom of Solomon throughout. It was not only that the work of the temple was so exactly planned that every block of stone, and every piece of carpentry was brought to the spot ready for its place in which it was noiselessly fitted, without work of chiselling, planing, or finishing,

“So that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building” (1 Kings 6: 7);

But the labour of the work was organised in a way to be a pleasure to everyone concerned. A levy of 30,000 men was divided into three relays of 10,000 men each, and these were sent to Lebanon, 10,000 a month by course; *“a month they were at Lebanon, and two months at home”* (1 Kings 5: 14). The same beautiful division of labour was observed in the furnishing of the royal provision.

Twelve purveyors *“provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision”* (1 Kings 4: 7).

By a wise direction of commerce, Solomon diverted the treasures of the east into the land of his dominion, so that—

“Silver came to be as plenteous as stones, and cedars as sycamores of the vale.”

“All King Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver; it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.”

Peace, plenty, and wisdom were on every side,

“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree.”

In all this, we have the manifest effects of the visible hand of God in the inspired direction of two most illustrious heads and leaders of Israel. It is an historical sketch that presents those brilliant features to us. It is no picture of the imagination. The reigns of David and Solomon are as undoubted episodes of history as those of Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth; and these are authenticated particulars of the two reigns—authenticated, we need not say, in how many ways that have in past times been passed before the reader. And they are particulars not to be explained except on the principle of their truth. And their truth is beautiful, and having the beauty that there is about no other historical truth, namely, that they illustrate for us beforehand the glories of another age of promise—an age in which both the temple and the architect and builder will have their converging significance focalised in the person of their “wonderful” descendant, Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God. He is now absent, but the word that has attested to us his birth, his

crucifixion, and his resurrection, has also attested his destined return to the earth, to re-establish the fallen Kingdom of David in power and great glory. The Spirit that photographed the temple plans on David's brain, and guided the hand of Solomon in all the wise and wonderful arrangements of his building and of his kingdom of peace, will in the coming age be manifest again, but in an abounding plenitude that will fill and ennoble a multitude—the reigning friends and body of Christ with Christ at their head. The glory of architecture that will again exemplify the visible hand of God has been shadowed in Ezekiel's specifications; while the wisdom of government springing from the same source working peace and plenty to all the families of the earth, shines on every prophetic page that tells us of the earth filled with Yahweh's glory, war banished from the usages of mankind, and death itself abolished from the ruling classes of the nations.

The dedication of the temple was signalled by the exhibition of the visible hand of God, as was suitable to the divine origin and superintendence of the building. The work having been finished (in seven busy years), Solomon assembled the heads and representative men of the tribes of Israel to inaugurate the use of the temple by the ceremonial transfer of the ark from the tabernacle that David had pitched for it in Zion, and where it had been stationed for the closing years of David's reign. The ceremony was very imposing. The whole population appears to have turned out and taken joyful part. The priests in their official robes, with Solomon at their head, took a prominent part. With feasting and every demonstration of joy, the ark was conveyed from the south-western quarter of Jerusalem (known as Zion, or the city of David) to the south-eastern plateau or elevation known as Moriah, on which the newly-finished temple reared its glorious form in the splendour of Eastern sunlight. Reaching the holy edifice, the procession entered the open-air courts of the building, which were soon filled by a densely-packed assembly of the thousands of Israel. The priests then conveyed "*the ark of the covenant of Yahweh*" into the oracle or most holy place in the heart of the inner building, which had been prepared as its final resting place.

They were not long before they hurried back again into the open air.
Why?

"A cloud (of glory) filled the house of Yahweh, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud."

Thus was intimated the divine adoption of the house erected by a divinely-inspired building king to plans divinely communicated to his divinely-chosen predecessor. God had taken possession of the building by the angel of His presence. The fact having been thus publicly manifested in the presence of all Israel, Solomon humbled himself before the oracle of the house and responded thus:

“I have surely built Thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever.”

Then turning himself to the standing assembly, he blessed Yahweh, and rehearsed the circumstances that led to the building of the temple, concluding with the words—

“Yahweh hath performed His word that He spake; and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel as Yahweh promised, and have built an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And I have set a place there for the ark, wherein is the covenant of Yahweh, which He made with our fathers when He brought them out of the land of Egypt;”

The “covenant” of this statement being the tables of stone divinely engraved at Sinai, as stated at verse 9:

“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when Yahweh made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.”

He then took up a position before the great altar, “in the presence of all the congregation of Israel,” and, lifting his arms towards heaven, addressed God in a lengthy petition perfectly suited, both as to its length and substance, to the great occasion.

The most notable feature of this prayer is perhaps the recognition of the illimitable immensity of Yahweh, in conjunction with the idea of localising His presence in a temple.

*“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens **cannot contain thee**: how much less this house which I have builded.”*

This is a complete confutation of the modern suggestion that would degrade the Jewish system of worship to a level with the heathen mythologies in neighbouring lands. In Solomon’s eyes, the God of Israel was no local God

such as the deities of the surrounding nations were to these nations, and such as the surrounding nations imagined the God of Israel to be. The great difference between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations is constantly recognised. As David says:

*“All the gods of the heathen are vanity (that is, nothing), but Yahweh **made the heavens.**”*

Could there be a greater contrast? Hezekiah, Solomon’s successor, gave very pointed expression to this discrimination in very trying circumstances when standing probably on the very spot where Solomon now spoke. The King of Assyria, in an insulting summons to surrender, had drawn a parallel, in his heathen blindness, between the God of Israel and the gods of the surrounding nations. He had said:

*“Behold thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the children of Eden, which were in Telassar? . . . Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? **Who are they among all the gods of these lands that have delivered their land out of mine hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?**”*

Hezekiah, having received a letter in such blasphemous words of blindness, went up into the house of Yahweh, and spread it before Yahweh, and in tearful words spoke in his great strait, and said,

*“Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, 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, save us from his hand **that all the kings of the earth may know that THOU ONLY ART THE LORD**, even Thou only.”*

The Being thus addressed by Hezekiah, and by Solomon in the case before us, was not the ark, nor the cherubic figures wrought in gold, that covered the ark with their wings, nor anything in the temple nor limited to the temple at all, but a Being whose illimitable vastness could not be more

forcibly expressed than in Solomon's own words,

"The heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have built."

Consequently, while dealing in this narrative with the spectacle of a house dedicated to God, we are dealing with a matter as far separated as possible from heathen ideas and practices in such a case. We are dealing with a case in which the enlightened idea is proclaimed in the foreground that God would only inhabit the house in a representative way; and that His inhabiting it in any other way was an impossibility, because He was the Maker of all things in heaven and earth, and could not, in the mechanical sense, be located at all, though having local manifestation at the centre of His universe-filling existence. The heathen idea confined their gods to their temples, and allowed the existence of other gods. This is, in fact, the corruption and degradation of an originally divine idea—the idea of the divine Being, and the divine worship, as existing in Noah's family, belittled and distorted with the progress of human ignorance—(for men left to themselves rapidly sink into ignorance)—until it came to be crystallised in the visible mythologies that have prevailed wherever there has been an absence of direct divine illumination. Away from Jewish revelation, all is darkness and hideousness. We are ashamed to have to defend the temple of the God of Israel from all derivative community with such systems of unmixed barbarism. But the tactics of "learning" so-called, impose the attitude of continual defence until the day come which David prayed for, when he said,

"Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: for the foolish man reproacheth thee daily."

At the close of Solomon's prayer, the visible hand of God was again exhibited in unmistakable manner. Sacrifices had been prepared and laid upon the altar before the house; and—

"When Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever."

All which, it will be admitted on the commonest reasonable reflection, was very appropriate and natural to the occasion. The question was, Did God accept this building as the dwelling place of His Name? How was this to be answered in a way striking home to the conviction of Israel, except by some such miraculous demonstration? Many edifices have been reared in the earth for religious uses, and we hear of “pious founders” of the endowments associated with them; but where has there been any divine endorsement? How do we know that they please God? They are nothing but the embodiment of private sentiments. But let God manifest His glory in connection with them as He did on the occasion of the dedication of Solomon’s temple: and all men would then know that the monument of private munificence was also in harmony with the divine will and the object of the divine approbation. Another thought will also occur to reflection. If God did not always accept the public sacrifices of the nation in the visible consumption by fire, there was a reason why He should do it on a great epochal occasion like the opening of the newly-built temple, when it was needful there should be explicit token of His adoption of the edifice. Afterwards, in the daily routine of worship, there was need for the absence of such; for it is God’s pleasure, when once He has given grounds of reasonable confidence, to be approached in an obedient faith which habitually conforms to His revealed will without the excitements of miracle, which would degenerate with repetition into childish sensationalism. There is a time for everything. There is a time to establish, and a time to let remain established. On this principle, having given men abundant evidence of the divinity of Christ in the miracles of his life, death, and resurrection, and having published these to the four winds in the miraculously-attested labours of the apostles, God expects men to exercise a reasonable and unfaltering faith in His Son until the due time arrive for the next display of the visible hand of His glory and power, in the resurrection of the dead at His second appearing.

The only other thing in the reign of Solomon that strikingly illustrates the visible hand of God is the reception of a direct message from God in answer to his dedicatory prayer. The message was as direct as any return telegram, or any royal message in reply to an address of Parliament to the throne. The message was this:

“I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast

made before me. I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. And if thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments, then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever . . . But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them, 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 Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people.

It was a great honour for a man to receive such a response as this, direct from the Deity! But it was also the ground of a special responsibility. This is recognised in the melancholy record of Solomon's subsequent apostasy.

"It came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart away after other gods . . . and the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel WHO HAD APPEARED UNTO HIM TWICE" (1 Kings 11: 9).

Men pray now, and have no return message as Solomon had. Prayer is now a "prayer of faith"—prayer spoken into the ear of the Eternal in the confidence inspired by past events, that though no token of hearing is vouchsafed, the prayer is heard and noted, and answered in the granting of our desires (though not necessarily in the form in which perhaps we ignorantly desire an answer). But prayer, in its normal relation, is prayer responded to as friend responds to friend, as it was in Eden, when in His angelic representatives, "*The Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day,*" and held open intercourse with Adam and Eve. This is prayer as it will be in the day of restoration, when "*the tabernacle of God shall be with men,*" and—

"His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads."

Then, in a special sense, will the promise be fulfilled,

"Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet

speaking, I will hear.”

This is the day spoken of by Christ, when—

“Ye shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

God hides His face now, because of the state of alienation from Him that prevails; and we pray in the dark, and seem to speak into soulless immensity. But the work of Christ will be done. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and when God, in him, shall have fully accomplished that reconciliation of the world unto Himself, which He proposed in the sending of His son (2 Corinthians 5: 19), there will be an end to the hiding of His countenance, and the glorified saints will experience their highest joy in those direct recognitions of their praise which alone constitute what is truly meant by *“communion with God.”* Solomon was permitted the high honour and gratification of this actual response. Therefore his sin was great in turning aside from his fealty. We are not so privileged; we tread the dark pathway of probation by the light of the written word alone. Nevertheless that light is clear, and its nature self-manifest to the attentive student. Therefore we may fear to come into great condemnation if we suffer ourselves to be beguiled from our steadfastness. Reason’s steady voice commands a patient continuance in well-doing—an enduring unto the end, even if faithfulness cause affliction. There is an issue from the darkness presently, in the glorious sunlight of Yahweh’s return and manifested presence and kindness in the midst of the house of Israel.

CHAPTER 25. —REVOLT OF THE TEN TRIBES— MISSION OF ELIJAH

The apostasy of Solomon bore bitter fruit in the succeeding reign. It had been divinely intimated that retribution would befall the house of David in the form of political rupture—the secession of ten of the tribes from their allegiance. How this was brought about in the manipulation of natural causes we have already considered in *The Ways of Providence*. We have nothing now to do with that phase of the matter. Our business is to scan the new situation for glimpses of the visible hand of God.

And we get one glimpse at once. When the ten tribes (repulsed by Rehoboam's unconciliatoriness of speech) had fairly revolted and shown the seriousness of their revolt by stoning his representative, Adoram, Rehoboam took the course natural to all sovereigns in all history in such circumstances. He assembled and equipped an immense army to put down the rebellion. With this army he was on the point of marching, when "*THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO SHEMAIAH, THE MAN OF GOD,*" ordering the abandonment of the enterprise:

"Ye shall not go up nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel. Return every man to his house: for THIS THING IS FROM ME" (1 Kings 12: 24).

Here was a phenomenon, unheard of in modern experience, but not new in the history of Israel. The history of Israel has been one of divine direction from the beginning—direction suspended since the work of Christ in their midst, as foretold, as necessitated by the situation, but suspended only for a while as explained in the same word, to be renewed when the Lord takes hold of the nation again, at the return of Christ, for His own glorious ends, which will involve the highest blessing to all mankind. It was no piece of political advice that Shemaiah gave. As mere advice, it was to be scouted on every ground of political expediency. Shemaiah, as a courtier, had he been such, never could have had the temerity to volunteer it. As a mere inhabitant of Jerusalem, it was contrary to all experience of human nature that he should have counselled a course so opposed to the heated impulse of a war-bent community. It was a divine mandate he delivered—a command from the eternal throne, to desist. Nothing but such could have averted the

needless effusion of blood impending; nothing but such, or some other miracle, could have averted the frustration of the divine purpose—that the ten tribes should become separate; for there is little doubt that, in their then unprepared state, the ten tribes could have made little stand against the disciplined army of Rehoboam. The mandate was effectual. Rehoboam recognised the divine voice, and dispersed his army, and allowed the ten tribes to organise themselves in peace under Jeroboam.

Jeroboam's position, prospects, and career we have also had to look at (in the book before referred to) in the light of the ways of Providence. It is the miraculous element we are now in search of. Therefore, we pass over the absurdities of his irrational reign, and ask only for those points and cases in which the hand of God was visibly manifested. God did not at once desert the ten tribes, although the ten tribes, under the barbarous policy of Jeroboam, entirely deserted Him (in their national capacity, at least). His hand was visibly shown in their midst for two centuries to come. Indeed, during that period there is more recorded exhibition of the visible hand of God in the midst of the ten tribes than in the midst of the kingdom of Judah, though, on the other hand, the visible hand of God continued (intermittently) in the midst of Judah for nearly 800 years after the ten tribes disappeared from the stage of history in regions beyond the Euphrates. We will hurriedly survey those exhibitions in the midst of the ten tribes during the comparatively short duration of their kingdom, and then return to the current of Judah's history—a history glorious yet in this respect, as we have said, for nearly 800 years, and ending with a blaze which all the world has seen (from the hills of Nazareth) but which, through the combined effects of a travestied theology and misdirected science (on some points) is getting very dim and almost invisible to the world's vision. Let us have patience: the darkness was in the programme. We read it there. The light is coming again, and this time, never to go out upon earth.

“The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

“The glory of Yahweh shall rise upon thee, O Israel, and the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

The first exhibition of the visible hand of God in the midst of the ten

tribes was of a peculiar character. It occurred in connection with a divine protest against the enormities of Jeroboam, Jeroboam had established idolatry at two centres, Dan and Bethel, as the religion of the new kingdom, and had appointed national feasts on dates "*devised of his own heart.*" On one of such dates, Jeroboam himself attended at Bethel to conduct the idolatrous ceremonies. There was peculiar sacrilege in the practice of idolatry in this place, which had been named THE HOUSE OF GOD—(*Beth-el*)—by Jacob on the occasion of Yahweh manifesting Himself by the angels of His power. In the height of the ceremonies, while Jeroboam, standing by the altar, was about to offer incense, a voice from the spectators near the altar apostrophised the altar in this strange and impressive way:

"O altar, altar! Thus saith Yahweh, Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee."

Everybody pricked up their ears, we may imagine, Jeroboam, looking sharply round, picked out the offender with his eye, and holding his hand threateningly towards him, ordered his attendants to lay hold of the person who had dared such contempt. His attendants no doubt were quick to obey the command, but before they could carry it out, the king himself became the subject of their solicitude. His arm remained outstretched. What a spectacle! What a humiliation! There stood the King, his impulse subsided, but his arm extended like a lifeless piece of carpentry. It had been suddenly paralysed in the act of threatening the bearer of a divine message. A further token was given to all, that the message was divine. The deliverer of the message added:

"This is the sign that the Lord hath spoken: Behold, the altar shall be rent and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out":

And the narrative informs us that—

"The altar was rent and the ashes poured out from the altar according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of Yahweh."

The king could not resist the evidence of his senses: his dried up arm—the shattered altar. He recognised the hand of God, and besought the man of God to entreat Yahweh that his hand might be restored; though this was about the whole extent of the king's solicitude; for we do not read that he took to heart the lesson against his idolatrous ways:

"And the man of God besought Yahweh and the king's hand was

restored him again, and became as it was before.”

Then the king was disposed to be very courteous, and invited the man of God home, and offered to be liberal to him. But the man declined.

The man of God was from Judah. He had received orders from Yahweh to attend the feast at Bethel, and to deliver his message against the altar, and then to come away at once and depart on his homeward journey southwards without so much as eating and drinking in the place. The act of eating and drinking is naturally a sign of peace and friendship, and there were to be neither with a community (though originally called of God) who had declined from ways acceptable to God—a lesson not without its modern applications. The man apprised the king of this command he had received, and at once set out on his return journey, by a different road from that which he took in coming (as he was also commanded). His departure was observed by certain young men who had witnessed the whole transaction with no small degree of interest, as probably thousands of others had done. These young men, on returning home, narrated to their father all that had happened. Their father was an old man, but lively, and felt a deep interest in this prophet from Judah, he having at one time been a prophet himself. Ascertaining which way the prophet from Judah had gone, he mounted his ass—(a very different animal in the East from his much-laughed-at comrade in western countries)—and went in pursuit. Coming up by and by with the prophet from Judah—(whom he found resting under an oak)—he asked him to come back with him, and partake of his hospitality. The prophet of Judah repeated what he had said to Jeroboam—that he dared not; that his instructions to the contrary were clear and explicit. Then the old man, remarking, *“I am a prophet as thou art,”* lied to him to the effect that God had ordered him to bring him back to his house. To this the prophet from Judah ought not to have listened. He knew what his instructions were: and he ought not from any human mouth have taken the countermand of those instructions, especially knowing as he did that God does not vary like man. But probably the idea of going back was agreeable to him. He was tired: he had a long way to go: he was all by himself: and he was naturally very accessible to the idea of rest and company. And he chose to think it might be the Lord’s will, and he went back—in direct opposition to what he had been commanded. Comfortably housed and enjoying the hospitalities of the lively old man (*“a prophet as thou art”*), he was sitting at table with him, when the

Spirit of the Lord came upon his entertainer, and compelled him to address his guest there and then in words very much out of place under one's own roof, according to the rules of human etiquette:

“Thus saith Yahweh, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the words of Yahweh, and hast not kept the commandment which Yahweh thy Elohim commanded thee, but camest back and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread and drink no water, thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers” (1 Kings 13: 21).

What a confounding of both host and guest. When the meal was finished, the prophet from Judah sorrowfully resumed his journey on the back of an ass which his host saddled for him. He had not gone far when, in a solitary part of the road, a lion leapt forth from the thicket and tore him from the ass's back and killed him. The lion did not mangle his body, nor did it touch the ass upon which he rode. The fact is, the lion had an unconscious commission. The Spirit of God controlled its movements, and beyond the will of the Spirit it could not go. It stood beside the ass and the dead body—a spectacle to all who passed by—which they probably would do quickly. The news soon got to Bethel and the old man—no longer lively—recognised the meaning of the report, and rode to the spot, and lifted the carcase of the prophet from Judah on to his own beast, and carried it back to the city *“to mourn and to bury him.”*

The whole case is melancholy to human feeling, as are a thousand other woes that have come from the breach of the simple but blessed and essential law of obedience. It was probably transacted and written with a view to illustrate (among many other illustrations) the imperative nature of this law; for Paul informs us that—

*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were **written for our learning.**”*

It is a lesson that could not be illustrated unambiguously without the direct unveiling of the divine hand in miracle. It is a lesson which has lost all power in the present age of the world, but which will shortly be renewed by more terrible things than the tragic death of a prophet by the roadside. A whole world has to be afflicted when Christ has returned, as it never has been afflicted, before the glory of Yahweh fills the earth, as it will, to its utmost bounds.

The visible hand of God was again shown well on in Jeroboam's reign. Jeroboam's son fell sick. Jeroboam was anxious about his recovery. Who could tell whether he would get better? He remembered the prophet who had informed him, during Solomon's reign, of his coming elevation to the kingdom of the ten tribes. If he could only speak with him, he felt sure he would learn what he wanted. But he felt it incompatible with his dignity, and with his relation to the kingdom of Judah, that he should enquire directly. In fact, he would not let it be known that he had anything to do with such an application. His wife was not known by face outside the palace. He would try and get the information through her.

"Arise," said he to her, "Disguise thyself that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam, and get thee to Shiloh. Behold! There is Ahijah, the prophet, who told me that I should be king over this people. . . . He shall tell thee what shall become of the child."

Jeroboam's wife did so, and duly arrived at Shiloh. But before her arrival, Ahijah, though blind with age, was aware of her journey and its object. Yahweh, by the spirit, had informed him of both, and that she was coming in disguise, and He put a message in his mouth for her. Ahijah watched for her coming. In due time, he heard the sound of her approaching footsteps. She presented herself at the door, having maintained her disguise successfully to this point, and was doubtless ready with her presents and some ingenious profession, by which to extract from the prophet the information wanted, without the discovery of who she was. Alas! who can be concealed from God? It was a long time before the generality of the people understood the greatness of the God who revealed Himself by Moses and the prophets, and wrought wonders among them by the hands of His angels. They little understood that, though dwellers in the far-distant heavens, He was everywhere present by His spirit, and that the most trifling circumstances cannot occur without His knowledge and permission.

"Come in," said Ahijah, "thou wife of Jeroboam," scattering her careful plans at one stroke; "why feignest thou thyself to be another? I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."

Jeroboam's wife was doubtless astounded at this sudden breaking through of her disguise. She might have expected such a thing if she were capable of reflection. She expected the prophet to know about her sick son, and whether

he would get better—she might have surmised that the power equal to discernment of such a thing would be equal to the discernment of the individuality of the woman who came to enquire. This apparently had not occurred to her; so there she stood in helpless amazement, dropping her disguise, and waiting to hear the heavy tidings. These first concerned her husband's uncircumcised behaviour, and the dreadful consequences that were in store for him and his house (1 Kings 14: 7-11). Then, as to her child, the prophet told her to go home, adding this calamitous information:

“When thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.”

We can easily imagine the dejected state of mind in which Jeroboam's wife would make that journey homewards, after such a message. She had got nothing by coming but woe. It would have been better not to have known what was coming. The ignorance in which Jeroboam sent her forth was bliss by comparison with the doleful knowledge which, though she were a queen, the prophet (no courtier) had communicated to her. Her own part was made specially bitter by the fact that she would never see her son alive again, and that her own arrival home would be the signal for his death.

“The ways of transgressors are hard.”

The whole world's history is proof of the fact, and Jeroboam's queen and partner in iniquity could not hope to be an exception while she trudged northward with heavy heart, full of the heavy tidings for which her lord was waiting. She arrived in due course at Tirzah, where Jeroboam dwelt, *“and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died.”* There was no magic in this junction of circumstances. It was the careful adjustment of events by the all-brooding and all-perceiving and all-controlling Spirit of God, whose intents in the case had been communicated to the prophet Ahijah.

It was a good many years before there was any further exhibition of the visible hand of God in the midst of the ten tribes. Affairs took the course indicated in the message by Ahijah. Disaster befell the house of Jeroboam; and the ways of Israel did not improve under his successor. He had not been in his grave two years when a military conspiracy assassinated his son, and elevated a captain, Baasha, to the vacant throne—a man who, following the insane example of Jeroboam, in a reign of twenty-four years, had his dynasty disposed of in the same way in the person of his son, Elah. This youth, proving a monster of profligacy, was put to death by his servant, Zimri, who also slaughtered all his friends. This Zimri, who had been a military captain,

like Baasha, got himself made king: but it was only for a few days. Omri, the general of the army, disposed of Zimri and his adherents, and also of Tibni, another aspirant to the throne, who took advantage of the confusion of the times to push his personal ambitions. Omri, quenching all rivals, was himself made king, and reigned twelve years, leaving the throne to his son, Ahab, in whose reign it was that there occurred that memorable exhibition of the visible hand of God that made up the life of Elijah, and that gave to the world some of the most signal illustrations of the possibilities of a state of spirit gift.

The immediate occasion and character of the work of Elijah, like all the prophets, was that of rebuke. The ten tribes, who, though separate from Judah, were still a part of God's chosen seed of Israel, had for several generations abandoned themselves to the grossest forms of disobedience. They had suspended the laws and institutions Mosaicly enjoined, and adopted the ways of the heathen around them. The result of such a course had been plainly foretold by Moses in his sublime address to them on coming out of Egypt, and that result was about to come upon them in fulfilment of the message to Jeroboam's wife; to whom, on the occasion above referred to, Ahijah had said:

“Yahweh shall root up Israel out of this good land which He gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river.”

The time was not very far off for this gathering cloud of judgment to break over Israel's head. But, as was His merciful wont, Yahweh was also about to engage in a final expostulation with His people, in a form that could leave them no excuse. He was about to raise them up the prophet Elijah, with a successor, Elisha, in both of whom the power and the expostulation of Israel's God were to be manifest as they had rarely been in previous messengers of His rebuke and mercy. It will be interesting to follow the incidents of their remarkable careers. They afford glimpses behind the scenes at some points—liftings of the curtain that divide the inner universe of divine operations from the perceptions of merely animal and sinful men, and show us some things to which we may stand related in futurity, should it be our happy portion to be chosen of the Lord for a place in that glorious family, which for ages He has been preparing for the perpetual habitation of the globe.

Of Elijah, we know nothing in a personal sense beyond the fact that he was “*of the inhabitants of Gilead*”—a region lying on the eastern side of the Jordan, which, was allotted to the tribes of Reuben and Gad by Moses, before the crossing of the Jordan. He was called “*the Tishbite,*” probably from the name of the village or town to which he belonged, a style of description of which there are numerous illustrations in the course of the Scriptures. We suffer no disadvantage from ignorance of Elijah’s family antecedents, as the whole interest of his case centres in what God did by him. He was a man of exceptionally faithful character, in the divine sense. He was “*very jealous for the Lord of Hosts*” (1 Kings 19: 10), which must have been a very notable thing in a country which Jeroboam and his successors had turned entirely aside from the worship of the God of Israel. There probably were others scattered here and there throughout the hills and valleys of the trans-Jordanic tribes who had preserved a memory of Yahweh’s dealings and a knowledge of Yahweh’s testimonies, and who stood aloof from the almost universal idolatry that prevailed. There is, indeed, a very pointed declaration of the existence of such a class in God’s communications with Elijah, at a certain stage of his work; when Elijah having said, “*I am left alone,*” Yahweh replied,

“I have reserved unto myself seven thousand men that have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

Still, of their existence Elijah was unaware. Elijah imagined he stood alone, which, undoubtedly, in his particular neighbourhood, he did. It was this solitariness of his position that made his faithful jealousy for God so noticeable. It was this faithful jealousy that fitted him to be the vehicle of such a signal display of power as took place in him, and to be honoured as Moses even himself was not honoured—honoured by translation that he should not see death—waiting in a living reservation for the further and far more effective work that Yahweh has in store for him with the same people, the same ten tribes, who were duly rooted out of the good land, as threatened, and scattered in hopeless exile to this day, from which they never have returned, but from which it is in the purpose of God to bring them, under Elijah’s leadership, certainly at a later, if not an earlier, stage of their restoration.

Ahab, having married the daughter of the most idolatrous of all the idolatrous sections of the Canaanitish residuum (disobediently left

unexterminated in the land of Israel after Joshua's conquest), Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, gave himself the fullest rein in a line of things which had been established ready to his hand by a long line of kings before him. He plunged entirely into idolatry in all its phases—omitting no opulence, no enormity, no extravagance. He erected a temple to Baal, the god of the Zidonians, in the very capital of his dominions—Samaria, and in his temple he reared an altar, travesty and outraging the divine appointment by Moses. He also made a grove for those open-air carousals which it was customary to hold under the name of feasts to their god—degrading orgies, in which licentious delights were an essential ingredient in the ceremonies of worship. He went to extreme lengths. He gave the priests of Baal a high place at his court, and carefully excluded from his surroundings every person and thing who stood in any way related to the God of Israel.

“He did more,” we are told, *“to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before.”*

It was not as the result of any great energy of character that he did so; for, on the whole, he proved a weak man. It was his complete subservience to a bad wife that led him to such excesses. But his having such a wife was itself a sin against God; for as a son of Abraham, and a descendant of the men brought out of Egypt by Moses, he was bound to make no alliance with the women of the Canaanites. The case was bad altogether; and God was about to show His anger by the hand of Elijah the Tishbite.

CHAPTER 26. —THE WORK OF ELIJAH

The work of Elijah begins abruptly, like his own appearance in the narrative. It would not be so abrupt in fact, as it appears. There would be circumstances naturally and gradually leading up to his acquaintance with Ahab, as there would be circumstances gradually and naturally leading to Elijah's own development as a faithful man among "*the inhabitants of Gilead.*" These, however, are unessential to the narrative. The narrative begins with Elijah's work. The curtain rises on Elijah standing before Ahab, and announcing to him the immediate commencement of a time of drought, and consequent famine:

"There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word."

This was in accordance with the covenant of Sinai under which Israel occupied the land. Blessing was contingent on compliance with the divine will as expressed and embodied in the Law of Moses. In the event of national obedience, the rain would be given in due season, and the land would yield its increase (Leviticus 26: 4; Deuteronomy 28: 12). In the opposite case, the rain would be withheld, and the heaven over them would become as iron, and the earth under them as brass (Leviticus 26: 19-20; Deuteronomy 28: 23-24). The ten tribes, over whom Ahab ruled, had gone entirely the wrong way. And after long patience, Yahweh was about to enforce the covenant by the hand of Elijah.

The words by which Elijah prefaced his intimation would have great significance in the court of Ahab:

"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain," etc.

This was not a mere ornamental adjuration. It struck at the logical essence of the controversy, and lays bare the need for miraculous interposition that characterised the ministry of Elijah throughout. Israel, under Ahab's leadership, were worshipping the gods of the neighbouring heathen, which were no gods at all, but fictions of the imagination associated with images of wood and stone. Elijah's mission was to draw them back to the living God of their fathers; the contrast between them is always exhibited in this light, that Yahweh was a living being, while the gods of the heathen were lifeless.

“All the gods of the nations are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens”

(Psalm 96: 5).

“Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased: their idols are silver and gold the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not” (Psalm 115: 3).

For Elijah to say: *“As the Lord God of Israel liveth,”* was to bring under their notice the mightiest fact in the controversy between him and them, and, by implication, to set forth the national sin of departure from God in its strongest light: for what could be more infatuated than for a nation to turn away from the Mighty Being who had contrived and formed the universe, who had done them the ineffable honour of condescending to make Himself known to them, and to choose them for Himself, as a nation above all other nations? What could be more insane than to turn away from such an unspeakable honour, and espouse the inanities and stupidities of barbarous mankind around them, who were doing homage to bits of created substance, falsely idealised as living beings?

The apostasy of Israel from their own national religion—their preference for the idolatries of surrounding nations—is a more significant phenomenon than it is usual for people to realise. It is significative of nothing less than the divine origin of the Mosaic system, for it cannot be accounted for on any other hypothesis. There are many national faiths and superstitions in the world: but whoever heard of a nation abandoning their own system, and gravitating to those of people around them? Israel constantly exhibited this spectacle. If their religious system had been the outgrowth of the national idiosyncrasy, such a spectacle would be unintelligible, for the idiosyncrasy developing it would have held to it. If even the system had been pleasing to them, it could not have occurred, for people hold to what is agreeable. The tendency of nations everywhere is to rejoice in their patriotic institutions and traditions, and to maintain them jealously against those of other nations, and these institutions of human derivation are everywhere in harmony with the national instincts and propensities. But here is a nation for ages in chronic revolt against their own institutions, and falling subserviently into those of other nations, which cannot be explained except on the principle furnished to us in the Scripture

account: that the Mosaic institutions, being of divine origin, were too high, and holy, and spiritual for the human sympathies and tendencies of Israel, while the surrounding idolatry being of purely human origin, presented many features that appealed to the corrupt propensities of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh.

The assertion of a living God as the issue in debate with Ahab and the house of Israel, gave a logical place to the miraculous means employed in the hands of Elijah to maintain it. How otherwise was the existence of a living volitional Being to be demonstrated? Argument is powerful, but not with the rank and file of a nation. The wisdom displayed in the ordinances of the Universe is not decisive when the question is, to whom the wisdom is to be attributed. The question can only be set at rest by acts of living intelligent power which no man could perform. Such an act was this stopping of the rain and dew. Who can control the elements? Man never realises so much the weakness that truly belongs to him as when he is out in the open air under the measureless vault of heaven. The largest of his works are insignificant there, especially in the presence of God's great mountains: and his efforts and arrangements in any direction seem the puniest movements of an insect. Even his scientific apparatus is laughed to scorn by the surrounding and imperturbable majesty of heaven and earth. If there was an age when the rain would be controlled, if it could be, it is the present, when human arrogance and human knowledge combine to generate a heaven-soaring presumption unequalled in previous ages. But the scientists are powerless to check the downpour in the day of rain, or to evoke the smallest drop of moisture on the parching day, when the heavens refuse their showers. The miracles of the Bible are mostly of this order—feats of power entirely beyond any possible application of human effort. The pretended miracles of impostors, with which some, in defiance of all reason, would class the miracles of the Bible, are puny feats, lying within the compass of human contrivance and sleight of hand. Bible miracles soar into realms as much beyond man as the immeasurable heaven above his head.

The word of Elijah came to pass. Rain ceased in all the land, and the dew refused its morning refreshment to the thirsty soil. We should not have been aware, if James had not informed us, that this result was due to prayer on Elijah's part.

“He prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5: 17).

At a first view of the case, this may seem strange. We naturally suppose that miracle—especially miracle with a national object—is independent of prayer on any one’s part; that it is the sovereign volition of Almighty Power with divine objects that are independent of the will of man. But a higher view will show us that as in affairs of natural well-being, so in divine operations of higher moment, God is pleased to put forth His power in connection with an acceptable attitude on the part of those nearly related to the matter. There are several illustrations of this in the course of Scriptural history. They are all condensed into the single allegorical instances of Moses on the top of the hill, while Israel, under Joshua, fought the Amalekites:

“When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed” (Exodus 17: 11).

Yahweh is the great and dreadful Majesty of the universe, though its beneficent, patient, and gracious Creator. He is not to be approached familiarly, but with reverence and fear, though with love. He finds pleasure in the rational and appreciative recognition of His greatness on the part of men of a humble mind; and if He predicates paternal regard now and hereafter on this recognition, it need not surprise us that the special acts of His power should have, as their accessory, the bended knee and earnest intercession of those who are acceptable to Him. Thus it was throughout the Egyptian plagues with Moses: thus it is with the great salvation to be manifested at the appearing of Christ which is preceded by a prolonged season of intercession on the part of the great High Priest whom God hath set over His house.

Elijah prayed earnestly, and the rain was suspended at his request. It does not follow that such a result can follow such a prayer at the present time. All depends upon what God wills to be done. What He wills to be done, He wills to be enquired for first, and what He wills to be done He makes known (Amos 3: 7). If He willed the miraculous exhibition of His power in the nineteenth century, He would will that His servants should entreat Him for its occurrence. He willed the chastisement of Israel in the days of Elijah by the withholding of rain; and it was His beautiful and interesting way of bringing that will into force that an earnest servant like

Elijah should earnestly pray for it—to whom doubtless it had been revealed that such a dispensation of judgment would be vouchsafed at the right season. The principle applies to us in those elements of the divine work to which we stand related. It is His revealed will in this the end of the times of the Gentiles, to put an end to the desolations of His land and people: and for this we are to “*pray earnestly.*” It is His will to send Christ again to the earth on the arrival of the “*times of restitution of all things which He hath spoken by the mouth of all His prophets since the world began,*” and we are to “*pray earnestly*” for the consummation of this purpose, saying also, “*Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.*” It is His will to put an end to the power of the Gentiles, and to establish His Son as the lord of all the earth: and for this we are to “*pray earnestly.*”

There are things of a smaller compass in which His will has been signified, and for which we are to pray earnestly. He has revealed that He wills to supply our temporal needs in these days of our pilgrimage, for, as Jesus says,

“*Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things . . . and all these things shall be added unto you*”; but for these things we must “*pray earnestly.*”

He wills to forgive the sins of “*the broken and contrite in heart that tremble at His word,*” and for this we must “*pray earnestly,*” and the prayer of faith will have its answer when thus “*according to His will.*” But if we ask things not according to His will, we ask amiss and will ask in vain. If we ask for miracle in an age when it is revealed there will be none, we may pray earnestly like Elijah, but no miracle will follow.

John lays plainly down the rule that governs the whole subject of our petitions. He does so in words that appear to turn in upon themselves, and lose all point, but which in reality convey a precise and large meaning. He says:

“*This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*”

It is the second part of this saying that may appear a little enigmatical, but the enigma dissolves when it is pondered. Why should our knowledge

whether we have our petitions granted depend upon our knowledge in the abstract that He hears us? In this way: whatever an enlightened man may ask, it is governed by the desire that the thing asked for should subserve God's great purpose with him, namely, to bring him at last into His glorious fellowship and life of the ages. But the petitioner may be unable to judge whether the getting of what he desires would have this effect or not, or whether, in fact, it might not have the opposite effect. God knows the bearing and working out of things in all directions. He, therefore, knows whether the best way of granting our desire is to withhold or give what we ask. He may grant what we desire (our guidance and preservation to His kingdom) in the very opposite form to our expressed wishes. He may answer our prayer by withholding what we ask on the ground that what we ask would, in reality, work out the frustration of our desire, and not its realisation. His will is our salvation, and if we ask according to His will, He heareth us: and, knowing this, we know that in the true spirit of our petitions, we have our petitions granted, though the specific things at any time asked may be withheld.

Elijah's earnest prayer for a suspension of the rain coincided with the intention expressed in Yahweh's covenant with Israel, to withhold the rain in the event of their disobedience, and therefore the rain was withheld, with distressing results to man and beast. Yahweh delights not in thus dispensing affliction. On the contrary, He taketh not pleasure even in the death of a sinner; but there is a time for chastisement; and chastisement in its season is good and beneficent, as we behold in the beautiful results of its infliction, and the ugly and offensive results of its absence. The child or man who escapes it is far from blessed. The chastisement was not for Elijah, but for the rebellious Israel. Therefore Elijah was directed to a place where he could be free from its inconvenient effects. He was directed to hide himself by the brook Cherith—a tributary of the Jordan—where he would have the advantage of a free and pure water supply; there also his food requirements were provided.

“The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.”

This was certainly a peculiar mode of supply. Some say it was not literal ravens, but those ravens of the desert, the Arabs, whose name in the Hebrew is identical with the name of the literal raven. It may have been so. There is

no certainty, for the word is the same as Noah's raven sent forth at the flood. It is the modern habit to minimise the wonderfulness of Yahweh's works, and if they have a natural alternative in any case, to select that. There is no need for it in this case. It would be quite as great a miracle to employ marauding Arabs as Elijah's providers, as to employ literal ravens. And if there was a miracle, we may as well understand that form of it which was most signal and most in harmony with the fitness of the case, which the raven form undoubtedly would be. A neutral creature would be more obviously and appropriately a divine instrument in such a case than evil men.

By and by, the drought that impoverished the land in general, dries up the brook which supplied Elijah, and Elijah is obliged to shift his quarters. He departs by instruction from Israelitish territory, and seeks in Zarephath, a city of Sidon, an asylum in the land of the alien;

"There," says Yahweh, "I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee."

Here the visible hand of God accompanies him, as the state of the country required. The widow woman to whom he was directed was not a rich lady, who, out of her abundance would maintain the prophet, but a poor woman who was at the last pinch, and who could not sustain Elijah without a miracle. This miracle could have been performed at the brook Cherith. The hand that provided bread and flesh could have given him water out of the rock, as it gave Israel in the wilderness. But there were other purposes besides sustenance to be served in his transference beyond Israel's frontiers. He was secreted from Ahab; the guilty land was left to simmer by itself in the heat of the divine vengeance; and Elijah was conveniently located for the next active scene of his work.

When he came to Zarephath, he found the widow, but not at all in a state prepared to receive him, or even knowing of his coming. The command she had received was not a command she had heard or was aware of. It was a command imprinted on her surroundings—a bias of her affairs imparted by the divine will, which would as assuredly work itself out as if the message had been audible and had enlisted the woman as a willing and able worker. Thus does God both use unlikely instrumentalities, and employ them in a way not obvious to themselves in the working out of His will—a fact useful to note in the interpretation of our own affairs. When Elijah arrived, the

woman was gathering sticks to make a fire to cook her last meal; for she had arrived at the end of her supplies, and saw nothing but death before her and her son, to which she was preparing to resign herself. With the knowledge that Elijah had of Yahweh's purpose in the case, he was able to take the situation cheerily. He was thirsty with his journey on a hot day through the dry country, and he asked her to let him have a drink of water. She started to bring him one, but before she went he asked her to bring him a morsel of bread as well. This led her to explain the pass to which her affairs had come. Elijah's answer would do her good:

"Fear not . . . for thus saith Yahweh Elohim of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day that Yahweh sendeth rain upon the earth."

And so it came to pass, and the widow had cause to be thankful that she had received a command, unwittingly to herself, to sustain the prophet Elijah. It was her own sustenance as well. It was a great miracle, but no greater than any other miracle, or than many things that are not considered miracles. God produces new meal and oil every year in the fields, by the slow chemistry of nature. It was easier to replace daily the small quantity of daily consumption in the barrel and oil vessel, than to produce the numberless tons yearly generated in the ordinary way—not easier for man: nothing is easy for man; in the essential sense, he can but manipulate the stuff that God has made in various shapes and forms. But to God, who does the great, it was easy to do the small. It is because men have ceased to recognise the great as His doing, that they find any difficulty in discerning the small as His work. God made heaven and earth, and, because He made them on such a wise principle that one part affects and regulates another, with the effect of constituting the whole a self-working machine, they have jumped at the absurd conclusion that because it is self-working, it is self-made! Such cases as Elijah's reveal to us the Artificer at work. He can produce a little meal direct when only a little is wanted, as well as a mighty harvest, by the slow methods of agriculture.

But this was far from being the only illustration. The widow had a son, who, during Elijah's stay, fell sick and died. This was a sore aggravation of the lonely widow's woes. She bewailed the event to Elijah, and seemed to regard it as a punishment of her sins from God. Elijah asked the woman for the dead lad, and carried him to his own room upstairs, and laid him on his own bed.

Elijah had no power to do any of the marvels that characterised his life; but he knew the reality and the power of the living God of Israel, from whom Israel had deeply revolted. And he knew that if it were according to His will, earnest prayer might bring that power into action. He was there closeted with a helpless corpse, which was no more able than he to restore life. But Yahweh could restore life. And Elijah could and did ask. And having asked, he stretched himself three times on the dead lad. The spirit of Yahweh rested on Elijah, by which only, was he a prophet; and it might be Elijah's view that the spirit of Yahweh in him, thus brought into physical contact with the lifeless mechanism of the once living lad, might help the result desired if it should prove in harmony with Yahweh's will in the case. It is the universal lesson of the word of truth—(as exhibited in *The Ways of Providence*)—that the children of God must work with God in the attainment of the objects of their desire. Doubtless in this spirit, Elijah stretched himself three times on the dead body; Elijah's endeavours would have been in vain had Yahweh's pleasure not concurred with his prayer.

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”

If the Lord be against them, their best efforts may succeed, but only to fail. If the Lord work with them—if His pleasure and consent be with their efforts, they will succeed, but not without their efforts.

“Yahweh heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul (or life) of the child came into him again, and he revived.”

With peculiar satisfaction must Elijah have taken the boy downstairs, and presented him before his mother, saying *“See, thy son liveth.”* It was a case of resurrection, in which, truly considered, there is no more marvel than in a case of resurrection illustrated every day. Men stand in life year after year, and think it nothing wonderful, but, when invited to believe that those who have died will be made to stand again, they profess to find it difficult. Why should they? Life is a question of conditions: interfere with the conditions, life stops. Restore the conditions, would not life resume? Ah, but who can restore the conditions? Granted that man cannot do it. Cannot God do it? The man would be a fool who should say, God could not. He might be a little more consistent if he were to say, “I do not believe there is a God to do it,” but, even then, his folly would only be put a little further back from view. We should only have to follow him to the beginning of things—whether the beginning of ‘Christianity,’ the beginning of the ‘Jewish nation,’ the beginning of the world, or the beginning of the universe, to find him in a

strange embarrassment in trying to maintain that works requiring power and wisdom were performed without one or the other. No: resurrection is no more wonderful than life: only it is a farther and higher and more interesting manifestation of the wonderful Father's power in whose hand even our present breath is, and whose are all our ways. The widow's son recovered under the action of the spirit of God: the stagnant blood re-liquefied: the congested vessels delivered themselves by a throb of new life: the lungs were set at liberty; the heart resumed its action, and the lad found himself coming out of a swoon. So it will be with countless dead men whose lives are all past and forgotten to man—who belong to ages past, and who have apparently disappeared from the universe as entirely as the leaves that choked the forest of their days. There will be this difference: their perished forms will have to be re-fashioned from the dust of the earth—ready to receive the vitalising inrush of the breath of life. In this, there will be no difficulty to Him by whose quickening word the heavens were made. What if their substance has been absorbed and circulated many times over in the wonderful chemistry of nature: any substance will do to build upon the nucleus of their identity; and on the new substance will easily be written by Almighty power those impressions which, hidden away in the recesses of our brains, form our recollections and go to make ourselves. Standing forth from the grave, the resurrected dead of all ages will seem to have resumed their life at the very point where death ended their former existence. They will, in fact, then become aware for the first time of their death and burial. Not by the prophet Elijah, but by Him to whom "*all the law and the prophets give witness*"—the Son of God—the Resurrection and the Life, will this wonderful work of divine power be done; for he it is to whom God hath given power over all flesh that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him.

CHAPTER 27. —ELIJAH ON CARMEL AND AFTERWARDS

At the end of three years and a half, the time had come for the return of the rain and the close of the famine; but this like the commencement of it, was not allowed without the interposition of Elijah, in a way that would serve the ends of its occurrence, and leave no uncertainty on the issue to which it stood related. It might have happened otherwise. The rain might have arrived like any rainy day, without prelude or explanation; but this would have been inconsistent with the object of the miraculous interference through Elijah. That object was to manifest God to Israel as the God of their fathers, in opposition to Baal of the Zidonians, whom they were following. Had the rain arrived in a natural way, this would not have been accomplished. The way would have been open for the people to think that as the rain had returned fortuitously, its suspension was also fortuitous. With this view, the point of the visitation would have been lost. In all Bible miracles there is a rational object—an object unattainable without them.

The prevalence of the drought for three years and a half, in harmony with Elijah's word, had given Elijah a commanding influence in the land, which paved the way for the effectual application and interpretation of the event at the right moment. Elijah, having received the command, "*Go, show thyself to Ahab: and I (Yahweh) will send rain upon the earth,*" Elijah sought an interview with the king, who had vainly endeavoured to find him for years past. He did not go direct. He sent word by a messenger where he could be found. It did not suit the dignity of Yahweh's prophet to go further than this in approaching an idolatrous king of Israel. Ahab came to the place of appointment. When he saw Elijah, he said,

"Art thou he that troublest Israel?"

It was Ahab's benighted simplicity to imagine that the famine was due to Elijah's magical power as a wizard. Elijah went to the root of the matter in a sentence:

"I have not troubled Israel, but (it is) thou and thy father's house in that ye have forsaken the commandment of Yahweh and followed Baalim."

He did not stay to debate the matter with Ahab personally, which would have

been of no advantage. He hastened rather to the business of his interview to ask a public assembly of Israel at which it might be canvassed with some effect. Elijah proposed Mount Carmel, and a large muster of the priests of Baal. Ahab assented, and issued the necessary mandate, in virtue of which, on an appointed day, an immense multitude of Israel came together on Mount Carmel, with Ahab himself, accompanied by *“the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the grove, four hundred, which ate at Jezebel’s table.”* Without needless prelude, Elijah addressing the multitude in loud voice, went straight to the heart of the subject:

“How long halt ye between two opinions? If Yahweh be God, follow him: if Baal, follow him.”

The people stood awed and silent in the presence of Yahweh’s stern and faithful messenger. Then Elijah advances to a proposed test. Calling attention to the fact that he was a single-handed prophet of Yahweh against a multitude of the priests of Baal, he proposed that he should have one bullock, and they one bullock; that they each should slay and offer their respective bullock without putting fire on the altar, and that they should each call on their respective deities.

“Call ye,” said Elijah, *“on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Yahweh, and the god that answereth by fire, let him be God.”*

The people were struck with the reasonableness of the proposal, and said, *“It is well spoken.”* And it was greed the test should be proceeded with. There was, in fact, no getting out of it. The priests were all there, with Ahab at their head, in the presence of the multitude, and any refusal of the test must have been disastrous to the national superstition.

Elijah gave the priests of Baal the first chance, and they accepted. They killed their bullock, dressed it, laid it on the wood on the altar, and called upon Baal to make known his reality by sending forth fire to consume the sacrifice.

“But there was no voice, nor any that answered.”

They called loudly, and leaped upon the altar, and lacerated their bodies after the foolish custom of idolatry: but all in vain. Elijah gave them plenty of time. He advised them to try again. He even ventured upon banter. He suggested that perhaps Baal was wrapped in contemplation, or hunting, or travelling, and wanted loud prayers to arrest attention. Considering that the

issue was, “Is Baal a reality or a myth?” this was not the pure raillery it might appear. It was relevant to the situation. At last, as evening began to draw on (the priests of Baal tired out and covered with shame), Elijah said to all the people, “*Come near to me.*” He then prepared an altar of twelve stones in their sight, dug a deep trench round it, put the wood in order, and the dressed bullock on the wood. When all was ready, and the people were expecting him to pray, he surprised them by asking them to pour water plenteously on the bullock and altar. When they had done so, he asked them to do it a second time: and they did it a second time; and a third time, and they did it a third time. When they had done it the third time, the trench was full, the sacrifice drenched, and the water running all round about the altar. The object was to exclude the possibility of fire being humanly applied. Then Elijah addressed himself to Yahweh in few words,

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.”

The crucial moment had arrived. Would Yahweh answer by fire, or would there be the failure there had been in the case of Baal? The people were attent. They had not long to wait. Immediately fire fell from heaven with an intensity that consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. The test was completely triumphant. Baal’s imposture was laid open, and Yahweh’s reality, for the hundredth time, demonstrated in the sight of Israel, with an effect that thrilled the onlooking assembly, yea, that covered them with shame in their own eyes that they should have been so duped and bewitched. They fell on their faces and cried:

“Yahweh, he is the God: Yahweh, he is the God.”

Elijah, with a divine fervour, ordered the impostor priests to be seized then and there, and put to the sword, which was done by the willing people submissive under his hand.

The object of the miracle was precisely the same as that associated with the Mosaic and subsequent miracles—the demonstration of the existence and power of God as the basis of His claim to obedience. In no other way (than by miracle of some sort) could this demonstration have been made. The demonstration has been made hundreds of times in the history of Israel—the last the most effective of all—the resurrection of Christ and the

marvels of the apostolic ministry. It is upon these demonstrations that faith rests, supported collaterally by the miracle of the Bible, and the adaptation of all to man's supreme need. That many cannot discern the demonstration is no matter of marvel in the pre-occupied state of the universal human mind, and in the prevalence of general incapacity in spiritual directions. Israel on Carmel had forgotten the Mosaic marvels through the influences of the Baalite priesthoods; and the present generation is insensible to the glories of the past by reason of a like ascendancy. Ecclesiastical puerilities and paganised speculations have taken the place of the wholesome realities of Scripture history. But the realities are there for all that. And Christ will come, though all the world has sunk into indifference. It is not with the hope of effecting any change in the wretched state of things now existing in the world and the church so-called, that these things are written; but merely in discharge of a duty that belongs to the believer in every age—in the nineteenth as well as the first century. There is no hope of a public vindication of truth, and the unmasking of the successful impostures of all sorts that cover the world in their deadly shadow, until means akin to the Carmel incident are employed. The re-appearance of Christ will be marked in this way. The spiritual slavery of mankind will be abolished by weapons more potent than argument and moral suasion. The truth will be manifested in a way that the people can see with their eyes; and their misleaders, in the pulpit and platform, are not likely to meet a fate vastly different from that of the prophets of Baal at the hands of Elijah. The prophetic word is unmistakable on this point. The deliverance of the world could not be accomplished without the removal of all obstacles.

Yahweh having been glorified again in the presence of assembled and repentant Israel, a return of the rain was granted; not, however, without intercession on the part of Elijah, who "*went to the top of Carmel, and cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees.*" On the appearance of a speck of cloud on the seaward horizon, he sent a message to Ahab to make haste, so that he might not be overtaken by the rain. In a short time, "*the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.*" Ahab got ready quickly, and rode to Jezreel as fast as his chariot-encumbered horses could take him. What became of Elijah in the midst of the pouring rain? Did he stay on the summit of Mount Carmel? No. When Ahab departed, "*Elijah girded up his loins*" and ran before him at a

surprising pace: and when Ahab arrived at Jezreel, about forty miles off, Elijah was there. The explanation of this pedestrian feat is to be found in the record of it:

“The hand of Yahweh was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (1 Kings 18: 46).

We may suppose that Elijah was in haste to confirm Ahab in the lesson learnt on Mount Carmel, before evil counsels should prevail; and the Lord worked with Elijah. The forty miles’ run would not distress him as it would distress a man depending solely on the unaided resources of the human physiology. A man in the latter case could not have run the distance and outstripped the proud horses of a king. But with the *“hand of Yahweh”* upon a man, he can do anything: the muscular force is replaced as fast as it is used, and the man can *“run and not be weary, can walk and not faint.”* This is possible in the mortal; what limits can be set to human faculty and human power when *“this mortal is swallowed up of life,”* and is no longer dependent upon the feeble supply of force generated by the animal organization?

Elijah’s hurried journey was unavailing if its object was to hold Ahab in the mood inspired by the Carmel meeting. Ahab reported to Jezebel what had happened: particularly the slaughter of the priests, which stirred Jezebel’s indignation beyond all bounds. She sent word to Elijah that he should pay with his life for what he had done. When Elijah saw that he was in danger, he fled from Jezreel and sought refuge in the wilds of Beersheba. Here he wandered about a whole day, and sat down at last under a juniper tree, tired and vexed. Vexation was natural to a man in such a situation: but we should not have known that it touched Elijah so deeply unless it had been recorded that he *“requested for himself that he might die.”* He said,

“It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers.”

This is an interesting glimpse into Elijah’s inner man. It reveals a degree of disappointment which shows that he had been expecting great things as the result of his mission to Israel. Instead of that, he finds his mission a failure, and himself a hunted fugitive. No wonder he wished himself dead. In the midst of his bitter feelings he fell asleep. While he lay asleep, an angel touched him, and told him to arise and eat. He awoke, opened his eyes, and found close to him a fire, and on it a newly-baked cake, and near by it a

cruse of water. He had evidently wandered into this solitude without provision of any kind, and the food before him was acceptable. Who had brought it? The angel. "How wonderful" some exclaim: others mock. There is no occasion for much marvel and none at all for scorn. If a man can kindle a fire and bake a cake, it must be much easier for an angel: but our scornful friend rejoins "Who ever saw an angel?" The answer is ready; names and dates and all particulars have been supplied in previous chapters: but our scornful friend is incapable of receiving the information, because it refers to times somewhat remote, and rests upon evidence which he lacks power to discern. So we let him alone in his foolishness and pass on.

Having eaten of the cake, and drunk of the water, Elijah lay down again to rest. Shortly he was roused the second time by the angel, who asked him to eat and drink again, adding that he (Elijah) was about to go a long journey and required to be strengthened for it, which was the explanation of this angelic visit in the wilderness. Elijah did as he was told and then started on his journey, which was long, even to Sinai, in Arabia in the wilderness. It lasted just as long in days as the journey of Israel in the desert took years—forty days and forty nights. During this time, he had no further food. He went all the time in the strength of the food prepared by the angel—a wonderful thing in the eyes of mortals who have partaken of no such food, but which would cease to be wonderful to them if they experienced it. It is the perversity of human nature to consider a thing impossible unless they can see it. God shows them many marvels in the animal and vegetable worlds. These they take as a matter of course because they are accustomed to them (though little do they consider or appreciate them). But when God speaks to them of "*greater things than these*," they dare to mutter presumptuous words of unbelief merely because they have not seen! Oh, insulting levity of the human race! Oh, unspeakable patience of the High and Lofty Possessor of all things! The day will come when the insult will be purged with works of devouring judgment, when the patience long tried will end in the destruction of myriads, whose cries and shrieks will avail not to avert the storm.

On Elijah's arrival at Horeb, he was commanded to stand upon the Mount: and Yahweh displayed His power before him in appalling forms. A tempest rent the mountains, and hurled mighty rocks from their place: an

earthquake shook the framework of nature as if it would shake it to pieces: and fire blazed and rolled and darted in the deep valleys around him. Elijah retired into a cave to shelter from the awful storm. When the tumult had subsided, a voice (still and small) addressed him, hearing which, he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave in which he had taken refuge. There he received a variety of directions (including the order to appoint Elisha as “prophet in his room.”) We are not told what the object of the terrible display was. It was probably personal to Elijah himself. We have seen that he had become despondent concerning the work of Yahweh in his hands. Yahweh was about to remove him shortly, and reserve him for future labours. It was needful that his heart should be thoroughly fortified in God. Nothing would be more likely to have this effect than the display of the terrible power of Yahweh in the control of those mighty forces of nature, in whose presence man feels so powerless.

When the sublime interview was over, Elijah returned to the land of Israel, and attended to the several little matters, about which he had received instructions. We pass over the interesting interval in the absence of those miraculous features of which we are more particularly in search. In a short time, Ahab, having met his death at Ramoth-Gilead, Ahab’s son, Ahaziah, succeeding him, fell sick. Anxious about his recovery, he sent messengers to enquire of “*Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron.*” By divine direction, Elijah intercepting these messengers, and rebuking them for going on such an errand, informed them from Yahweh, the God of Israel, that Ahaziah would not recover from his sickness. The messengers returned with this message to Ahaziah, who despatched a military company to arrest Elijah. Elijah sat on the top of a hill. The captain of the company delivered the king’s mandate to Elijah, addressing him as “*Thou man of God.*” Elijah’s rejoinder was stern:

“If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty.”

And the fire came, as at Carmel, and consumed not the carcase of a bullock, but the living bodies of fifty-one soldiers. A second company sent on a like errand shared a like fate. A third was saved by the reverential attitude of the captain.

Moderns feel a difficulty in understanding or even receiving this matter. The difficulty is in themselves: it does not belong to the subject. The

transaction was a divine one. Elijah could not bring fire from heaven. It was God's doing. If so, where is the difficulty? Israel had forsaken Him and abandoned themselves to all the abominations of the heathen—not only abominations of worship, but all the abominations that come in their train. Israel had broken the national covenant of Sinai, under which, death and evil were the penalty. God had sent Elijah to bring them back to their fealty. Instead of surrendering to the evident demonstrations of reason by his hand, they sought his life, and here was a company of men whose express business it was to hand him over to the tender mercies of a Baalite worshipper. Was it out of keeping with such a situation of things that God should show His power in the retributive consumption of the rebels? So far from this, the marvel was that the catastrophe was not extended to multitudes besides, which it doubtless would have been, had not God's further purpose with Israel required the deferring of His anger, as explained by Isaiah (48; 9). The Bible represents the divine point of view throughout: adopt this, and all is easy to comprehend. Take up, instead, the human point of view and all is confusion. This is the source of all difficulty in modern times: man and not God is the ruling factor; by man's feelings and notions, they judge transactions which originate in God's views and purposes. It is not reasonable. Man is a creature. The Bible is not man's book, though it is for him, and his best blessing, when he receives it as a little child. It records God's doings and God's wisdom, for God's purposes, which will all be found to have the most perfect reason at the foundation.

CHAPTER 28. —ELIJAH'S REMOVAL FROM THE EARTH

Elijah's work, so far as the record goes, concluded with the fiery vindication of Yahweh's majesty against the insolence of idolatrous Ahaziah, who did not survive it many days. This was the last miracle of his life unless we consider his removal such. The time then drew near when—

"Yahweh would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind."

Such a marvel had only occurred previously on earth once—in the case of Enoch. The reflections passed in review in connection with that case are all applicable to the case of Elijah, and need not now be re-entered upon. The occurrence was marvellous in the light of ordinary human experience, but in itself no more marvellous than the thousand marvels that are enacted before the eyes of unthinking myriads every day. The object of it we may not satisfactorily conceive, because the object was divine: and—

"The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 11).

What man can enter into the aims of the eternal universe-filling mind? This, however, we can see, that Elijah was a man of perfect zeal for Yahweh; and it is not altogether unintelligible that Yahweh should will the exemption of his faithful servant from the humiliation of the grave. Elijah had been long enough among the incorrigible ten tribes for the divine ends. If he was not to be allowed to die, what other alternative so reasonable as his removal? He might, of course, have been allowed to remain in the land of the living till the consummation of Yahweh's purpose in the manifestation of the Messiah in power and great glory; but there would have been an unfitness in this, in view of the nature of the times to pass over the world during the long interval—times, both of intense darkness and when faith was to be the necessary principle upon which the servants of Yahweh were to be developed. His removal seems the most natural event in all the circumstances.

Elijah's removal was an event that Elijah's attendant and coming successor—Elisha—foreboded. Elijah himself appears to have been quite aware of its imminence, and to have desired to get away from Elisha for its private and convenient accomplishment. Arrived together at Gilgal,

"Elijah said to Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee, for Yahweh hath

sent me to Bethel.”

Elisha's response was a very decided refusal.

“As Yahweh liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

So they journeyed to Bethel. There, the sons of the prophets (young men under the guidance of the prophets) came forth to meet them, and privately addressed Elisha on the subject of Elijah's impending removal. They had become aware of it, either from Elijah, or from a common brooding of the Spirit upon them all, imparting to them a common consciousness of the purpose of God about to be effected:

“Knowest thou that Yahweh will take away thy master from thy head today?” and he said, *“Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.”*

It was not a subject on which he cared to talk or think, still less to be addressed by others. There are subjects on which the mind is very tender, and can only grapple with in silence with any satisfaction. Elijah's impending removal was of this nature to Elisha. Under Elijah's headship, he felt safe and strong. He was, as it were, a covering of God to him. The idea of parting with him was most unwelcome. He knew the parting was at hand: but he refused to hasten it by a single minute. He resolved to stick by Elijah to the last available moment, and was therefore deaf to all hints from Elijah himself, and sore to all conversation on the subject. The sons of the prophets doubtless “held their peace,” and the two stern men went on together to Jericho. The young men of Jericho came out to meet them in the way the young men of Bethel had done, making a like salutation, and receiving from Elisha a like rebuff. Here Elijah made another attempt to throw off Elisha, but with no better success, and the two went on to the Jordan. Their movements were watched by a band of *“fifty men of the sons of the prophets,”* who stood on the hill country, as the two men descended to the channel of the Jordan. Here they witnessed a marvel they may not have anticipated. The two evidently aimed at the other side of the Jordan, but how were they to get across without boat, bridge, or ford? They had not long to wait for a solution: they saw Elijah take off his mantle, and wrap it together, and strike the surface of the water with it. The effect was to cause a displacement of the element, which quivered and ran hither and thither until a passage was formed clear down to the bed of the river, through which the two prophets passed on dry ground. It was a miracle, yet simply the application of a cause adequate to produce the effect following. Water can be

separated from water in various ways: but there is one way not available to ordinary men for want of possession of the instrumentality. Not only by wood or stone or wind, but by the Spirit of God volitionally applied, water can be displaced for any purpose in view. Elijah had possession of this power. He was full of it: his very clothes were charged with it, as were the clothes of Christ afterwards (Mark 5: 28-39) and when he struck the water with his mantel, the water received a shock which it could not resist, and retired before the superior force applied to it, till the object of the disturbance was accomplished in the comfortable passage of the two prophets. It is an illustration of the control of nature that will be exercised by the saints in the glorified state, when they will not only have possession of the spirit, but be themselves that spirit corporealised in glorious and powerful bodies.

The two went over on dry ground, and the moment had now arrived when Elijah could no longer remain with Elisha. The moment had come for him to be “taken.” As was natural, Elijah, before parting, asked Elisha if there was anything he could do for him. Elisha showed his suitability for the successorship of Elijah by asking—not money, long life, influence with the king, or any temporal advantage, but—a large endowment of the Spirit that rested on Elijah—“*a double portion.*” Elijah said Elisha had asked a hard thing. He could not say whether his request would be granted; but he was able to say this (the Spirit enabled him to say this much and no more) that if he (Elijah) should be visible to him in the moment of separation, Elisha’s petition should be allowed. While they still walked on in mutual conference,

“There appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them asunder.”

Elisha, in the excitement of the moment, exclaimed, “*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,*” and rent his clothes, according to the common Oriental mode of giving vent to painful emotion. He saw Elijah as “*he went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*” This was the token to him of his accepted prayer.

In our entire lack of experience of things or creatures of higher nature than the dull animal organizations at present prevalent on the earth, it may strike us as strange to read of “*horses and chariots of fire.*” There may, however, be nothing intrinsically strange in these things themselves. The universe is of such vastness and illimitable power and diversity that there is

nothing philosophically to exclude the possibility of interstellar space being occupied with creatures and objects of a kind as much higher than we are accustomed to on earth as the universal spirit is superior to our local atmosphere. All matter is but a “differentiation” and condensation of spirit in chemical combinations (modern philosophy calls it “force”). Why may not the spirit itself be susceptible of incorporation in higher and rarer forms adapted to life in free space—the spirit itself being as easily traversable by such as water by the fishes of the sea? If we are accepted of the Lord at his coming, and transformed into spirit, we may find ourselves introduced to a sphere and a family as far transcending our imaginations as the height of heaven transcends the dimensions of our globe.

Elijah’s mantle fell from him as he went up: and Elijah himself becoming quickly invisible, Elisha picked up the fallen mantle, and after a due interval of reflection, started on his return journey to Jericho. The Jordan lay an obstacle in his way: but it could be no obstacle to a man on whom a double portion of the Spirit that had endowed Elijah rested. Laying hold of Elijah’s mantle in imitation of Elijah’s own action, he smote the Jordan as Elijah had done, and the river divided under the concussion of the force that had riven it before. Elisha passed safely over. There must have been something in Elisha’s appearance indicative of the fulfilment of his request that he might have a double portion of Elijah’s spirit; for—

“When the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him.”

Elijah was gone, and they recognised in Elisha his appointed successor.

But it seems as if they could not be quite sure that Elijah was quite gone—or finally gone. They thought his removal might be temporary, and that he might return and be found for the search.

“Behold,” said they to Elisha, “there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of Yahweh hath taken him up and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.”

Elisha’s knowledge was more perfect than theirs. He knew Elijah was gone for good, and that he would be no more seen upon earth, till he should be

sent again for the work of restoration, “*before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*” (Malachi 4: 5)—a work in which he was typified by John the Baptist, who went before Jesus to prepare his way “*in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1: 17; Matthew 17: 12-13). Elisha therefore forbade the sons of the prophets to search, but they were importunate, and urged him till shame led him to consent.

“*They sent, therefore, fifty men: and they sought three days and found him not.*”

And he has not been found since.

A writing came from him to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, who was king in Jerusalem for some time after his departure (2 Chronicles 21: 12). If this was written after his removal, then this letter was an act of participation in affairs on earth performed in the new state and place to which the “*chariots and horses of fire*” introduced him. There would be no difficulty in this; for Elijah would be more cognisant (and not less), of what was going on in Israel after his removal to a state of sustenance by the spirit than while he was yet among them as a man sustained in the natural ways of the flesh. And as for writing, it is more easy for a man with the power of the spirit to write a letter or do anything else, than a man having only the abilities and resources of mortal nature. But possibly (though it is scarcely likely, in view of the retrospective bearing of the writing on a reign which had scarce begun at the date of his removal), the writing was written before his departure.

Another recorded post-removal participation in mundane affairs was his appearance on the mount of transfiguration, where, with Moses, he “*spake of the decease which Jesus should accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Luke 9: 30-31). Dr. Thomas has always believed that this appearance was actual, and that of Moses also. The term “*vision*” applied to the transaction has been held to exclude this view, since “*vision*” is defined in Acts 12: 9, as that which is in contrast with reality. This contention may be right as regards the common use of the term, and yet allow of the things seen in a case like the transfiguration—seen for visional purposes—having been real in themselves. Jesus was real: the glory was real: the voice was real: the overshadowing cloud was real: and Moses and Elias may have been real. It is a matter about which positive ground cannot be taken; but it is interesting to think of the

possibility of Elijah having been really there present in personal interview with the Lord, holding converse on the approaching climax of the Lord's work on earth—the Lord's death and resurrection. It would show Elijah in a state of personal interest in that part of the work of God to which we stand related. It would be natural that such should be the case. Elijah was alive: and if he sent a letter of reproof to an idolatrous King of Israel, it was equally in place that he should personally and encouragingly confer with "*the Son of God, the King of Israel,*" on the approach of the great act of obedience—the laying down of his life for all the children of God—in which Elijah, though not permitted to see death, must have been as much interested as the least of those in need of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The presence of Moses would be no barrier to this view; because if Moses were really there, it would be by the exercise of that resurrection power which more than once was exercised before the days of Christ. The exercise of this power in the raising of Moses would not displace Christ from his position of "*the first fruits*"; since Moses might merely rise to renewed natural but miraculously prolonged life against the day of change to spirit-nature in the presence of Christ at his coming. Christ as the first to be glorified, and the dispenser of glory to all his brethren, would be in the position of the first fruits, however many God might see fit to sustain in natural being against that day.

The cases of Moses and Elias in no way lend countenance to the popular view of the death state, since Elias did not die, but was bodily removed, and Moses, if there, must have been bodily raised.

The reality of Elijah's participations, since his removal, in the divine work on earth, in the two recorded cases, is in harmony with the revealed fact, that he is destined to take an active part in the work of Israel's redemption, from the transgression and down-treading of the Gentile ages. To this Jesus refers, when he says, in answer to the enquiries of his disciples, "*Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things*" (Matthew 17: 11).

If he added, "*But I say unto you that Elias is come already,*" it only shows that two coordinate truths are consistent, though in apparent conflict when

viewed superficially. John the Baptist came in “*the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1: 17); and therefore his coming was a coming of Elias (appropriate to the nature of the preparatory work to be done for the first appearance of Christ). This does not interfere with the fact that the personal Elias himself will come in his own spirit and power, to do a work of preparation of a different nature from that of John the Baptist, as the different situation of things connected with the second appearing of Christ requires.

These are details with which, of course, Elisha and his attendant “*sons of the prophets*” were not acquainted. Their work related to the state of things then existing in the midst of the tribes of Israel. For this work only were their qualifications suited. These qualifications involved the power of displaying in a large measure the visible hand of God, at the exhibition of which we shall look in the further contemplation of the life of Elisha.

CHAPTER 29. —ELIJAH’S MANTLE ON ELISHA

Elisha first stayed at Jericho after Elijah’s removal. The place was not very salubrious—perhaps owing to the curse pronounced against it in the days of Joshua (Joshua 6: 26). At all events it was a fact, to which “*the men of the city*” called Elisha’s attention:

“The situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught and the ground barren.”

This supplied occasion for the first exercise of the wonderful power that rested on Elisha. Elisha asked the men to bring him a new cruse filled with salt. They did so: and—

“He went forth unto the spring of waters and cast the salt in there and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters: there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.”

The narrative adds,

*“So the waters were healed **until this day.**”*

The import of this remark, as regards the question of time, depends upon when the narrative was written, which would probably be after the occurrence of Elisha’s death. It would be a natural circumstance to allude to an illustration of Elisha’s power—that Jericho, the first scene of the prophet’s labours, originally desolate, was then fertile and flourishing.

Josephus, about eight hundred years afterwards, bears the same testimony (and in all matters of which he was an eye-witness, he is reliable). He says:

“There is a fountain by Jericho that runs plentifully, and is very fit for watering the ground . . . This fountain at the beginning, caused not only the blasting of the earth and of the tree, but of the children born of women; and . . . it was entirely of a sickly and corruptive nature to all things whatsoever, but . . . it was made gentle and very wholesome and fruitful by the prophet Elisha . . . The power of it so great in watering the ground that if it do but once touch a country, it affords a sweeter nourishment than other waters do . . . There are (in the space of ground watered by it), many sorts of palm trees that are watered by it different from each other in taste and name: the better sort of them, when they are pressed, yield an excellent kind of honey . . . He who should pronounce this place to be divine

would not be mistaken, wherein is such plenty of trees produced as are very rare, and of the most excellent sort . . . It will not be easy to light on any climate in the habitable earth that can well be compared to it.”

The healing of Jericho by Elisha’s offices, is an illustration of what is in store for the world, when the whole earth is under the rule of a multitude of Elishas. The glorified brethren of Christ who will “*live and reign with him upon the earth,*” will have all the power and more, of even a double-endowed mortal Elisha, for they will be spirit in nature and substance, having the spring of its healing and creative power in themselves. When, therefore, “the men of the city,” in any barren region, to which a glorified saint may be assigned as ruler, call his attention to the condition of the place, it will be easy for him, in his wisdom, to give some simple direction that will cure its malady. Elisha prescribed a new cruse filled with salt. Possibly, this may have been all that was naturally needed to rectify the disordered condition of the water—a simple cure, but requiring spiritual discernment to prescribe it. There are many beneficent adaptabilities in nature which are hidden from the eyes of men, because of sin, or from inevitable natural ignorance: the knowledge of which would be a source of blessing. In the case of the bitter waters of Marah, the Lord “*showed Moses a tree, which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet*” (Exodus 15: 25). The tree had the power to sweeten the water, but Moses did not know it. It required a miracle (that is, a direct divine act) to enlighten him. In the age of blessing that is coming, every son of God will possess this divine insight into nature, that will enable them to prescribe measures that, without any miracle, will produce blessing. Of course, there are cases in which “*the powers of the world to come*” will be exercised specifically and supplementally to nature, as when the word of Christ opened the eyes of the blind, healed the paralytic, or raised the dead, and the apostles after him did the same thing. Possibly, the healing of the bad water at Jericho was done in this way, and not by the natural action of the salt put into it. In that case, the casting of the salt would be but a symbolic act, and the divinely-appointed signal for the doing of the wonder, after the manner of the lifting of Aaron’s rod. In either case, the marvel was great, and its occurrence suggestive of glorious days yet in store for the world under the covenants of blessing.

When Elisha had stayed for a while at Jericho, he removed to Bethel. While in the act of removal, the young rebeldom of the place manifested itself in a very insulting manner towards Elisha. They had heard the old man was going, and possibly had seen his preparations, and were glad at the departure of a man who had, in all likelihood, acted with a restraining effect on their youthful turbulence while living among them. The children trooped out of the city as he was ascending the slope leading out of Jericho towards the direction of his journey, and saluted him with disrespectful cries,

“Go up, thou baldhead! Go up, thou baldhead!” (from which also we get a glimpse of Elisha’s personal appearance).

“Elisha turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord.”

Had it been a merely transient ebullition, he would probably have taken no notice; but the little rascals evidently persevered with increasing emphasis and numbers, and so he cursed, and in response to the curse of a spirit-gifted man, two bears emerged swiftly from a neighbouring wood and made sad havoc among the children. It has distressed some to think of a prophet of God cursing instead of blessing. They note the commandment of Christ, to *“bless them that curse us,”* and they think it a strange discrepancy. Their difficulty will disappear if they but remember that there is a time for everything: that God the fount of blessing is *“a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12: 29); that Christ, who *“reviled not again,”* is the appointed executioner of condemnation and vengeance (2 Thessalonians 1: 8-9; Revelation 19: 15; Isaiah 11: 4). The time of Elisha was the time of the Law of Moses which (justly enough) exacted an *“eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”* The state of Israel at the time was one of almost universal disobedience. Elisha was the power of God in their midst. To insult him was to insult the representative of God. Cursing was, therefore, natural and just, and in accordance with what was threatened them in the law of God in such circumstances. Christ’s command not to curse, but to bless, belongs to another time, with other purposes in view. It is a test of obedience and a means of discipline and spiritual development for those who are called as the sons of God and the divine rulers of mankind in the age to come.

The incident may be regarded as an illustration of one feature that will characterise that age of divine authority. One of the many drawbacks of the present age, is the liberty of sinners to say and do many things that are

foe their own hurt, and the hurt of the community. This liberty is considered one of the attributes of glorious “freedom”: no doubt it is better than a tyranny that would crush the good as well as the evil; but it is a poor compromise. It is a compromise necessitated by the absence of authority equal to the wise coercion of opposition: but it is a compromise that secures a vigorous growth of all manner of evil while checking and choking the development of righteousness. What is wanted is the application of the hand of authority in a way that would foster the opposite result—that would check the rank weeds of civilised barbarism, and nourish and preserve the fruits and flowers of a true and godly culture. This cannot be done in the human age. But it will be done in the age of Christ’s authority upon earth. He and his people are to rule the nations “*with a rod of iron.*” This is a rough simile, but of blessed import. The rod of iron will only be laid on the back of wickedness: and if the blows are heavy enough to break it, none but the sons of wickedness will be sorry. The world will be all the better when the wicked mourn and the righteous rejoice. When every manifestation of diabolism is repressed by men of Elisha-power, at whose curse calamity, dire and immediate, springs upon the rebellious, diabolism will soon hide its head, and take refuge in the dark corners of the earth.

Elisha stayed a while at Carmel, and then removed to Samaria, where Jehoram, Ahab’s successor (no better than his predecessors) reigned over Israel. Shortly after his removal thither, a great stir arose in consequence of the revolt of Mesha, King of Moab, who had been a vassal of Israel’s during Ahab’s life, but who, since Ahab’s death, had gradually drifted from his allegiance, and now fairly threw off the yoke. (This is the Mesha who figures in the inscription, made during his reign, and discovered a few years back on the celebrated “Moabite stone”). Jehoram got ready a military expedition to bring back Mesha to his allegiance. Before starting, he secured the alliance of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom; and agreed upon a plan of campaign, which required the three kings to effect a junction in the wilderness of Edom. Arrangements being complete, the expedition started—Elisha accompanying. The three armies duly met at the appointed rendezvous, but shortly found they had selected a waterless region, in which they were soon in great straits; for what can men do without water? Jehoram saw that a catastrophe threatened. He lamented to Jehoshaphat that things should have come to such a pass with them:

“Alas, that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab!”

Jehoshaphat, who ought not to have been in league with godless Jehoram (as a prophet told him on his return to Jerusalem), enquired whether there were no prophet of Yahweh in the camp. The answer discovered Elisha’s presence. To Elisha forthwith the three kings went (there is nothing like calamity for unbending the human neck). When Elisha saw Jehoram, he refused to have to do with him.

“What have I to do with thee?” said he; *“Get thee to the prophets of thy father . . . As the Lord God of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee or see thee”* (2 Kings 3: 14).

Out of respect for Jehoshaphat, who was faithful to God, Elisha consented to entertain the matter of their request for guidance in their difficulty. *“Bring me a minstrel,”* said he. Why did he want a minstrel? We discover from the effect that followed the minstrel’s playing.

“It came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.”

But what connection, it may be asked, could there be between the music of a minstrel and the stirring of the divine gift that was upon Elisha? It would be difficult to suggest a connection, if the popular conception which puts God outside of nature were correct. But this conception is neither Scriptural nor philosophical. The Scriptures declare all things to be *“in God”* (Acts 17: 28; 1 Corinthians 8: 6), and God declares of Himself that, though dwelling in heaven, in a personal sense, He *“fills”* heaven and earth by the presence of His Spirit (Jeremiah 23: 24; Psalm 139: 7). What the Scriptures thus declare, reason tells us must be the case, for how is it possible to conceive of a system of nature which God has created, and upholds, without the pervading presence of His power through it all? In view of this, the influence of the minstrel’s notes is not inscrutable. The laws of music are of God, as much as the working of inspiration: for *“all things are of God.”* Now, we know it is one law of music to stimulate and open the higher faculties, where there are higher faculties to open (all men are not liberally endowed in this matter). Music awakens the higher susceptibilities, when, without music, they would lie dormant. Even Saul felt its soothing effect. If the higher faculties are thus acted on in their normal state, how much more when the Spirit of God dwells

with them, as in the case of Elisha? His quiescent light and power awoke under the minstrel's strains, and prepared him as the sensitive instrument to receive the impressions of the divine communication.

“And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain, yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye and your cattle and your beasts.”

The ditches were dug, and in the morning—

“There came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.”

Where did the water come from? Answer: It was made for the occasion: nothing easier. Even man, by the electric combination of oxygen, hydrogen, etc., can produce water in small quantities with appliances: what difficulty then, to the Possessor of all power, in producing any quantity the occasion might call for?

The water put an end to Israel's distress. It also had the effect of urging the Moabites to their destruction; for seeing an immense sheet of water in an unaccustomed place under the ruddy glare of an Oriental sun, they came to the conclusion that the three kings had fallen out among themselves, and had reddened the valley with the blood of mutual slaughter. Under this impression, they came on without caution, and were easily overthrown by their foes. Judah and Israel were the Lord's people, not as yet cast from His presence. This is the fact to be held distinctly in view as a key to all events, so peculiarly divine as those which have marked their history, and the history of no other nation.

Israel returned from their successful expedition, and Elisha settled in the land in quietness. One of the young men in attendance upon him (one of the “*sons of the prophets*”) soon after died in debt. The person to whom he owed the money applied to the widow for the payment of the debt. The widow could not pay, and the creditor insisted upon taking her two sons as forced servants in satisfaction. The widow in her distress applied to Elisha. Elisha asked her what she had. “*Nothing but a pot of oil.*” Then, said Elisha, go and borrow as many vessels as you can, and pour out of the one pot of oil till all the vessels are full. In ordinary cases, such a command would have been a mockery: but the case was not ordinary. Elisha was there, with “*a*

double portion of the spirit of Elijah” resting upon him. The direction of such a man meant the operation of a power not higher than men knew in nature, but than men can ordinarily control, for men see in nature any year the operation of a law that can increase a small quantity of oil to a great quantity; but they have no power to “differentiate” this law. Here was a man who could do what ordinary men cannot. The Spirit of God, abiding with him and working with him, could combine the elements on the spot to any required extent. The one pot of oil was the laboratory in which the work was done. Consequently, her pot of oil went on pouring without emptying not because there was anything magical in the pot (there is no such thing, in reality, as magic), but because the oil was manufactured in the pot as fast as it escaped into the other vessels. Here, also, is one of “*the powers of the world to come,*” at the command of the saints who will reign with Christ. The supply of what is needful will be an easy matter with those upon whom even more than a double portion of the spirit will rest. Not that this will be the common mode of supply, but it will be an available mode, when requisite. The employment of it will simply be a question of propriety and fitness.

When all the vessels were full, the supply ceased, and the woman, by Elisha’s direction, sold the oil, paid her husband’s debt, and had a sufficient balance to have a living for herself and children. There will, doubtless, be many such cases of helping the poor in the age to come, by the saints, in the exercise of the power that will reside in them for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Next, Elisha has to visit Shunem, where a certain “*great woman*”—a woman of some social standing and power of discernment—becomes interested in Elisha, and presses her hospitality upon him. He accepts it, and goes his way, but returns frequently, and on each occasion, “*turns in thither to eat bread.*” She declares her impression at last to her husband that this wayside visitor is “*an holy man of God,*” and she proposes (and her husband evidently consents), that they should offer him an apartment in the house, for use every time he came that way. Elisha accepted, and becomes a regular occupant of the “*little chamber,*” with its “*bed, table, stool, and candlestick,*” which the lady of the house had so generously provided. Elisha, by and by, proposes to recompense “*all this care*” with which she

and her husband had been careful for him. He asks what he shall do—speak to the king for her, or the commander-in-chief, or what? Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, calls attention to the fact that the woman is childless. This suggests the most acceptable form of reward:

“About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son.”

The word duly came to pass.

“The word of God is quick and powerful.”

The removing of the cause of sterility is easy to the Power that made man at the beginning, and so the woman *“bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her.”* But this was not the end of the marvel. The child, when grown, appears to have died of sunstroke (2 Kings 4: 19). Elisha was on Carmel at the time: the woman made straight for him, to tell him the heavy tidings (perhaps with the hope that he could help). When she arrived, she threw herself at Elisha’s feet in speechless grief, and held him by his feet.

“Gehazi (the prophet’s servant) came near to thrust her away.”

But Elisha said,

*“Let her alone, her soul is vexed within her, and **the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.**”*

This is one of the many casual evidences of veracity in the narrative. In a fictitious narrative, written with the aim of extolling the greatness of Elisha, there would have been no such feature as this—Elisha ignorant of the woman’s grief. Elisha in such a narrative, would have known all and anticipated all, and arranged for all. But here is Elisha pitying the poor broken-hearted woman, and wondering at the cause of her grief. After a pause, the question (no doubt wildly) escapes her lips,

“Did I desire a son of my lord?”

This shows Elisha what has happened. He instantly tells Gehazi to take his (Elisha’s) staff, and run to Shunem, and lay it on the face of the dead child. Elisha evidently expected that this would restore the child: why should he think so? Because the staff constantly handled by Elisha, would be impregnated, through his hands, with the intense spirit power that rested upon his own person: and Elisha’s thought was that the contact of this spirit-charged staff would be sufficient to rekindle departed vitality, as the contact of his own spirit-charged dead bones proved, in the subsequent case of a dead body hurriedly thrown into his grave (2 Kings 13: 21). But his thought

proved mistaken.

“Gehazi laid the staff upon the face of the child, and there was neither voice nor hearing.”

Here again is proof of the artless truth of the narrative. A fictitious account would have represented the staff as all-sufficient. Into such a narrative the intimation of failure would never have crept. Gehazi, reporting the failure to Elisha, Elisha went to the child himself, and closing the door, knelt in prayer to God for the restoration of the child's life. Following upon this, he took the means likely (in his case) to accomplish his desire. He stretched himself upon the dead child until the flesh of the child *“waxed warm.”* Then he walked backwards and forwards, and repeated the process, on which he had the gratification to see the child sneeze and open its eyes. The spirit of God in Elisha raised the dead in harmony with the laws of its own working.

CHAPTER 30. —ELISHA, HEZEKIAH, DANIEL; **CONCLUSION**

There are many other instances of the exhibition of the visible hand of God in the life of Elisha and others, the consideration of which, in the minute manner of the foregoing chapters, would easily fill as many chapters again. Even in the remaining life of Elisha, there are:

1. The antidoting of the poisonous herbs accidentally used in the preparation of a meal for the sons of the prophets in the time of scarcity (2 Kings 4: 41);
2. The multiplication of scanty supplies for the wants of a hundred men, who, after eating to their satisfaction, left something over (v. 42-44);
3. The cure of Naaman's leprosy by seven dips in the Jordan (v. 1-14);
4. The smiting of Gehazi, Elisha's servant, with leprosy, for falsehood (v. 20-27);
5. The recovery of a borrowed axe head, which had fallen into a stream, by causing it to float (6: 1-7);
6. The revealing of the secrets of the king of Syria (v. 12);
7. The manifestation of the invisible heavenly host that opposed the movements of the Syrian army (v. 17);
8. The smiting of the Syrian army with blindness (v. 18);
9. The illusion of hearing by which the Syrian army were made to desert their camp and flee from Samaria, relieving the city from threatened starvation.

But these incidents only illustrate the principles already exhibited in the consideration of the life and work of Elisha's predecessor, Elijah, and the first part of Elisha's own life. To follow them out would be interesting, but could add nothing to what we have already learnt in these chapters, which have been already drawn out to a sufficient length.

We follow Elisha to his grave for a last glimpse of the power that rested upon him in double measure during the days of his life as requested from Elijah, and which had not quite forsaken him in death. He had not been long in his last resting place when a funeral approached where he lay. Before the funeral was finished, an invasion of the land by the Moabites became visible

from the spot. Seeing the marching bands, the people who had charge of the funeral got into a panic, and hastily threw the corpse into Elisha's sepulchre, and made off. The result was wonderful. The dead man on coming into contact with the bones of Elisha, revived and stood upon his feet (2 Kings 13: 21). No explanation is offered by the narrative of this remarkable incident. The fact simply is stated. But the variety of facts recorded in various places enable us to have a glimpse of the explanation. First, there is the fact just seen, that the power of God rested on Elisha in an intenser degree than even on Elijah. Second, there is the fact that this power is transmissible, and, therefore, storable, as shown by the luminosity of the face of Moses after a forty days' association with angelic glory; by Elisha's sending his staff to the dead child with the expectation that life would return; and as shown more particularly in the New Testament, where we read that virtue went out of Jesus, and healed them all (Luke 6: 19; Mark 5: 30); and that a woman was healed by but a touch of his garment (Luke 8: 46-47); that "*from the body of Paul were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them*" (Acts 19: 12). These facts suggest that the divine energy that brooded on Elisha during his prophetic ministry, so permeated his substance, that even his bones remained charged with it in death, in sufficient power to reanimate a dead body brought into contact with them. The Spirit of God has passive relations, in which its effects are irrespective of divine volition, and spring from what it is in its own nature. From such a conception, conventional theology may recoil in horror: but blindness only can fail to see that such a conception is yielded by the Scripture illustrations referred to—a conception, at the same time, which in no way interfered with that higher phase of the subject in which the Spirit of God is seen as the agent or power by which the volitional Eternal Father in the heavens accomplishes the designs of His wisdom, directly, or by the hand of His angels, as the case may be.

In the other cases remaining to be noticed, the facts are amply narrated, and free from obscurity. They differ little from those already passed in review, except in this, that they were miraculous deliverances of the Lord's people in trouble, rather than acts intended to manifest the divine name in the earth, though this aim (inextricably blended with all deliverances) was subserved in a way scarcely subordinate. We refer to the cases of Hezekiah, Daniel, and Daniel's companion captives in Babylon.

Hezekiah, the fourteenth successor of David on the throne of Judah, was a king whose ways were all pleasing to Yahweh.

“He did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father David did. . . . He clave to Yahweh and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which Yahweh commanded Moses” (2 Kings 18: 3-6).

In this character is to be found the explanation of the wonderful response to prayer with which Hezekiah was honoured in the time of trouble. The trouble was a sore and threatening one. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had overrun and devastated all surrounding countries. He then cast his eyes upon Jerusalem, which Hezekiah had purged from idolatry. From Lachish, the siege of which he was finishing, he sent a summons to Hezekiah, demanding the surrender of Jerusalem. The demand was insolently delivered in an open manner before the people gathered on and near the wall; and it aimed directly at Yahweh, in whose service Hezekiah had shown such zeal. Sennacherib’s messengers said:

“Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of mine hands, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?” (2 Kings 18: 33-35).

Hezekiah commanded silence on the part of all his people in the presence of these blasphemous words. But he was greatly perturbed. He knew the overpowering strength of the Assyrian host, to which Sennacherib’s ambassadors appealed; and he knew that what they said about Hezekiah’s inability to muster even two decent cavalry regiments, was true. But he dared not to surrender. With rent clothes and in covering of sackcloth, he submitted the matter to Yahweh in His temple, and at the same time sent a message to Isaiah, the prophet. Sennacherib’s ambassadors, understanding that the summons was refused, returned with the report to their master, whom they found to have shifted from Lachish to Libnah. Sennacherib then wrote a despatch, probably the only State document of his that has come down to posterity; and which, like a few other documents and human

utterances, would never have been heard of but for their relation (hostile and otherwise) to matters involved in Bible narrative. He wrote a letter to Hezekiah. *“Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee,”* and repeating in substance the argument of his ambassadors. Hezekiah, having read the letter, was deeply distressed by it. What could he do? There was only one thing left him. There come times when all human resources fail. He went to the temple and spread it before the Lord, and submitted the matter to Yahweh in prayer. He acknowledged the prowess of the Assyrians against the divinities of the surrounding nations; but said,

*“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, save us from his hand **THAT ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH MAY KNOW THAT THOU ART THE LORD, EVEN THOU ONLY.**”*

Such a prayer from such a man received the direct and immediate response that characterised the Mosaic operations in Egypt, and which will again be a joyful experience upon earth when Yahweh by the hand of His Son returned, will “revive his work in the midst of the years.”

*“Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, King of Assyria . . . He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake. **Then the angel of Yahweh went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib, King of Assyria, departed, and went and returned and dwelt at Nineveh**” (Isaiah 37: 21-23).*

David tells us that the angels *“do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word.”* Here was a practical illustration. The destruction of the bulk of Sennacherib’s army was ordered for the deliverance of Hezekiah, and the vindication of the divine name against reproach. The angel went forth, and executed the command. *“The angel of the Lord campeth round about them that fear Him,”* but he is terrible to Yahweh’s enemies. It is easy for an angel, having control of nature’s elements, to snuff out the fragile

lives of a military host, however numerous. Paralysis of the breathing nerves, or stoppage of the action of the heart, soon lays the proudest will in the dust. To show this power on the wicked, the glory of God called for in this case, and the same cause will call for it again when "*the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,*" at his second coming, for the purpose of executing judgment on the ungodly. Divine power is never specifically exerted, except for some large and lofty end, and when it is put forth it is for ends that could not be reached without the employment of power which men speak of as miraculous.

In a later age, when the corruptions of Jerusalem led to her divine abandonment, the same power was shown in an individual case and in a strange land. Daniel, among the royal captives taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, excited jealousy by his ability and success among those above whom he was promoted in the days of Darius, the Mede. His envious compeers, knowing that Daniel was in the habit of praying three times a day, obtained a decree forbidding, for thirty days, all prayer except to Darius, under the penalty of being thrown to the wild beasts. The publication of this decree did not deter Daniel from his daily duty; and being caught in the act of prayer, he was thrown to the lions. The whole world has heard this, and of the result; that God stopped the mouths of the lions, and preserved him from their claws till the morning, when he was liberated safe and sound. It was a miracle, that is, a divine act, but not an inexplicable or unreasonable one. The angel commissioned in the case (Daniel 6: 22) acted on the nervous system of the brutes, with the restraining power which even a high human magnetism possesses in a small degree, but which in the hand of an angel, who is spirit-substance itself, is irresistible wheresoever brought to bear. Under its influence, the lions felt no more inclination to eat Daniel than to eat stones. But when the influence was removed, on Daniel's liberation, the native ferocity of the animals came back with redoubled power, and enabled them to mutilate and destroy Daniel's enemies (thrown to them) before they reached the bottom of the den in their fall. The reasonableness of God's interposition on behalf of His faithful servant, does not require a word of vindication.

The next, and last case, is also of world-wide notoriety, though received with world-wide incredulity (that is, meanwhile: by and by, the

incredulity will all vanish before events that will confound the logic of the schools). The names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are household words. They were Jewish officials, high in power and position in the state of Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. On a certain occasion, during that monarch's reign, an idolatrous feast was ordained in dedication of a new image which Nebuchadnezzar had made. At a given signal, a mighty concourse of people, to assemble on the occasion (including the officials of the empire), were to prostrate themselves in the presence of the image, on pain of being cast into a "*burning fiery furnace.*" As officials of the empire Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were present, but refused the adoration commanded. Their non-compliance was reported to Nebuchadnezzar, who summoned them to his presence. He asked if the report was true, which they acknowledged. He gave them another chance. They said they would not worship the image whatever the consequences might be. Enraged at their obstinacy, Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to be cast into the furnace without delay. The whole world knows the marvellous sequel, though this, too, is scornfully received and will be till the day near at hand, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will themselves confound their adversaries by reappearing among men, with all the other saints of God. Thrown into the furnace, bound, they were not burnt, but presently appeared loose, and walking in the midst of the fire with a fourth companion, a godlike being, in whom Nebuchadnezzar recognised the angel of Yahweh (Daniel 3: 28). The prodigy excited Nebuchadnezzar's extremest surprise and admiration. He ordered the men to come forth, which they did, among the crowding courtiers of the King, who satisfied themselves by personal inspection that even the smell of fire had not passed upon them. Here again, there was nothing truly out of the way of reason. Even men can neutralise the action of fire for a certain length of time by various artificial contrivances. How much more easy for an angel, throwing a mantle of the spirit over these three men, to keep them unscathed in the midst of the roaring flame. The possibility of such an exercise of power in the abstract is beyond contradiction; its fitness and reasonableness in the circumstances is beyond the need of demonstration.

In such a miracle there is nothing puerile: nothing beyond the capability of a fully developed understanding to receive. This, indeed, is true of all the miracles recorded in the Bible. They are within the range of abstract possibility, as illustrated in actual experience in other forms, and

they were all performed for purposes that were in the highest degree noble and good, and for purposes which could not have been achieved apart from their occurrence.

We have now reached the end of the Old Testament section of this most interesting and important subject. We have by no means exhausted it. The entire ministry of the prophets, as represented in the books ranging from Isaiah to Malachi, was an exhibition of the visible hand of God, of the highest and most valuable form. But it is not necessary to deal separately with this. In substance, the subject is entirely covered by the early chapters of our treatise. Faith in the prophets is most surely established by the contemplation of all the historic marvels which enter into the essence of Jewish history, and lie at the foundation of the Bible's literary development. Neither the Bible's existence nor the history of the Jewish nation is susceptible of a rational explanation apart from a recognition of the "*miracles, signs, and wonders*" which we have looked at in the foregoing chapters. If we have given a somewhat prominent place to the Mosaic phase of these wonders, it is because here the foundation exists for the whole Biblical superstructure. Let a man fairly master the principles involved in the opening chapters of Jewish history, and he will find no difficulty in anything that comes after.

We had purposed, in commencing these chapters, to extend them to the consideration of that most wonderful of all exhibitions of the visible hand of God which occurred in the beginning of our era, when Christ appeared in Judea, and arrested attention as attention never was before arrested, by his wonderful words and works; and when the world was revolutionised shortly afterwards by the apostolic testimony that Christ, whose enemies had got rid of him by crucifixion, had risen from the dead, and had commanded a proclamation to all the world, that by him, and by him alone, could men be saved from death, and the world delivered from its woes. On reconsideration, however, we have abandoned this purpose, and have decided to devote to this phase of the matter a separate series of chapters in the hope of being able to present such a "Life of Christ" * as the nature of our times calls for, and in such form and aspect as the apprehension of Bible truth in its harmonious entirety alone makes it possible to present. Whether we shall accomplish this

purpose (or, accomplishing it, shall carry it out successfully), is known alone to Him in whose honour these pages have humbly been inscribed.

“Man deviseth his own way, but the Lord directeth his steps.”

* *Nazareth Revisited, a Life of Christ*, by the same author, was subsequently published (1890).