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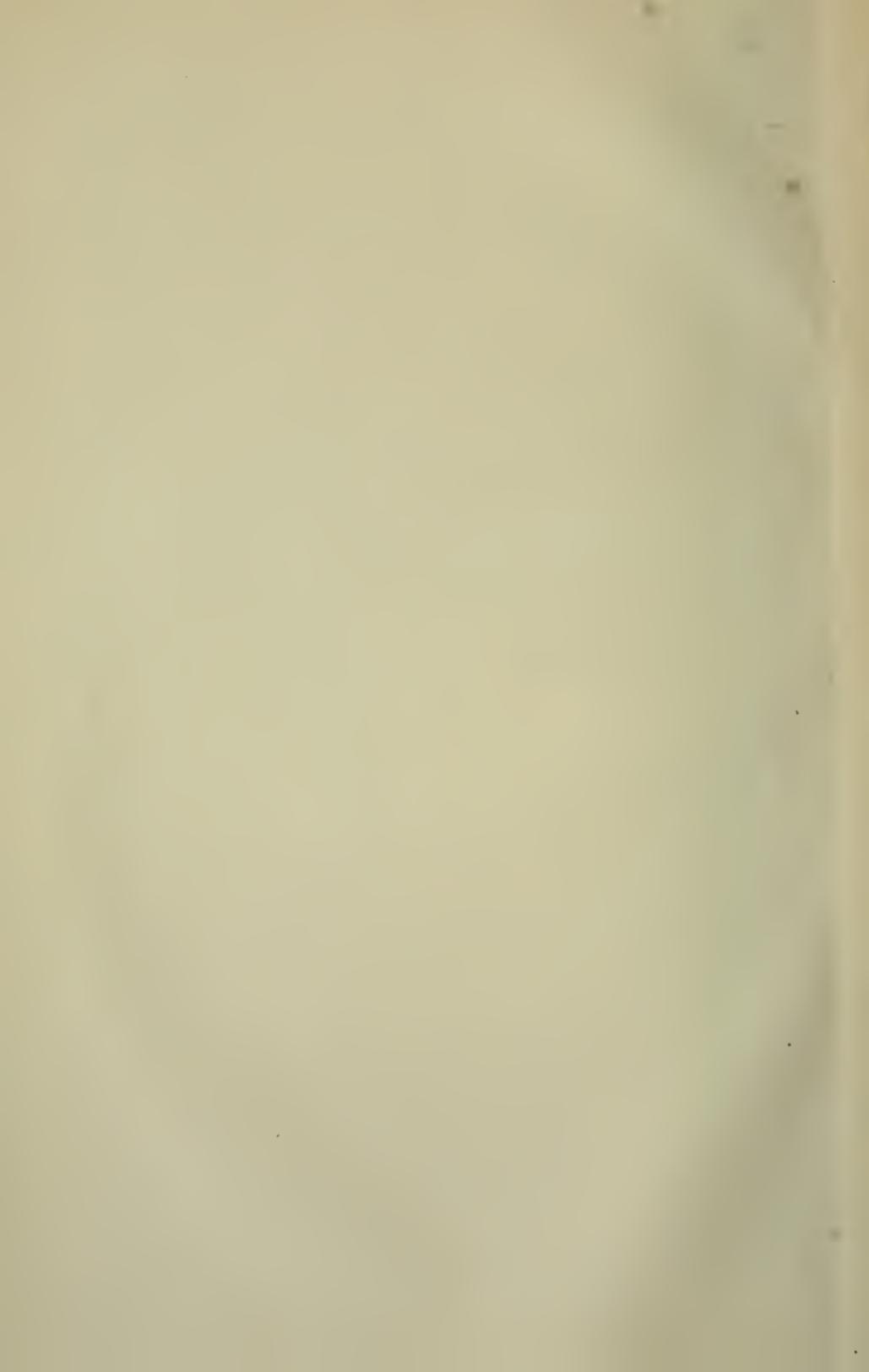
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# M O S E S:

A B I B L I C A L S T U D Y.

BY

J. J. VAN OOSTERZEE, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF 'YEAR OF SALVATION,' ETC.

*Translated from the Dutch*

BY

JAMES KENNEDY, B.D.

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# M O S E S.



## CHAPTER I.

### Childhood.

‘ And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son : and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch, and put the child therein ; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river ; and her maidens walked along by the river’s side ; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child : and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse it for thee? And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses : and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.’—Ex. ii. 1-10.

‘ MOSES!’ Full four and thirty centuries have sped their flight since that melodious name was first pronounced by royal lips over an infant head ; but can you mention any other, after Abraham’s, that shines more lustroly

on the historic page of the Old Covenant? It is within the truth to say, that one religious system in this world claims Moses as its founder; for the members of three different communions have been striving which could weave the fairest wreath for Moses' brow. The Jew, even to this day, with no less pride than that shown by the Pharisees when Jesus walked this earth, exclaims, 'We are Moses' disciples!'<sup>1</sup> The Mohammedan considers him as one of the most eminent among those who preceded and prepared the way for the great prophet he acknowledges. The Christian, too, most heartily inscribes, beneath the statue of the lawgiver, the words of praise first written by a sacred penman: 'He was faithful in all his house, as a servant.'<sup>2</sup> Moses, the great interpreter, the confidant, the special favourite of God; Moses, the master-mind, whose heaven-supported leadership transformed a most debased race of slaves into a nation of God's kings and priests; Moses, whose noble figure towers as far above those round about who lived in his own time, as Sinai rears its head above the lower hills surrounding it: could any one of us remain in this man's presence without feeling a desire, as Peter did, to build a tabernacle for the man of God?<sup>3</sup>

Well may we say that, as the history of Moses is among the most remarkable, so is it, too, one of the most instructive in the Book of books. Even looked at by itself, it may at once be classed among the best biographies that ever came from the historic pen. How strange a life, begun upon the perilous waves, and ended on the mountain top; now at the royal court, then in the shepherd's tent, and later in the deserts of Arabia; but almost always one of constant change, of strife internal or external, full of toil and grief! But specially, when

<sup>1</sup> John ix. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvii. 4; Mark ix. 5; Luke ix. 33.

we take up a higher, and the only proper standing-ground, and when we look upon this history as showing us God's mode of dealing with His friend, we often fail in finding words with which to praise the love and faithfulness, the wisdom and the holiness, the majesty and power of Him who deigned, in an especial manner, to become the guide of Israel's chosen leader in the wilderness. 'Blessed is he that hath the God of *Jacob* for his help :'<sup>1</sup> such are the words sung by an Israelite of old, in holy ecstasy. But may we not repeat the words, thus slightly modified, 'Blessed is he that hath the God of *Moses* for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God !' Yea, well may we be thankful that, in the first half of Scripture, there is scarcely any life so much presented in detail as his ; and we may readily affirm that what was said of Paul may also be applied, in its own measure, to this Moses : 'He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.'<sup>2</sup> Even the sufferings which he, no less than Paul, endured for God, but serve to raise him all the more in our esteem. Is it not just the crown of thorns he wore so long that makes the mediator of the Old Covenant so much more like the Mediator of the New ?

Of this important history (what designation shall we give to it?—a history of miracles ; or part of universal history?) the first page lies before us now. Let us suppose the early part of Moses' life was quite unknown to us ; do you not think that fiction would have done her best to make a picture with the brightest colours possible, by telling us about extraordinary miracles, appearances of angels, and such other revelations of the mind of God ? But oh, how far the simple truth surpasses even the highest flights of poetry ! And when we read with ordinary care the brief account of Moses'

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlvi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ix. 15.

rescue, who could fail to see and feel its truth, so plainly is it taken from the life? Although no single letter of the name of God were written here,—even though there were as little mention of the name as in the book called after Esther, which records a like deliverance,—the finger of the Lord will yet be manifest even to the simplest child. But possibly that narrative, so well known to us all from early youth, is far too insignificant to claim express regard; our tastes, too, may be so depraved, that simple beauty fails to charm and to attract. We hope much better things of you than that: we rather fancy you will thank us in your inmost heart, if, in an hour snatched from the bustle and the toil of daily life,<sup>1</sup> we introduce you to a Jewish family well worthy of your deepest interest. Though we knew nothing more of his whole history than what this chapter tells us, we should still have perfect confidence in representing Moses as *the child of special Providence*. And how could we content ourselves with standing still in contemplation of this incident, instead of rising to much higher views, and seeing in the family of Amram how the God of Providence at all times deals with those for whom He shows a special care? Come, follow us, as we conduct you in this contemplation; and while we point out to you what God is towards those who are His own, we shall, besides, show what they ought to be to Him. A special explanation of the well-known history is what you neither need nor ask; but what you, no doubt, are most ready to accept will be a careful re-perusal of the whole, while the attention is alternately directed to the persons herein named,—especially to God,—and to yourselves. We need but follow Moses step by step, as he describes the history of his own early days, to see unrolled successively before our

<sup>1</sup> Delivered on the evening of Thursday, Sept. 17, 1857.

eyes a picture of (a) his *constantly increasing trials*, (b) *hidden struggles*, (c) *wonderful deliverance*, (d) *careful training*, (e) *slow preparation for his great life-work*.

When such a child of Providence has spoken thus, to strengthen us in our most holy faith, he will not leave us till he has presented to our notice maxims, drawn even from his earliest experience, to regulate our heart and life. O God of Moses, Thou who art the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, let none of us depart without receiving Thine own blessing from above!

## 1.

We now transport ourselves, in thought, to fertile Goshen, where the seed of Abraham for some time past had dwelt. How great a change has taken place since Jacob first set foot upon that hospitable soil, the honoured head of seventy souls! Nay, surely Joseph, on his deathbed, had not dreamt of such a sad fulfilment of his latest prophecy, 'God shall surely visit you.' Where now is Egypt's gratitude for what the Hebrew regent had unweariedly performed in her behalf? Though Egypt still retains his dust, his name she has dropped out of memory,—ungrateful as the butler whose immediate honour and advancement he foretold in prison. Could the twelve patriarchs again have raised those heads on which their father's blessing came, they scarcely would have recognised their sons. The race of shepherds, once quite free, seems now to have become a race of slaves; the guests seem strangers, enemies—nay, beasts of burden, too. See how they toil as brickmakers and bricklayers, doomed every day, as if with their own hand, to forge another link for their already heavy chains! Here rises up the city Raamses, in all its vast extent; there, too, the towers of Pithom rear their heads;

strong fortresses, not only for restraining foreign enemies, but also checking mutiny at home,—walls made of brick, but built with blood and tears! What else is all the land of Egypt now for Israel but one vast brick-kiln, burning day and night? By dear experience they learn that Joseph's memory is now no longer honoured by the reigning family; false policy but silences the voice of yesterday, to vex itself with fancied dangers of to-day. The rapid increase of the Israelites,—quite unexampled in its way,—by which God's promises to Abraham were strikingly fulfilled, makes Pharaoh's heart beat with solicitude. What if those strangers, should a war break out, join with the enemy?—or, in a time of peace, when they grow strong and arrogant, expel those who at first inhabited the fertile valley of the Nile? The tree is now too strongly rooted in the soil to be destroyed, both root and branch, without great danger every way; but it will be enough to stop the growth of new fruit-bearing branches, and thus let it die, stripped of its leaves and fruit. The burden laid on Israel increases every day; some say that even the pyramids, those palaces made for the dead, that still continue to excite the wonder of the living, must in part have been erected by those Jewish hands. Next is matured the secret plot, by which the innocents are doomed to cruel death just at their birth; and when even that is frustrated, cold-blooded tyranny is not ashamed even to order publicly that all male children shall be cast into the Nile. If the elders have no heart to carry out the ordinance, there must be had a multitude of executioners. Hark! there resounds a voice in Goshen, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; and the waters, in their detestation of the horrid cruelty, blush crimson with the blood of innocence! And though all this astonishes, what is the most astonishing of all is, not the cry of

hundreds, but the reticence of One, who yet had promised Jacob at Beersheba, 'Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation.'<sup>1</sup> Look down, thou sainted patriarch! see what has here become of thy posterity, increased now fourteen thousand fold; nay, see, Thou God of Abraham, what has become of Thine inheritance, how they have watched and prayed in vain! It actually seems as if Jehovah had become like one of those divinities, worshipped in Egypt as in other lands, to which the mocking language well applies, 'Eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not.'<sup>2</sup> God speaks no longer unto men; He does not now appear to them; there is no effort made even to preserve, in downcast souls, the fading knowledge of the one true God: yes, now or never seems the time to make the sad complaint, 'The Lord hath forsaken, the Lord hath forgotten!' And this continues, not for years, but centuries, each year of which seems in itself a century! Just like the fierce Nile crocodile, Pharaoh devours the seed of Abraham; and now the promises and hopes of centuries seem likely to be wholly swallowed up in that vast watery grave: 'Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself!'<sup>3</sup> Why do we speak so rashly of the darkness of our path, or why impiously accuse God, when, far from reaching to our lips, the water but comes to the knees, or even no farther than the feet? With such a scene of sorrow in his view, the most unfortunate among us well may cease complaint; and he who has to some extent learned to observe God's dealings in His providence, may have himself already marked how, in the present case, an old-established law in God's government is set before us in the form of a most touching incident: the Lord oftentimes makes everything as dark as they can possibly become, just that thereafter

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xlvi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxv. 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. xlv. 15.

and thereby the light may shine more brilliantly. Ishmael must faint beneath the shrubs, ere Hagar shall be told about the well. Joseph must even be left to sigh, not merely in his slavery, but in imprisonment and deep oblivion, ere he is raised to his high dignity. The host of the Assyrians must stand before Jerusalem's gates, ere they are smitten by the angel of the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah must be let sink down into the miry pit, ere he is placed upon a rock. Did not a violent persecution of the Christians precede the triumph of the gospel? In the night of mediæval times, must not star after star set ere the Reformation dawn arose? Yes; is not Israel's history in this respect also the history of God's own people in succeeding times, even in the present day? They suffer persecution, are oppressed, ill-treated, and opposed through a mistaken policy; all kinds of force are often used for their restraint under the sacred name of liberty; yet still they stand, and take deep root, and grow, expecting better times will come in spite of these fierce hurricanes. Nay, verily, the Lord has not forgotten to be gracious, though He sometimes seems to hide His face; nor does He cease to rule the world, though He delays to interpose. The father watches and preserves his child amidst the fiercest fires of persecution; and although the furnace of the trial through which he comes be heated seven times more than usual, every degree of heat is counted, measured, regulated by the Lord Himself. Though He permits injustice, and even lets it grow to an extraordinary height, He yet employs it for a purpose that may well command our adoration and regard,—the purifying and the perfecting of those who are His own. He lets the wickedness of men increase for a brief period, that He may suddenly abase them all the more; His words of comfort are withheld, just that, in His own time, He may speak far

more forcibly by deeds. While Pharaoh builds his treasure-cities, he is working his own ruin, though unconsciously: while Israel totters on the margin of a yawning gulf, Moses is born!

## 2.

‘Moses’—Do you not fancy that you see a brilliant sunbeam breaking through the pitchy darkness of the heavens? Yet think not that, because of this, the last cloud is about to be dispelled; when we but cast a glance upon the hidden struggles mentioned in the narrative, it seems as if the contrary were true. It is quite easy to transport ourselves, in thought, into the middle of a blooming family of one of Levi’s sons. Amram and Jochebed have twice already had bestowed on them the highest blessing of a married life; and, for the third time now, the wife hopes to become a mother soon. Who shall presume to fathom the deep floods of tears poured forth in silent hours, when there arose the thought that this pledge of her love might fall a victim to the cruel mandate of the king? Who can declare how earnestly she prayed her fathers’ God that she might bear a daughter rather than a son? But the Lord provided something better with regard to her than such an answer to her prayer, so eminently natural. The first cry uttered by the new-born babe sounds in her ears like a death-sentence; every smile that shows itself upon the infant countenance pierces her inmost soul. Poor mother! why present your breast thus constantly to lips that soon shall have much more than they require of water from the Nile? But no, the wretched mother cannot but use these tender words: ‘Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?’<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlix. 15.

child, too, is so beautiful,—much more so than even Aaron or Miriam,—it seems to beg to be allowed to live; ‘it is beautiful to God,’ as the expression stands in the original of Stephen’s speech,<sup>1</sup> as if it were a more than earthly, yea, a heavenly beauty that was meant. Is it not likely that the elders, long familiar with God’s ancient promises to the posterity of those who were His friends, found in that very beauty of the child what led them to expect something, of which, nevertheless, they scarce could give account, even to themselves? At least, it well deserves to be remarked, that the concealment of the child is represented in the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>2</sup> as an act of faith, from which it is quite evident they did not fear the king’s command. May we believe the testimony of Flavius Josephus, that Amram, some months previously, in answer to his earnest prayer of distress, had been informed by special revelation that this child was destined to deliver the oppressed race? Is it possible that the recollection of the precise time stated in a communication made of old to Abraham<sup>3</sup> proved so much the more powerful as an incentive to the presentiment? But we need not raise conjectures, just as if the long concealment of the child would not admit of explanation otherwise. What mother could be found that willingly gave up her suckling into the assassin’s hands? or what daughter of Israel that could not frame some artifice against the cruel force that threatened lives of innocents? Nay, verily, the fatal truth must be concealed as long as possible; more carefully than ever must the joyless dwelling now be closed against all prying stranger eyes; each sound that might arouse suspicion must be stifled on the mother’s breast: meanwhile, all Israel must call upon their fathers’ God, that He may influence the

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 20. [See the marginal rendering of the English Version.]

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xv. 13-16.

tyrant's heart. What countless multitudes of sighs must certainly have ended in such prayers; and with what terror must the wretched—yet happy—mother have observed the first few hours, that followed the decisive point, increase into as many days, the days to weeks, the weeks to months! How frequently she must have been aroused in terror from her dreams by even the slightest rustling sound; and how the tide of hope regarding Israel's deliverance must have arisen when the child, as yet unnamed, was born, but only to descend thereafter to the lowest point when ninety days had brought no signs of change! One would not judge from the appearance of the anxious Jochebed—when she presents a cheerful countenance, as far as possible, to those she meets, and speaks, perhaps, of the approaching hour when she is destined to become once more a mother—that so much is dependent upon her. Nor would one venture to suppose, of those who have poured ointment on their head and washed their face, to make a fair show to the world, that there is frequently contained in their full hearts a world of pain, and that it is with difficulty they, against hope, still believe in hope. But how often has this been the very mode in which God in His providence has dealt with those for whom He shows especial care,—that He not merely made for them a cross that might have served for multitudes besides themselves, but also opened up for them a special course of life, known only to the angels up in heaven! But has not your experience been similar to what these parents felt? The Lord bestowed more blessing, but through this there came more care. One prayer was heard and answered; but, as it appeared, just that the other might be utterly refused. A single star now shone aloft, and shed a light to comfort weary souls; but soon it showed itself to be no more than a misleading jack-o'-lanthorn. Yesterday, it seemed that the Destroy-

ing Angel had withdrawn from a bedside at which we watched ; but to-day he has returned with his two-handed sword unsheathed. It seemed as if, at last, there now would be an end of cares and fears ; but, lo, after the rain has ceased, new clouds return, and she who had but recently rejoiced as Hannah did, is suddenly bereaved, just as Naomi was. Those thirteen anxious weeks in Amram's family, how many hearts and homes do they most fully represent ! And who has never known of hours that dragged their weary length, when we scarce dared to look before, when naught was to be seen but darkness, when we could do naught but wait ? What shall we say when for us too, as for that wretched pair, without are fightings and within are fears ? Shall we express our deep astonishment, as if some strange thing happened us when we are so oppressed ? Surely each one of us is well aware that the right path which leads to peace, let it be short or long, has ever passed through conflicts that are hazardous, and which often must be fought alone. Jacob does not become an Israel without a wrestling through the night ; the woman of Canaan does not obtain the restoration of her daughter ere she strives in faith and prayer ; Peter does not become the rock on which the Church is built before sinking in the deep waters. Shall we complain, then, when the Lord's way does not seem to us quite right ? or shall we, in the calmness of despair, deliberately put our hand within our bosom ? Nay, like this pious pair, we will keep silence in the presence of the Lord, so long as we are still unable to rejoice in our adversity ; and we will patiently await the advent of deliverance such as we cannot possibly anticipate. We will not leave neglected any single means which heavenly Wisdom has placed within our reach to comfort us when we are sad ; and we will wrestle on, even to the limits of our strength, although we do not

see that we advance a single step. With Amram and Jochebed, we will not yield, even to the strongest enemy : only for this are we afraid, lest our own faith should fail. He that believeth shall not be afraid, and just as little shall he be put to shame. The safety which the lovely infant no more finds upon his mother's breast, he finds—how wonderful; yet true!—upon the restless bosom of the Nile.

### 3.

How must your thoughts anticipate our words, when we now come to speak about the wonderful deliverance, which even Moses, in his later years, surely could not describe without becoming deeply moved ! I shall not venture to depict the storm that rose within the mother's heart, when it at last appeared that the concealment of the child had now become an absolute impossibility : four lives were constantly in danger on account of one. I leave it to yourselves to picture the condition and the frame of mind of that unhappy mother, who in solitude avails herself of what is now the last, but almost hopeless means of saving that frail life, exposed to dangers manifold and imminent, as she prepares that wicker ark, and, when it seems quite safe and dry, besprinkles it with showers of bitter tears. I follow, but far off, that loving pair, who, all unseen by human eyes, betake themselves in haste to yonder river's brink, where, days before, perhaps, the safest spot has been sought out ; and now, with trembling hands,—yes, and with trembling hearts,—they come to lay their precious burden down among the thick-set reeds that lift their heads above the glassy stream. Is not the frailest reed far stronger than the slender thread by which that infant life still hangs ? Oh that they might be let remain and watch—at least,

be not far off! But no! if Jochebed continued waiting at the river's side, suspicion might be speedily aroused; Amram, if he remain too long, may have to fear and feel the lash of the oppressor, and—would there were nothing worse than that! But what is more, the safety of the child, already problematical, will be impossible if it be known wherefore and how the babe lies here. Is not the God of Abraham also here,—the God who once restored the promised Isaac, even as from the dead? Ye mothers, say, what else can it have been than strong, unshaken faith, which gave that woman's hand the strength to push the basket from the shore, and turn her back on it, leaving her darling there, the plaything of the flood? If there was any parallel, besides the one already pointed out, on which she pondered in her solitude, perhaps she thought of Noah's ark, bearing most precious freight, and safe within the haven of rest, after the waves had failed to find an entrance to that place of refuge from the storm. Our arm is far too short to sound the depths of suffering within that mother's heart; and Jochebed may possibly have learned that silence in the hour of danger is the greatest power the soul can exercise. But it is youthful Miriam whom we should most have wished to see, watching with eagle eye lest yon frail craft should float away, and vanish from her sight. It must needs be that very princess—whom tradition names Thermuthis, and of whom it says she had been married, but was childless—who, attended by her maids, comes down to bathe in some safe place; but little does she think there is a reason why she must come to this very spot. It must needs be that very child, whose cry for help falls on her tender ear, and who now stretches out his little arms to her, as if entreating for some other kind of nourishment than tears and water from the Nile,—who now, too, is restored

to life, when she exclaims, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children!' But no! we cast aside the pencil from our hands when Moses has assumed the pen; we know, too, that you will within your heart commend us, when we quite refrain from colouring or touching up the picture of the text, so beautiful and clear, that it appears as if it had itself been taken from the limpid stream. Now that we stand, then, by the Nile, surrounded by such multitudes of reeds, say, was ever stately wood, with here and there an altar for thank-offerings interspersed, so beautiful as this? and does it not appear as if you here beheld the very footsteps of that God who is supreme above the great ones of the earth? Well may you fancy that you hear the purling waves repeat the joyful song, 'The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death!' But deeply should we be constrained to pity you, did you feel hesitation in acknowledging the hoary past to be a mirror of the present, with its blessings and its joys, and if it were but with unwillingness that you could make these words your own, 'The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save.'<sup>1</sup> I grant that we are not at all times able to perceive such striking interventions of a special Providence; yet who is there that does not tremble at the simple thought that Pharaoh's daughter might have come but one hour sooner, or one hour behind? Neither do I forget that many a beloved child is torn from hearts which certainly prayed no less earnestly than Moses' parents that its life should be preserved. But may I not as fearlessly affirm, on the other hand, that those who have been specially delivered and preserved in tender youth are probably more numerous, by far, than we believe or know? Your parents, probably, have not told you, as Moses'

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lix. 1.

parents told their son, or else you may have quite forgotten what great kindness was displayed to you by God, while you were still too young to comprehend your danger, and much less to ward it off. But if it were required to mention here the names of all who must have perished long before, had He not sent His angel, that they might not dash their foot against a stone, surely no ancient monument could be discovered high or broad enough to bear the list of names, however closely they might be inscribed. Yes, God saved and still saves in countless instances, just when our human wisdom fails, and human aid is vanity. He saves just at the proper time,—as formerly upon Moriah, when the sacrificial knife was lifted over Isaac's head; as later at Jerusalem, the very night before the sword of Herod was to end the life of Peter, then asleep. He saves, not without using means, but by the use of means; and even the simplest means that are employed under dependence on His aid soon are evidently blessed. You see there are no miracles performed for even a Moses, when the ordinary means are quite sufficient to accomplish God's adorable designs; but every heart, like that of Pharaoh's daughter, is quite at his service, and He guides and drives them where He will, just like the waters of the Nile. Why do we speak of 'chance' or 'fate,' when, at such times as this, we see the finite and the Infinite so closely intertwined? Let but the little vessel leak, or let the princess, for some unimportant reason, and for once, omit her daily bath, and the whole history of Israel, of Egypt, and perhaps the world, shall then exhibit quite another character! Why do philosophers affirm that it does not become God's dignity to care for even the smallest thing? But let that weeping child be hidden from the eyes of God, and the means for Israel's deliverance will have escaped His

hands. Why does the heart with little faith tremble even at the thought of danger? Moses, in helpless infancy, has a Protector better far than even the clever Miriam: He that keeps Israel sleeps not, and slumbers not. God does not willingly afflict or plague the sons of men; and even though affliction's flood may seem to know no bounds, yet, like the Nile, at God's command it shall return within its limits, and leave after it a fertilizing mud. Not even a single word of this great promise, made to all God's own, has ever fallen to the ground: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.'<sup>1</sup> 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies!'<sup>2</sup>

## 4.

'With loving-kindness.' How this was learned experimentally by that same child whose careful training is now set before us in the narrative! There stands the scion of the royal house before us still, surrounded by her maids, the emblem of a gracious Deity, protecting the forsaken and oppressed. She does not hesitate to take an interest in the babe, though she may readily suppose her cruel father will indeed be wroth, when she thus sides with the despised, whom one stroke of the pen had now consigned to death. But first of all, who shall now give the babe what it most pressingly requires? As quick as lightning, through the soul of Miriam there flashed a thought, for which she must have afterwards thanked God upon her bended knees: what if she could not only

1 sa. xliii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. ciii. 4.

bear the tidings of her brother's safety, but bring back the half-lost child some other way to its own mother's heart? The angels must have listened, when, after emerging from her hiding-place, she asks in bashful tones, 'Princess, shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that may nurse the child for thee?' She did not wait too long for further orders, lest the first command to go should be rescinded for some other one. As if on wings of wind she hurried home, called her astonished mother, and by all that is most sacred prayed her not to let herself be known. The mother understands the princess's command, 'Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.' 'Thy wages!' Did it never once occur to you, Thermuthis, that you have deposited far more than the most precious treasure in the arms of that poor Israelite, who bows in deep humility, but finds no words for overwhelming thoughts? But Jochebed is even already gone; and now she is presenting on her family altar what was certainly the first, the only pure and unalloyed thank-offering presented to the Lord within three weary months; she thinks . . . But what shall we add further to the simple story, 'And the woman took the child, and nursed it; and when it was grown, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son'? You must already have admired the love of God, who sent three years of unalloyed maternal joy after three months of sorrow indescribable; and then you must have thought upon the words, 'His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'<sup>1</sup> But have you not yet felt, besides, strong admiration for the Lord's deep wisdom, which the thoughtful mind of Amram must have speedily perceived, when he discovered why the Lord had ordered things just thus, and

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxx. 5.

in no other way? There is a higher destiny for Jochebed than that she should be merely nurse to her own child, for she is also to become the early guide of him who shall be Israel's guide. With His own hand the God of heaven and earth here fastens, to a single individual, the threads uniting Moses and the Israelites for life,—yea, must we not say for eternity? And though he soon must needs be trained in the Egyptian schools, his mother's milk will, to his opening mind, be antidote enough against the superstition of the heathen land. As with that mother's milk,—who shall decide how closely joined the soul and body are in their development?—he shall imbibe a love for Israel; and the first name he learns to lisp will not be those of Isis and Osiris, but the name of Him who is his fathers' God. According to the custom of those days, he would be taken from his nurse when three years old and brought to court,—a sad farewell, and yet how much less painful than the former one! But will the princely foster-mother not most readily permit the lovely child sometimes to pay a visit to the nurse, who shall but seek to fan into a flame the spark of love for true religion and for liberty that smoulders in his youthful heart? Nor will he leave her ere the grand traditions of God's covenant with His friend, of Jacob's death, and Joseph's last command, of Canaan as the land destined for Israel, and of the great deliverance that has been promised for the world, have all been more impressed upon his mind; and what he hears within that family circle fixes, even in his early years, the course of his own private thoughts. Egyptian science and intoxicating wine, instead of his own mother's milk in all its purity, will offer now to nourish and refresh this soul, thirsting for truth. Amidst the most refined, most learned, and most highly trained of nations, Moses must—if I may so express myself—learn all that is mechanical

pertaining to the great work of his later years. The highest wisdom of the earth must first be uttered in his ears ; its highest glory, too, must pass before his eyes, that he may afterwards learn by experience that all the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, and that all human glory is but like the brittle reed. But Jochebed must specially beware lest the young man, through his Egyptian training, should become in heart and soul a true Egyptian ; yet it is just the combination of what may be termed Egyptian and Hebrew elements in Moses' training which produces, in his later years, that Moses who was so unique in character. Remove one of these two constituents, and you obtain a Moses who is wholly different, and much less fitted for his work ; the Hebrew household and the heathen court must both successively become his training schools. Oh, how adorable is God, viewed in His providence ! Are you astonished that a Paul, the Moses of the Second Covenant, could so decidedly affirm that God 'hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of the habitations of men' ?<sup>1</sup> And in how many lives do we perceive like guidance on the part of God, by which the first steps are distinctly brought into connection with the latter portion of the course ! The history of many soldiers of the Lord shows that, like Moses, they have owed their early training for a great and noble work to mothers of distinguished excellence ; and many, too, like him, have been astonished to discover afterwards that they required to make their preparations for a future stage just where God willed they should remain. Who does not here remember David, trained even at the court of Saul for his own later kingly life,—the Lord's apostles, well inured by fishing in the Sea of Galilee to many a privation which they could not but experience when they went forth to

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 26.

fish for men,—a Paul, who, at Gamaliel's feet, acquired that wisdom and that knowledge which he afterwards employed, as weapons in behalf of Christ, against these selfsame Jews,—nay, who does not think of himself, when he takes up the thread of his own life, to trace its windings through the maze, and looks towards yon gate by which he entered on this scene? Or can we Christians doubt that the relationships of early life must have conduced to bring us where God's hand has afterwards conducted us; that every one of us has his own special destiny, for which, like Moses, we are frequently prepared, though all unconsciously, throughout a series of years; in short, that even our first impressions, like the later lessons we receive, are all appointed and arranged by higher wisdom than our own? Nay, do not shake your head so unbelievably, and say, in your complaint, that if this were the case, in your experience at least, things would not be quite as they are, and not a little must have been quite otherwise. You have not reached the end yet, just like Moses at his tenth or fifteenth year: whoever seeks to guess how any history, consisting of two portions quite dissimilar, shall end, when he has scarcely reached the half of the first part, is in the greatest danger of pronouncing an opinion that is quite erroneous, and founded on a superficial view. What else is all this now before us than the period of youth, wherein we see this infant grow into a child, a youth, a man? All that is proper to the child must pass away, ere we can see the glory of the Lord in guiding every step of infancy.

## 5.

‘And she called his name Moses; for she said, I drew him out of the water.’ We will not weary you by

setting forth the different opinions formed by learned men as to this name and what it means ; nor shall we now defend the brief account given in the text against the fierce attacks of unbelief. To show how superficial these last can sometimes be, and how God knows the way to use all kinds of means in order to uphold the truth of His own written word, let it suffice to state the following :—The doubt had frequently been raised, in something like triumphant tones, whether the Oriental women were indeed allowed to show themselves in public, and to bathe, as we are here informed regarding Pharaoh's daughter ; but there has recently been found, among the fresco paintings forming part of the remains of ancient Egypt, one that represents Egyptian women of the better class, attended by their maids, proceeding to the Nile to bathe. But rather let us now regard the almost imperceptible, slow preparation for so much that was both glorious and great, as we find set before us here. Yet is it possible that any one could fail to mark how there is opened here a quite new page in Israel's history, —in that of true religion,—nay, in a sense, a new page in the world's history ?

A child has now been drawn out of the water ; and from this time forward there is opened up a new and better future for all Israel. How little thinks the tyrant, while he brandishes the scourge, while wielding, too, the sceptre, that the chosen instrument of the Almighty's recompense has now been saved by his own daughter, and is destined to grow up before his eyes ! 'I shall destroy, I shall annihilate,' says Pharaoh ; but the Lord says, 'I shall work, and who shall bar my path ?' And then God puts the cradle that contains the hope of Israel, just as it were upon the steps of Pharaoh's throne. Tremble, proud Memphis, for that youthful eye shall sparkle soon with indignation when it sees un-

righteousness increase! The hands that now, by turns, embrace Thermuthis and then Jochebed, shall one day bear the rod that shall compel the waters to divide. Yes, Israel as a nation shall be able now to date its birth from that same hour when Moses came upon the scene! 'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!'

A child has just been drawn out of the water; and from that hour there opens a new page in the history of God's revelations. For three whole centuries, as we are told, Jehovah has been silent; but He now begins to speak almost uninterruptedly. Amidst the quietness of a most humble dwelling, there grows up the soul that is to fathom God's deep thoughts: upon the breast of Jochebed there beats the heart that, all through life, shall burn with deep desire not only for complete deliverance of Israel, but also for the furtherance of true religion everywhere. Till now, the Lord has let the heathen—yea, and in a certain sense even Israel—walk in the ways they chose; but now, here He appoints the man who is to be the great interpreter of all His special revelations till the fulness of the times. Now there appears the coming prophet, far surpassing every one in Israel,—the future lawgiver, who is to state the fundamental principle of true religion, the indivisible unity of God,—the great historian, who is to shed the first trustworthy light on the beginning of creation and the great Redemption-plan. And here he is, preserved and trained by that same Egypt against whom he soon shall rise to vindicate God's majesty. 'How unsearchable are the judgments of God, and His ways past finding out!'

A child has now been drawn out of the water; and here there begins a further, more direct, more earnest preparation for that great time of deliverance, predicted

long before in paradise. The sinful world, alas! has long ago become like an Egyptian house of bondage, where vast multitudes of slaves sink down beneath the leaden weight of misery. But how shall it be possible even for Almighty God to break that ignominious yoke, so long as sinners do not feel, themselves, their misery? And, on the other hand, how shall the sinner even feel his misery, so long as conscience has not been aroused from mortal slumber by the law? Lo, there God raises up the man whom we may call 'incarnate law,' as Christ is named 'incarnate grace;' and his appearance, so far, is important for humanity at large. Those lips, still sealed as yet, shall utter words which rouse the painful thought, 'By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified.'<sup>1</sup> The son of Amram, though apparently doomed long ago to death, still lives; but lives to pass death-sentence, in his turn, on millions of his fellow-men. No sinner unto whom he speaks shall be allowed to rest, ere the convicted soul betakes himself to One whose way he shall prepare. For centuries, to all the world, Gentile as well as Jew, this man shall testify of sin, until that day of God has dawned, when naught but grace shall reign. He shall bear witness unto Jesus, but Jesus in His turn, too, shall bear witness unto him; and, as at Tabor, it will be impossible rightly to look on Jesus anywhere, without perceiving Moses in the background,—as the shadow He can never want. Nay, more; the service which was rendered now by Egypt unto Israel, though all unconsciously, Israel shall yet repay with interest, when, in His turn, a Saviour shall present to all the heathen world, lost in their sins, One who is more than ever prophet was. How little thought that noble-minded woman who saved Moses, that his name would shine so lustrously long after her own

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 20.

throne had crumbled into dust, and that dust had been blown away into oblivion! But we who meditate on it, and here in quietness observe the preparation of so much that is most glorious, shout in our raptures of delight, 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?'<sup>1</sup>

Thus much to-day. The first leaf of this Moses' history has most assuredly shown us the day of small things. But will it really be needful to point out, in full detail, the lessons flowing from what we have been considering? Perhaps I may be speaking to proud-hearted ones, as well as those cast down in soul. High in your own esteem, can you not gather from this narrative, although you may not comprehend it thoroughly, that all the might of man is powerless against the counsel of the Lord? Who has opposed Him and had peace? And ye oppressed ones, tossed by the tempest, comfortless, will you still make complaint, as if you had no comforter, when you have once more seen that there is One who hears, and sees, and saves, even in the hour of the most pressing need? I am addressing those who occupy the higher social ranks, and who are well to do; but those, too, who have less, and occupy a humbler place. Children of luxury, shall a heathen princess shame you,—one who took delight in changing sorrow into joy? Will you not rather be induced, by her example, to be workers with the Lord for others' joy, to weep with the afflicted ones, and draw near even to the most despised and indigent? And you, again, the weak and little ones, will you still fancy you may well be quite passed by, when Miriam's case proclaims to you how needful even the weak link is to join the other links into one chain, and how God can avail Himself even of

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 34.

a child deemed insignificant in the promotion of our human bliss and joy? I am addressing those who have been gently dealt with by the Lord, but also those who have been sorely tried, such as we frequently have found, by turns, upon this earthly scene. Ye mothers who, perchance, like Jochebed, have now recovered from the jaws of death a child most dearly loved, will you strive less than she to train it up in the fear of God? Ye children, too, who must appear a wonder to your parents, will you not cry to your Creator and Benefactor, 'My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth'? Or you, again, who are most sorely tried, should you allow yourselves to be so much cast down in soul, because, like Amram, you have now been months—or years, perhaps—in darkness, while the light which you desire so much does not appear? As if it were not just the self-same God who forms the light and who creates the darkness, who makes peace and causes evil, but who forthwith, too, makes evil work for good! 'Never despair, even though the earth departed from before your eyes!'—such is the call of God addressed to us from yon Nile shore. What else does Moses in his youth proclaim, than just what he still sang when old: 'The Lord is a rock, whose work is perfect: God is truth; righteous and just is He!'<sup>1</sup>

'Righteous and just!' But wherefore is it that these very words, by which we sought to raise your courage, threaten instead to break it wholly down? Do you feel still unable to rely on God with perfect confidence, because you do not yet enjoy His friendship and the favour He bestows? Do you object, that God's paths verily are truth and mercy, but for those alone who keep His covenant and His testimony; and do you feel no warrant yet to count yourself as one of these?

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxii. 4.

Blessed art thou, my fellow-sinner, if thou dost most truly comprehend and thus apply to thine own case the soul-disturbing words, which we dare not keep back even here! Nay, we must not immediately remove from you this feeling, painful though it be. God is a refuge, verily, but only for His own and those who truly seek to be His own. But would it not have been a dire mistake if, at that gloomy period, a prophet of the Lord had given the selfsame consolation both to Amram and to Pharaoh? You have as little ground to hope for peace as that great tyrant had, in stiff-necked opposition to the will of God; nay, more, while you thus seem to be in peace and calmness, there is even now in quiet preparation God's dread judgment upon sinful men: soon shall it burst on every worker of unrighteousness, as then it did on the Egyptians. But this we may proclaim to every one of you: the strength by which the parents of this Moses were upheld may, in like manner, be the stay of your own souls, that otherwise must sink beneath the load of woe. And do you ask, How can all this be brought about? Lo, suddenly my spirit wings its way from Egypt to the friendly Promised Land; and there, after some centuries, I find another Child, threatened, like Moses, by an equally ambitious tyrant, and as evidently saved in that same land which formerly afforded an asylum to the Hebrew prophet, but long since raised to greater eminence than that to which this Moses saw himself advancing at that most luxurious court. For your sake He has lived on earth in lowly servant-form, like that in which you here find Israel. Sinner, stretch out your hands to Him in prayer, that He may free you wholly from your sin! And, reconciled to God through Him, learn to rely upon that God, as on a Father from whose love nought shall divide. Yea, He shall free your soul from greater want and death than

that by which you saw the house of Israel distressed ; and just as Moses was drawn from the water as a new-born child, so will He cause you also to experience the second birth by water and the Spirit, which alone can truly make of you a freeman in the kingdom of the Lord. Oh, pray to Him for the salvation of your soul, with earnestness like that displayed by Jochebed when she entreated for the safety of her child ! Commit yourself to Him, that He may keep, establish, train you for a higher destiny than that to which you have seen Moses led ! Remember that the world is as unfit to be your refuge and your strength as that frail basket would have proved had there been any need that it should keep the infant long ! See that you be so thoroughly renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of grace, that, like Amram and Jochebed, you may belong to those who are the people of the Lord's chosen inheritance ! And then shall you, too, realize the truth of those most wondrous words, ' that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.'<sup>1</sup>

Ye friends of God, who, like this family, must thank the Lord because He has afflicted you in faithfulness, have you not felt the truth of this ? Only take heed unto yourselves, and see that ye do not forget His benefits. Strengthen your heart, as Moses, doubtless, must have done, by looking back, in after years and days of darkness, on the many points in your career which well may show memorials raised up in honour of God's love and faithfulness. But do not let yourselves be put to shame by faith such as these simple Israelites displayed, ye who desire to follow, as your leader, the great Guide in faith ; and if the hand of God may happen to lie heavily on you and yours, then seek, like them, your strength in

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

secret and continued prayer. Be not surprised when it appears as if the heavens were shut to your complaints : as you have heard, the furnaces must needs be raised to scorching heat before the songs of the deliverance resound ; there is no dawning of salvation's morn so long as evening has not deepened into midnight gloom. More clearly than could Israel, you now behold, even in the darkest night, a star that never sets,—the promises of God in His eternal faithfulness ! Oh, gaze thereon continually, even though a cloud may often intervene. Follow His counsel unreservedly, wherever and whenever He may call. And further, bear in mind that the Eternal has before Him an eternity when He can justify His mode of government ; wait till you see the end of all His ways. What was the final issue of the darkest days of Amram and His wife—glory and majesty—shall prove, ere long, the end of yours. Verily, 'light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.' 'Rejoice in the Lord alway ; and again I say, Rejoice !'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER II.

### The Training-Time.

‘And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not. And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, *Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me [also], as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday? Then Moses fled at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.*’—ACTS vii. 22–29.

‘OH the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!’<sup>1</sup> Thus Paul exclaims, in holy rapture, when he has completed his description of the Saviour’s work; and who that ever thought of the extent, the cost, and the design of God in our salvation, does not heartily repeat the words? But it is not alone to the adorable design of God in our salvation that the praise of the enraptured writer most directly and immediately applies. For when we further view the ways of God’s eternal providence, we may again employ the words of Paul, and add, ‘For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?’ Nay, more; if it be true, as has been

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 33.

somewhere said, that even Redemption's mysteries sometimes appear still less impenetrable than the enigmas found in the book of Providence, then, certainly, it is not too presumptuous to say, that the riches of God's wisdom and His knowledge, here especially, lie frequently before our eyes, concealed in depths almost beyond our power of fathoming. In sacred stillness, heavenly wisdom makes complete the fabric of her grand designs ; but no child of the dust receives permission to inspect and sit in judgment on the building-plan itself ; and it is the event which first pronounces sentence between man, who constantly asks, 'Why?' and his Creator, who replies, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'<sup>1</sup> If even the most ingenious of men were to attempt, beside the cradle of each infant, to predict what would be its career in life, you may be sure that the last page of its life-history, then scarce begun, would almost always shame him as a prophet of mere lies. Yea, there is none of us but lives to verify the truth of what was said of old, 'A man's heart deviseth his way ; but the Lord directeth his steps.'<sup>2</sup> And do not fancy that it will be otherwise in this respect with those who are especially selected by the Lord to be His chosen instruments for working out His purpose on the earth. The history of all God's people who have been designed for something great is sure to turn out very different from what, had we been told beforehand of their future work, we would have reasonably thought of and marked out for them. And further, though the whole of life is but a time of trial, and a school where we are trained for something higher still, yet, for each friend of God, there dawn into that life some special periods, which, more than others that precede and follow them, deserve these names just given to life in general. So was it with

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlvi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xvi. 9.

Abraham during these years when he was vainly waiting for the son of promise to be born of Sarah. So was it with Joseph, when, filled with a presentiment of something great and glorious, derived from youthful dreams, he pined within the gloomy prison, utterly forgotten, as it seemed, by God as well as men. So was it with David, who, although anointed king of Israel, was constantly compelled to wander up and down, 'hunted like a partridge on the mountains of Judea.' And can there possibly be any doubt that the same principle, seen in God's government, applies to Moses also, whose great name belongs not merely to his Israel, but to humanity at large? If that were true, there would not have been any need for making known to us the chapter in his history to which our notice is directed in that part of Stephen's speech which we have read.

8 Moses! You know that his strange history divides into three periods, each one consisting of exactly forty years. But now let us suppose that we knew only the beginning of the first of these,—his marvellous deliverance,—and that we also knew what God determined as regards the third. Could even the most ingenious imagine that the second would be so immensely different from both the other two—nay (what is even more astonishing), that the unexpected turn, and (as we may well say) the seeming standstill and reversal that occurred during the interval between his fortieth and eightieth year, would be the means for fitting him to be the lawgiver, the prophet, and the mediator of the Old Covenant? Just let us candidly confess that we would have as little thought of it as Moses had himself at first. Nevertheless, it is too true that the history of Moses' life in Midian appears as barren as the sands of the Arabian desert; but especially when we compare it with

its most remarkable commencement, which we have but lately been considering, and its strange course, which shall hereafter occupy our thoughts. 'But what is there that specially concerns us in that murder and its discovery, that flight, that sojourn in a land from which we scarcely hear a single sound?' If any one judge thus, his judgment is as rash as Moses' course of action was. As sandy deserts have their oases, so this transition-period too, with all its seeming unimportance, has a deep significance; and that which promises but little interest, when we regard it only on the human side, rises into supreme importance when we view it in the light of faith, and as a mirror of God's ways and works. We have been showing you, till now, Moses regarded as the child of Providence; to-day, we bid you look on him as one trained by the trials he endures. As Stephen, in the two immediately preceding verses, gives a summary of what is mentioned in the old account of Moses' birth, so, in those now before us, he presents a brief but comprehensive survey of the *training-time* to which we have referred before,—a picture which affords some traits additional to what we meet with in the old historic documents. Neglecting the particular design for which the Jews are here reminded of these things, let us now fix our thoughts upon the facts themselves which are related here. The three great heads which comprehend all that we mean to bid you notice with regard to Moses' training-time are,—*enigmas*, *rays of light*, and *calls* from heaven. O Thou who hast declared that Thou wouldest dwell in darkness, teach Thou us to fathom those deep mysteries, to catch those rays of heavenly light, to hear those calls when Thou dost speak! And if there be no more vouchsafed to us than merely to behold the utmost portions of Thy ways, do Thou Thyself give all of us the heart in childlike faith to say, 'O God, Thy way

is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?'<sup>1</sup>

## 1.

We often find analogies in nature, corresponding to what meets us in our ordinary life. After a dark and cloudy night, the sun ascends through an unclouded sky; but scarcely has it run through a portion of its course ere a dark cloud obscures it, even before it reaches the meridian. So is it with the man of God, whose chequered life we shall to-day trace through a considerable portion of its course. Is it too much to say that Moses felt the trial of severe temptation, painful disappointment, and a long exile in a foreign land? Take any one you like of all these trials he endured, you find each one an enigma, when, even for an instant, you forget the issue that explains the whole.

'And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.' To one who only takes a superficial view, these words present no more than a description of the great good fortune Moses met with in his infancy and youth. The daughter of the king was not content with merely rescuing the babe from death so imminent; with the faithfulness and wisdom shown by mothers, she cares also for the right development and training of the higher life. We have already learned that, in primeval times, Egypt maintained the highest place in all the civilised and learned world; imagine, then, what an Egyptian education must have been, paid for with princely gold! We may be sure that the most eminent of teachers were entrusted with the task of caring for the foundling, and conducting him, as his capacities increased and strengthened, ever deeper

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 13.

into all the mysteries connected with their sciences. If we may trust profane tradition, the polishing of this most precious stone was specially committed to the care of priests ; and to no single branch of human knowledge which could possibly be reached, did this young child, adopted now as one of the Egyptian royal family, remain an utter stranger. What new worlds revealed themselves before his opening mind,—what questions thronged upon his lips,—what answers gave him the material for ever deeper thought ! Methinks I see the beauty of the child become the bloom that marks the boy, the strength of the young man, the earnest striving of the full-grown man to reach all that is great and good. But what a gloomy cloud obscures his countenance when he leaves proud Memphis for the lowly Goshen, which he often visited ! Alas ! what there meets ear and eye is too well fitted to throw a sombre covering over all the splendour which surrounds him daily at the court. The huge oppression of the Israelites continues still ; nay, it is even heavier than it has been before. And these are his own brethren, his own flesh and blood, whom he sees driven like oxen ; while, if he but choose, he can lie down upon a bed of roses ! No ; he can never part with Amram and with Jochebed without increasingly becoming conscious of the truth that he, too, is an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; that those who oppress his countrymen are nothing but a most accursed race of idolaters ; and that there has been given to Jacob's offspring a great promise, in comparison with which the prospect of a dynasty is naught. Has his faithful nurse been bringing to his mind the obligation under which he rests, placed as he is in a position of great eminence, to show himself the advocate or the protector of the oppressed ? At least, the young man feels increasingly that two great forces have been all

along at work throughout his training-time, and that the strife between these two is ever deepening, viz. between that faith he has imbibed from his own mother, and that knowledge he has gathered from the priestly sanctuary. More and more clearly he perceives that he is standing on a crossway, where he is shut up to make a choice ; but what a choice is this, O God of Abraham, which Thou art calling the most highly privileged of men to make ! On one side, Egypt lays down all her treasures at the feet of this fair nursling of Thermuthis, and exclaims : ‘ You have but to express your wish, O mighty Moses, and a glittering career presents itself. The glory of successful wars will then attend your name ; science will add its weight to your own influence ; the shadow of the throne shall be your dwelling-place ; nay, more, before you, like another Joseph, there may sound throughout the land the loud command, Kneel, kneel ! ’ Upon the other side, Goshen stands beckoning, with its vast race of slaves that bend beneath the tyrant’s rod ; with its religious worship, shown to One whose very name is almost wholly lost ; with its deep scorn for every one who stretches out the hand of fellowship to Egypt,—the offscouring of the earth ! How wide the difference between the palace and the brick-kiln, between the wise and foolish of the world, between the food of princes and the bread of tears, between an Amram and a Pharaoh ! We easily can picture Moses, inclining now to this, now to the other side. An old tradition tells of brilliant feats of arms performed by him in early life ; but what are these compared with the harassing struggle doubtless carried on within his heart through many weary nights ? Yes, Israel approaches him with power irresistible ; but has not she who rescued him a claim upon his faithfulness and his obedience too ? Has God placed him so high, that he may of his own free will

abase himself? What will the world say, when he sides with these maltreated ones, whose cause no man has ever pled before King Pharaoh with impunity? And what— But we have had enough: I merely ask if it may not be safely said that Moses, too, was tried, long tried, tempted in many ways? And have you never asked yourselves why Moses should be trained at the Egyptian court, if that were just the place where lay the greatest snare for youthful feet like his?

We are not left in ignorance as to the way in which the man escaped this snare; but scarcely have you gone a single step before you see that this noble choice of his is followed by most *painful disappointment*. Forty years have passed since the babe first raised a cry on the Nile shore. Perhaps Thermuthis is now dead; or possibly her heart has come to be estranged from him who, in his high estate, could still think of his humble origin. At least, he can resist no longer the intense desire to terminate the crying injuries endured by Jacob's sons. There soon presents itself the opportunity of showing, by a deed that told more than a hundred words, the plan that was maturing in his most heroic soul. He has just seen an Israelite abused by an Egyptian; there is none else around to tell that he has interfered; one moment more, and the oppressor's life's blood dyes the ground. Moses imagines he can safely trust the keeping of the secret to the bosom of the earth and to the heart of him whom he had saved; nay, more, so very far is his own conscience from accusing him of murder now committed, that his heart beats high with hope and joy. Now he can have no doubt, nor can his brethren fail to understand, that God is to deliver them through him. Already he perceives, and that not far away, the hosts of the oppressed approaching him; the fetters of the slaves are broken through; he finds himself placed at

the head of those now freed, who march towards the Promised Land, and, after a brief struggle, dwell in the inheritance their fathers had been promised. Alas, how vain a hope, that vanishes almost as soon as it appears! Next day, he sees two of his brethren quarrelling: who is so fitted as himself to come between them,—he whose name is now, no doubt, pronounced with thankful lips by multitudes? ‘Sirs, ye are brethren; why do you wrong one to another?’ So he addresses them in kindly tone. ‘Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me also, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?’ These words come on him like a thunderbolt that issues from a cloudless sky; nay, pierce his soul like a poisoned dart. The murder, then, is known, and known to have been perpetrated by a prince upon a subject of the realm; nay, what is more, his secret is betrayed, and this, too, by the only man who saw the deed committed and was saved through it, for whose deliverance he stained his hands in blood drawn from an enemy. So he has broken now with all the splendour found at Egypt’s court; thus he has made a willing sacrifice of all his earthly prospects; thus he has drawn upon himself the deep displeasure of the king. Thus, through a single utterance of the most base ingratitude, the golden dreams of Moses quickly disappear. He feels his life is now at stake; it seems to him as if a thousand suspicious eyes were turned on him; he thinks he will be fortunate if he can but escape, even with disgrace, from this land where he dwells.

How shall we make you understand the pain of disappointment felt by Moses now? We must not, certainly, approve of Moses’ conduct in itself; for even he forbids us, in that passage where he says: ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’<sup>1</sup> But yet, as

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxii. 35; cf. Rom. xii. 19, Heb. x. 30.

little may we judge of what he did by our ideas and our practices. His object was as laudable as his great motive-principle was void of selfishness ; and one must first have gained a victory over himself as Moses did, seen a foul deed performed like that done under Moses' eyes, and felt provoked as Moses did, ere he breaks over one who has shed blood the rod that utterly condemns and shows itself implacable. Let us suppose that you, a man of generous soul, had willingly renounced all prospects of advancement in this world to follow duty's call ; that you had risked your life to free a brother in distress ; that you had even committed a foul crime for the advancement of the other's interest ; that you had suddenly discovered you had been betrayed by him, the very man who owed you such a debt of gratitude ; and that you had completely missed the sole reward you hoped to gain : would not this be most terrible ? We may conceive what there must have passed through the mind and heart of this sad fugitive, as we soon see him sit on yonder well,<sup>1</sup>—that separating point between two portions of the world, that epoch in his life where met two periods so widely different. Deal tenderly, kind Jethro, with the youth that has become your guest ; his noble heart has now received a deep and streaming wound !

At last, within that tent, the stranger, veiled in mystery, finds rest and peace, no longer tracked by those who seek his life. But surely you do not suppose that the *long exile*, into which you now have followed him in thought, had less of enigma and dark obscurity than former days and weeks ? I readily allow that, in comparison with that great danger which once threatened him, the land of Midian must have been a quiet resting-place, whence he looked back with thankfulness on storms he had endured. The scenes of nature which, in

<sup>1</sup> Ex. ii. 15.

all their grandeur and sublimity, surrounded him by day and night, were certainly more suited for a mind like his than all the splendour of a most luxurious court. Thanks to the hospitality which he receives, he finds himself prepared to enter for the first time on the married state, and soon feels, twice, a father's joy. In peaceful shepherd-life his days glide by, like a smooth, untroubled stream. Many another man would no doubt have esteemed himself quite fortunate in such a case; but is not Moses well aware that it must cost him pains to exercise contentment? Even though he may have but few trials to endure, how much is there that he must long be quite content to want! What an accumulation, too, there is of ills,—remembered, presently experienced, and looked for,—all these tending to destroy his heart's repose! I shall not speak of the blood-guiltiness, which doubtless weighed his conscience down, the longer and more loudly he permitted it to speak; nor of the deep privations which the shepherd must have suffered, and of which he never thought while he was treated as a member of the royal family; nor of his life as father and as husband, though the little that we know about Zipporah does not form a strong inducement to our wishing Moses joy of his life-choice. I merely now refer to the deep love he bore towards his people, which he must have carried with him here, but which he now feels wholly impotent; to the dull and mechanical shepherd-life, so little in accordance with a mind and heart like his; to the enigmatical character of his whole history, which must have seemed to him full of confusion, when at any time he took this standpoint and looked back on it. But why had he been saved from such great danger when a child? Why was there given to him an education and a training which no single Israelite had ever got before, but which

now seemed superfluous? Why was he so endowed with wisdom, and with powers too good and great to be now wasted in a hidden corner of the earth? If it were really the voice of God within his heart that called him to deliver the oppressed, why has this very first attempt of his so miserably failed? Nay, is it not much more than possible that he has only (though unintentionally) made his brethren's case much worse instead of better, since the vengeance meant for him now falls on them, the innocent? Must not his whole life stand before him as a failure, and a vain attempt,—a life whose second half sees all the profit of the former half mis-spent; and would he not have spared himself all this distress, if he had only listened to the voice of flesh and blood, and still remained, in life and spirit, an Egyptian? Thus questions, thoughts, and doubts crowd fast into his mind; but neither from above nor from below is there a voice that gives a satisfactory reply. Of all those round about him, there is not a heart that understands his whole position; not a single voice comes down from heaven, as it came sometimes to his pious ancestors; so uneventful seems his life—external and internal—that even tradition has made no attempt to fill the blank. Thus one decennium succeeds another with a varying speed; but still the sixtieth year finds him the same as did the fiftieth: he is a shepherd still, eating the bread of charity; and, judging from appearances, he is as far, when near his eightieth year, from reaching the high aim of his first wish, as shortly after he had seen his fortieth. The uniformity of daily life with him is like the rigid firmament seen in Elijah's days, but there is not the smallest speck of cloud to indicate a change; and while the future stands before him in its joylessness, the past, just like a vision of the night, sinks ever farther down into obscurity. Do you not

think that, more than forty times within those forty years, there must have risen in Moses' mind the thought thus uttered by the Psalmist, 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him'?<sup>1</sup>

## 2.

But are justice and judgment indeed the basis of the throne of the eternal God? The selfsame history that here presents us with such enigmas, affords us also, on the other side, some *rays of light* that well may take us by surprise. If we regard it in the light of faith and of the great result, we clearly see that Moses' faith was exercised by strong temptation, that his character was purified by painful disappointment, that long exile perfected the training he received.

May we not confidently say that strong temptation was the very means by which the faith of Moses was called into exercise? You need not be surprised that we speak thus decidedly of Moses' faith; one of the sacred writers has already done so long ago. We are not left in doubt regarding what it was that properly led Moses to decide, and make a choice which every Egyptian must certainly have deemed the greatest foolishness. 'By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ'—think of reproach like what Christ afterwards endured, reproach for the kingdom of heaven's sake—'greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.'<sup>2</sup> This is indeed a sublime description; but how much more sublime is the thing itself

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcvi. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 24-26.

here pointed out, and which we vainly try in some degree to estimate as it demands we should! Lo, there before you Moses stands once more, the balance oscillating in his hands! In the one scale, the left, is everything that could charm any youthful mind,—wealth, pleasure, popularity, wide influence, and fame; while on the other side, nothing but faith appears, yet, wonderful to tell, the scale in which this last is sinks, because it is the heavier! ‘But surely, Moses, you do not suppose that those down-trodden slaves are God’s own people; you surely do not look for any glorious future to a race that plainly sinks but farther down to ruin; surely you do not look for a reward better than what this world can give?’ Yet this is just what Moses does, and does without receiving special revelation,—without having any one to urge him on to such a work,—without support from anything beyond God’s ancient promises to Abraham, which were, no doubt, well known to him. At a time when life and immortality were far from being brought to light, he has in view a great reward with God, compared with which all Egypt’s treasures are as chaff. Though other men esteem it a disgrace to be a member of that branded, ill-used nation, he considers it an honour such as he will not resign for any royal crown; nay, marvellous to tell, he thinks himself far richer than a Pharaoh in his glory! Wondrous power of faith, that measures things by quite another standard, looks on them with quite another eye, and feels with quite another heart than that with which those measure, see, and feel, who have no other sphere of life than merely this seen world! Men once reviled this Moses, pointing at him their finger in deep scorn; but now, how suddenly he has been raised above all Memphis and its mockery, so little really, though in its own esteem so great! But yet how plain,

too, has it now become, that even this confidence of faith would never have produced such grand results, if the fiery trial, spoken of before, had never been endured! If you remove the word 'temptation' from the history of Moses, then his name, as one who dared the worst under the influence of faith,—who staked all that was precious, though to gain what was more precious still,—becomes an empty sound. For it is not until the heavenly Refiner puts the gold—your faith—into the hottest furnace, that its reality and its amount, its worth and durability, become quite evident. The Christian's soul is like a garden of the Lord; but that the trees which have been planted there may scatter forth their perfumes everywhere around, He must from time to time send storms, to liberate the balmy odour and present it to the weary traveller. It is not much to choose the service of the Lord, and range oneself among His friends, when it is possible, withal, still to retain a hold of Egypt's treasures, and to suffer no reproach of any kind for His name's sake. But when, just as in Moses' case, it is impossible to keep the two at once; when we must take some most decided step, for which we know full well, beforehand, that the world will frown on us; when we must sacrifice, upon the altar of a God-devoted heart, the honour and the favour of our fellow-men,—then will appear the true amount of our much-boasted faith, of which, in peaceful days, we could discourse and sing so fluently; then will appear the difference between a seeming faith and life with God; then, when the sun of persecution has arisen, the seed that has sprung up in stony ground will wither utterly, and only that which has been sown in good soil will produce good fruit. Why should you Christians wonder, then, when you discover that the tree which tests and tries us men has been transplanted out of paradise into all regions of

the world? or why should you desire to be at once delivered from all strife? Without the fiery trial at that seductive court, Moses would not have been himself; the Christian, too, is called to show how he can conquer through his faith, not when out of the world, but in the world. And now, when God's grand purpose with regard to Moses has been actually carried out, and when the man leaves his first training-school, quite destitute of Egypt's wealth, but rich in faith, has he great reason to complain?

'But,' you will say, 'when once the right choice has been made, and the decisive step is taken, there was surely no necessity at least for painful disappointment?' Say not so; for surely it was just in this way that the character of Moses was refined. It is quite possible that, at the first, a man may be a true believer, and remain, alas! weak, vain, proud, arrogant. Such was the case with Moses when you see him summoned to avenge the wrongs of Israel. He has firm faith in God and in His promises; his feelings and affections are no longer bound to Egypt; and there can be little doubt, or none, concerning his sincerity: but he is sadly wanting in humility. Moses is conscious of a special destiny for something great, but thinks he is the man that can the least be spared in any case. His is a merely carnal zeal to save his fellow-Israelites, as is quite evident from the great failure that befell his first attempt; for his heart, a prey to his own folly, is the sport and plaything, now of pride and arrogance, and now of fear and cowardice. *He* will, *he* can, *he* shall do just as he thinks right; but God is not yet willing. God shall certainly perform His will through Moses, but not through a Moses such as *this*. The darling of the whole Egyptian world still stands too high; he must descend a step or two before he can be used to serve Him who hates lofty looks, be they of

friends or foes. Moses has made great progress in Egyptian wisdom ; but he is as yet quite unaware that, in the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, while he is nothing, God is everything. Although his heart is right, his will is not sufficiently subdued ; he still counts far too much both on his own strength and the gratitude of men ; his old man yet must needs be slain, as he slew the Egyptian. Therefore the Lord Himself assails him now, and seems in this quite as unmerciful as he had been to the oppressor of his brethren. In the first Israelite to whom he showed himself as a deliverer, he must be made to see, as in a glass, the nation's meanness and ingratitude, that he may learn to do all for the sake of God, but nothing for the sake of man ; and that he never may presume to say, ' My hand hath led out Israel.' Even though the murder he committed seems a pardonable sin, yet it is just in His own elect that the Holy One of Israel strictly visits what seems quite excusable ; and though He deeply humbles Moses now, it is that He may straightway make him great through the humility. Moses' first action lets us see what he shall afterwards be able for, when God's grace shall have wholly filled and purified his manly soul ; just as the husbandman perceives, in the strong crop of weeds, the promise of good harvest, when the ground shall have been cleared of tares, and sown with wheat. But harrowing and ploughing, that break down the hardest clods,—such are the operations specially attended to by Him who is the heavenly Husbandman, when, in His wisdom, He proposes to lay out a field that is particularly fine ; and disappointment to our dearest and legitimate, perhaps, indeed, our most praiseworthy plans, forms the deep furrow drawn across us, that the heavenly seed may afterwards be sown. Christians ! do not forget that God is constantly employing such a means for cleansing these

our hearts from that impurity which brings Him so much pain, and us so much disgrace. Have you formed fine ideals of the good that you will do for the promotion of your neighbour's happiness? It shall not be, says God; you still rely too much on your own strength, expecting far too little from the Lord, who must do all. Have you been sketching out a golden future for yourself? God blows on your designs some time or other, right before your eyes, that, with a broken but a humbled heart, you may exclaim, 'I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself!'<sup>1</sup> Have you been really so foolish as, unthinking, to rely on human love and gratitude? God, in some rude and startling way, opens your eyes, that, fleeing in your terror from the falling idol, you may fall down at the feet of the true God—nay, sink into your heavenly Father's arms! But I must stop; because the more I look, so much more clearly do there fall upon me rays of light, that raise me to an ecstasy, and urge me to say that there can and must be no other way for you and me than that of wrestling and temptation, if there is to come from us what is most truly good, and great, and worthy of God's kingdom, whether here or up in heaven. Even the mean-spirited betrayer, in his turn, had his own share in training Moses for his future work; and when the man of God has, by this very means, unlearned what he must needs unlearn, in order that the courtier might become a prophet of the Lord, do you not think that Moses has been in this as free from wickedness as the Almighty from unrighteousness?

Now you begin yourselves to see how the long exile—the last enigma which we have specified—formed the last step in training Moses for his work. But yet, how wondrous are the ways of Him who never is so near as when He seems to have forsaken us! It must be

<sup>1</sup> Jer. x. 23.

Jethro's daughters, and none else, whom Moses shall first look upon in Midian ; and the small service rendered them but paves the way for him into the training-school which his celestial Guide now opens up to him under a simple shepherd's tent. You know the Midianites trace a direct descent from Abraham ; and however much idolatry infects some tribes, there is no ground for doubting that Jethro was a worshipper and priest of Him who is the one true God. Do you not find yourself beginning to imagine how unspeakably important, for a mind like Moses, must have been his daily intercourse with such a wise and pious man? More precious far than all the treasures of Egyptian wisdom is the knowledge of antiquity, of human nature, and the truth to which he now is introduced ; while, just at the arrival of the proper time, he is at once and utterly removed from all the evil influences of the idolatry surrounding him. He must now get accustomed to a desert life ; how else can he, who has just come from court, be hardened for a wandering of forty years? It is in solitude that the heroic soul must be matured for its grand destiny ; God's friends are always formed in such a way. The lonely nights spent in the cave are just the seasons when the most affecting psalms of David were composed ; it is just in the desert that the son of Zacharias grows to be the messenger who calls on Israel to repent ; it is just in the stillness of that same Arabian desert that Paul ripens into the Moses of the New Covenant, whose it shall be to lead out Christianity from the hard bondage of the law ; the cloister-cell at Erfurt hides the pangs of Luther's second birth ; and it is in the stillness of the inner chamber, whither you have fled for refuge from the din and vanity of worldly things, that there grow on your souls those seraph-wings, with which, when you have been glorified, you will appear before the Lord. But

Moses is not destined thus to live and die among a company of shepherds, quite unknown to fame ; he, too, shall in his time be brought out from obscurity to light. Nevertheless, this cannot be before God's time arrives ; and this time does not come so long as the concluding, the most difficult of all the lessons the believer has to learn—submissive, patient waiting—still remains unlearned. Moses was given no less than forty weary years to learn the lesson ; and even after that, he is so far from being perfected, that, in the last year of his life, he is again surprised and led away by his impatient soul. The training-time of Moses is a long one,—just as long as his life-task. But that which is most excellent, both in the natural and moral world, is always slowest in attaining full maturity. And who can doubt, moreover, that even long delay in the realization of our hopes receives alleviation at God's hands in many ways, and compensation too? But further, it is worth observing how the names that Moses gave to his two sons express his calm reliance and unshaken faith. 'The name of the one was Gershom ; for, he said, "I have been a stranger in a strange land." And the name of the other was Eliezer ; "For the God of my father," said he, "hath been my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."' <sup>1</sup> How often Moses must have been astonished when he found, on looking back upon his life in Midian, that what he had regarded as an obstacle must have become the very means for leading him towards his destined end ! Such is the way of God with those He calls and chooses for Himself. As Moses guided Israel out of Egypt, so He leads us out from the world's house of bondage, just that we may learn in secret what a blessed thing it is to be with Him. He makes one star and then another set before our eyes, that we may gaze uninterruptedly upon the sun of

<sup>1</sup> Ex. ii. 22, xviii. 4.

His rich promises. It is far more by hunger's pains than by the comfort of an appetite that has been satisfied ; it is by weaning, rather than by giving us to drink, that He both forms and nourishes our inner man. And after our probation-time has been fulfilled, He calls us, as He summoned Moses, to the earthly or the heavenly destiny marked out for us peculiarly, and brings His own out from their exile on this earth into their Father's home in heaven. If we are sometimes dazzled by mere rays on earth, what shall it be when faith gives place to sight ?

### 3.

Shall we, too, realize that prospect in our own experience ? This will depend upon the question whether we give ear unto the calls addressed to us, as from the hoary past, that come from Moses' history in his probation-time. *Respectful silence, careful choice, complete obedience*,—such are the leading lessons taught by his experience.

To show a reverential silence, and never to contend with our Creator:—the inculcation of this lesson must be almost needless now, after such light as has been thrown upon mysterious ways. And yet who is so ignorant of his own heart as not to know how much more hard it is to see that everything is good which God in sovereignty performs, than judge that everything is good which God, in His unspotted holiness, requires ? Some here may seldom, or even never yet have felt how the whole soul at times can rise in loud complaint against the course which God pursues with us. But why should any one complain against the Guide of all, when we discover that the way is quite as plain and pleasant and frequented as we well could wish, or might expect ? Even Moses could have had no ground for making a complaint about his case,

when everything was done in Egypt at his nod, and when he felt quite confident that every one in Goshen would side with him. But when the Lord now suddenly restrains this man in his impetuosity, and says, 'Stand still!' and asks that the unyielding one shall bend, Moses would not have been a man at all had he then submitted joyfully. We often have a like experience ourselves. We have our good intentions, but we find no opportunity of doing what we would. We feel our powers have grown, enabling us to work, to fight, to overcome; but yet we find ourselves condemned to inactivity. We see that we are placed within a narrow sphere, where we can never do what we, no doubt, could well effect if our surroundings were more favourable than they are. We see injustice triumph,—justice mercilessly trodden down. It is as if, at certain points, the thread of our development were being broken off by the celestial hand that has been spinning it. It seems that we shall never be what we had hoped and thought; we find ourselves beginning to despair of our earthly, if not of our heavenly destiny; and we sit down, like Moses at the well, exhausted and dispirited, resting our weary head upon our hands, while we feel it is hard indeed to keep from crying out in the deep bitterness of grief. And when we vainly ask, from day to day, 'Oh, who will show us any good?'<sup>1</sup> how far we are from asking, on the other hand, 'Where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?'<sup>2</sup> 'Who giveth songs in the night:' if you desire to feel the force of these words of Elihu, you must fancy that you heard, along with Job, the question of the Lord out of the thunderstorm, 'Is it wise to contend with the Almighty?'<sup>3</sup> Shall a short-sighted one contend with the Omniscient, a mortal man with the Eternal, the transgressor with the Righteous One, be-

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

<sup>2</sup> Job xxxv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Job xl. 2.

cause He was not pleased to lead us by the way we chose, or possibly because He will not give us what we, groundlessly perhaps, are pleased to say is indispensable for our best interests? But is He, who thus will not give us all we ask, obliged to grant us even the smallest benefit? Is it not just ourselves, at least in part, who are the cause of all that brings us sorrow, even as Moses, for the murder he committed, suffered banishment? Are we aware how many more degrees the heat must needs be raised, before the silver of our faith (supposing that the silver is quite genuine) will be refined from all the dross? And do not even the streams of consolation from the Lord flow on in whispers through the sands of gloomy Midian? This hour will be a blessed one for us if we have learned at least this much,—never to cherish the desire of being wiser than the Lord, and reverentially to lay our hand upon our mouth, even though our eyes should stare themselves quite blind in darkest night. ‘It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,’<sup>1</sup> and to vouchsafe no answer while He still continues at His work, but only after He has finished it. What more do we require than the glad certainty that once made David say exultingly, ‘This I know, that God is for me’?<sup>2</sup>

But Moses also had experience of this; do you, too, wish this consciousness were yours? Your conscience has already told you that the wish will never be fulfilled, so long as Moses’ choice has never really been yours. But is it needful to adduce much proof for showing that the comfort which arises from this faith is, certainly, for such as Moses, but not for the Midianites,—for God’s own Israel, but not for the Egypt of this world? Ah, this is why, in evil-times, your courage sinks so rapidly! Your heart gives way, because your conscience is aroused;

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lvi. 9.

conscience condemns you, since you are not yet at peace with God; and you remain without that peace, because you have not yet true faith in Christ. Poor man, away from that eternal Son through whom alone we can approach the Father! how my heart laments for you,—even though all Egypt's treasure had been yours, as well as what Peru affords! You have but chosen the reverse of that which Moses chose; you have preferred sin's pleasures for a season, rather than endurance of that shame which still abundantly attends the followers of Christ. You still refuse to serve the best of Masters, quite as obstinately as did Moses to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter; but, alas, when you, too, shall begin to look upon 'the recompense of the reward,' how frightful is the prospect that awaits you! The history of Moses has to-day proclaimed, with solemn emphasis, how speedily all worldly fame and honour pass away, and even the highest sink down to the lowest depths. Those earthly friends, to whom you cling so eagerly, may be as faithless and deceitful as that Israelite who betrayed the man that was the instrument of his deliverance. You know, too, that your highest expectations, even as his, grow out of one another, like the soap-bubbles that children make; and your sins, though they may remain concealed on earth, will most assuredly be brought to light, just like that fatal secret Moses vainly sought to hide beneath the depths of sand. How much more dreadful will it be, when the great Judge of heaven and earth, at the decisive hour, ascends His lofty throne, while deep depression and uneasiness steal over every sinful soul! You utterly abominate the blindness and ingratitude of Israel, who would not look on Moses as their great deliverer; of how 'much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy' who hath rejected the Mediator of the New Covenant, after, not

one, but countless proofs that He sincerely and most earnestly desired to save our souls? By your eternal welfare, we beseech you no more to reject this Lord who comes from heaven, and who will save you from destruction far more certain than the miserable death now threatening the son of Abraham. See that you realize the greatness of your guilt, which you have been contracting all too long; pray for the spirit of that faith which you see working here in Moses, so that you too may be able rightly to compare the worth of earth and heaven,—of that which perishes and of that which shall endure! You too, like him, are called to make a choice,—not for the first time, certainly, though one day for the last; see that you do not make mistake—see that you do not needlessly delay! Even though you might be able to acquire, in serving sin, all Egypt's treasures, do but think how small their worth will be when the brief dream of life is past; and look unto the gracious recompense of the reward prepared by God for those who serve Him faithfully! There must, indeed, be self-denial and a constant struggle on the part of those who seek to win that crown; but how much better is it to taste suffering with God's own people, than to bathe in streams of sin's delights! In the great conflict, then, see that you range yourselves among—I do not say, indefinitely, 'pious men;' for when you enter into dealings with your fellow-men, you will experience as bitter disappointment as did Moses in his intercourse with suffering brethren: but be on the side of unfeigned piety, and lead a life of intercourse with God! Learn from Him who is greater than Moses, to fight the good fight of faith and to lay hold upon eternal life, whereunto ye are also called! Let no youth here object that he is still too young, when he perceives how Moses, even in his earliest years, sought to escape the lusts of youth.

Even though you should on that account be forced to suffer shame and deep reproach, yet, if it be indeed reproach for Christ, you may rejoice with deep and humble thankfulness. Yea, though you saw that the issue of your choice, in taking up the cross and following the Lord, must sometimes be a flowery path, sometimes one full of stones, nevertheless, the end will show that God is merciful and most compassionate. All heavenly Wisdom's ways, whether they lead through desert Midian, or towards friendly Goshen, are at all times ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace!

Yes, verily, for those who will be taught by her—but only those. Let me once more insist on this; and listen to the call requiring you implicitly to follow, and proceeding from the region of the Nile. Whence came all the disgrace and injury which you here see poured out on Moses' head? Did it not just arise from this, that, anxious as he was to do God's work, he did it quite in his own way, instead of letting God decide not merely what he was to do, but how and when he should begin the work? It does not matter much though we declare for the good cause, if we endeavour to promote its interests just in the way we like, rather than as the Lord desires; and even the confidence of faith may change to culpable presumption, when a spirit of enduring patience is not joined with it. Then, Christians, be not envious of the lot of sinners; rather continue in the fear of God, because there is a sure reward, and your hope shall not be cut off.<sup>1</sup> 'Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.'<sup>2</sup> Do not be over hasty in assuming that to be the voice of God which possibly, as here in Moses' case, is but a voice of flesh and blood; and though you say that you can see no wrong, do not be much astonished when you find that you must suffer

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxiii. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 8.

grievous wrong. Do not in peevishness complain when well-meant efforts on your part are disesteemed, or violently opposed ; you have not yet, like Moses, risked your life in vain for thankless men. Knowledge of human nature is but rarely gained except through the hard lessons learned in this world's school ; blessed are ye when it is ever followed by such knowledge of yourselves as brings humility,—blessed especially when you can learn, sooner than Moses did, to place reliance less and less on self and men in general, and more and more upon your God and Saviour Jesus Christ ! Be silent in the presence of the Lord when He gives no reply regarding what He does, and wait until you reach the end. You have a better fountain than the well whereat this Moses drank and was refreshed in Midian,—God's word and promises, which in Jesus are Yea and Amen : refresh and quicken these your souls by drinking daily there ! Habituate yourself to see the hand of God in little things as well as in the great events of life ; the God of Providence arranged not merely for the meeting between Moses and the daughter of King Pharaoh, but for that, too, which took place with Jethro's daughter at the well. Like him, be generous, compassionate, pacific, ever ready to serve others in humility ; and though your life should for the present be, in many points, a cheerless Midian, rejoice in this especially, that Egypt is behind, Canaan before. And if your burdens press upon you heavily, repeat to your own mind what Moses said after the birth of his first son, ' I am a stranger in a strange land.'<sup>1</sup> And when at any time you feel deep longing to behold your own true country, rather seek, above all things, that you may not find entrance there before you have been quite prepared. Well may we, at the close of such a narrative, depicting Moses' training-time and that

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

of multitudes,—believers like himself,—say to each other, in the words of a sweet Christian poet<sup>1</sup> not forgotten yet :

‘Beloved children ! let the Master train you :  
Surely to you He meaneth nothing ill.  
His love to you can never know decreasing,  
He knoweth what He does,—’tis wisdom still.  
Patience in heavy days of dark distress  
Works out for you the heavenly blessedness.

‘At last, to enter the eternal glory,  
The dross of earth and all life’s base alloy  
For ever purged by the Divine Refiner,—  
Ah, this is bliss ! this is of joys the joy !  
God’s dearest child is he who, longest tried,  
Thus enters in, refined and purified.’

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<sup>1</sup> Ulysses van Salis. [For the English rendering we are indebted to the Rev. Dr. Horatius Bonar.—TR.]

## CHAPTER III.

### The Call.

‘God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here am I.’—Ex. iii. 48.

IT was a remarkable message from God that came, at a critical juncture, to Habakkuk, the prophet of the Lord in the kingdom of Judah. Like a watchman on a lofty tower, the seer is now standing at his lonely post, waiting an answer from Jehovah to the sorrowful complaint which he had just poured forth. There he is bidden write on tablets, by the wayside, what shall be declared to him in vision, so that any passer-by observing it may stop to read the sacred writ. It shall, indeed, be some time yet before the long-expected day of God’s salvation dawns; faith, deeply though it has been tried already, has not undergone, as yet, the final test. Nevertheless, by thus deferring hope, so very far must Israel’s heart be from becoming sick, that, on the contrary, expectancy must rise to greater heights of joy. The Lord takes vengeance, even though He may not actually say He shall; and hence the man of God has these words uttered in his ears, from heaven above: ‘Although He tarry, wait for Him; for He shall surely come, He shall not come behind the proper time.’

‘Though He tarry, wait for Him; for He shall surely come.’ Am I far wrong in saying that this is a message of most deep significance from God to all His friends, throughout all history? Indeed, two brief expressions

here present us with God's way of dealing towards men throughout all time. 'The Lord tarrieth,'—there is the one: 'The Lord cometh,'—there is the other. He tarries, when He lets His people walk in darkness; and He comes, when He makes plain, before the face of heaven and earth, that He can do beyond what we may ask or think. He tarries, frequently far longer than we in shortsightedness thought good, or in rash haste deemed possible; He comes, and in a manner much more manifest, and wonderful, and glorious, than our weak faith had ever thought or asked. He tarries, just that He may come; and when He comes, then it appears that 'light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.'<sup>1</sup> How often it has happened in the history of this same Israel, so peculiarly a people in expectancy, but yet a people that repeatedly beheld their King appear, to crush oppressors in their tyranny, and to deliver the oppressed ones that cried out to Him for help! Yes, what a minor prophet thus bears witness to, has been experienced in all its force by him who was the greatest prophet of the Old Economy; and even though we had no other proof, the call of Moses to be Israel's deliverer remains a permanent reminder of the truth we never lay sufficiently to heart, that the God of Israel is One that tarries,—the God of Israel is One that surely comes!

The call of Moses:—we must readily confess that it is not without reluctance we have now prepared ourselves to pass from a consideration of his birth and training-time, and deal with all the rich material before us here. Already we have been unable to regard the man of God, first as a child of Providence, and then a pupil in the school of hard experience, without adoring God at every turn. But when we, for the first time, bid

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcvi. 11.

you look on him as called to be Jehovah's prophet, God's own voice seems, with redoubled force, to sound within our heart, 'The place whereon ye stand is holy ground!' But the page now open to our eyes must ever occupy a special and important place in Moses' history, in that of Israel, and that of all God's kingdom on the earth. Here we see Moses brought quite to the turning-point, for which much preparation has most carefully been made through eighty long and, in so many ways, most anxious years. At last, high over all the blazing fires that issue from the brick-kilns, we perceive the flaming torch that shows to Israel the path of their deliverance. Here we can see, prepared, announced, and actually begun, the setting-up of the Theocracy among the most remarkable of all the nations of antiquity. Now there begins a quite new series of events, of revelations, and deliverances, shown in a barren wilderness; and if you seek an explanation of the character in which Moses, the man of God, appears, you find it given as if by light reflected from the burning bush. The Lord here, for the first time, comes into close and personal connection with the man, concerning whom one—not a sacred writer—has inscribed these words: 'He was as great as any man could have been before the Gospel;' while, on the other hand, a sacred writer, in the grandeur of simplicity, has said, in language still more beautiful: 'There arose no prophet since like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.'<sup>1</sup> Even though we had no more before us now than the account of a mere passing incident, whose consequences have extended through long centuries, and in a certain sense continue to exert their influence even at the present day, yet we could never tread this hallowed ground till we had stripped our shoes from off our feet. But we

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 10.

have not yet marked the point from which this picture may be seen most advantageously. The call of Moses, as it has been termed, was a *revelation of the glory of God*. If, as our Lord has said, this is eternal life, that we know Him, the one true God, then here, as in a mirror, there is shown us who God is, what He would be to us, and what He may require us to become towards Himself. Are we not right in saying that we shall derive most benefit and blessing from consideration of the call of Moses, when we view it as a picture of the present, and a training-school for time to come? Even after making all allowance for acknowledged differences, there still remain sufficient points of likeness to support us in the view we take of it. Setting aside archæological and exegetical questions, which are of minor consequence for our design, we fix upon the text as being suitable for introduction to the view presented us, not merely in the whole of this third chapter of the book of Exodus, but also at the last part of the second and the greater portion of the fourth. Come, read for your own selves, as if by light shed from the burning bush, how God (1) understands His people's cry, (2) breaks their bonds, (3) decides upon the mode in which they shall be called, (4) strengthens their weakness, and (5) rewards them for obedience to His word.

Lord, Thou hast made known Thy ways unto Moses, Thine acts unto the children of Israel; show us also this day that Thou art merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth! Amen.

## 1.

Forty years have passed away since Moses' first attempt to break the yoke of Israel's slavery. But, alas, how far the people are from crying out, like Joseph once,

with joy: 'God hath made me forget all my trouble!' The voice of history is silent as to all that passed during that period; but what else would have been related than sad scenes of blood and tears? At last there dawns a ray of light; the king of Egypt now is dead,—he who has such a reckoning to make of fathers' curses, mothers' screams, and murders of so many innocents. 'Take courage, ye oppressed ones! the tyrant now has bowed his head before the king of terrors!'—but, alas! the respite lasts no longer than the time for which the princely throne remains unoccupied. The change of master only brought the slaves still deeper slavery; and this they felt all the more painfully, because they had, for a brief moment, dreamed and wished for better times—the wish was all they could enjoy. The morning seemed to have arrived, but the night came on still darker than before; yet Israel has at last learned to do something else than make complaint, for they begin to pray with importunity unknown before. 'Their cry by reason of their bondage came up unto God,' so runs ver. 23 of the preceding chapter. When all hope of escape had been cut off around them, and no king on earth gave ear to their complaints, then was their eye, wearied with shedding tears, turned towards heaven; and though they find it thickly covered with dark clouds all round, yet they perceive that there is still above, beyond these clouds, one cheering star,—God's covenant made with His friends. Can there be any doubt that these grand promises, given of old by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, came latterly with an increasing force before the minds of those at least who were the leaders of God's Israel, and furnished them with grounds for humble supplication to the Lord? Methinks I hear once more a voice from Goshen,—lamentation and weeping and great mourning; and the burden of the lamentation,

consciously or all unconsciously expressed, is this : 'Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, O God of our fathers !'<sup>1</sup> But this they have been praying for so long already, that it seems as if their prayer has not been heard. Nay, now they pray no longer without being heard ; for listen to the touching story : 'And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.' How glorious and how adorable a God is He of whom the Bible speaks ! The philosopher imagines that he gives the highest honour to his God, when he portrays Him as a Being quite supreme, unchangeable ; that once made all things, and arranged them perfectly, so that He now can let them all go on, guided by their own laws, while there appears no need for further interference on His part to stop the restless wheel of this world's history. The wheel revolves on its own axis,—wounds one, bruises another, and drives aside a third. 'But cries we utter in distress avail us not ; our prayers are sighs by which we vent our pent-up griefs and find relief, but have not even the slightest power with God ; and our complaints but perish on the winds that daily bear them heavenwards.' Were this the true conception of what God is towards men, what better counsel could we give to those in suffering than that which Job's wife gave to him in his severe afflictions,—to curse God, and then die in dark despair ? But no ; the God of Scripture comes before us in a manner far more human, and, just for that reason, more divine ; and He affords us opportunities of uttering our hearts' desires. A God that lives, and thinks, and sees, and hears, and shows more pity than a mother to her weeping child,—such is the God of Israel, the God and

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lxiv. 1.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ! Do you not feel this more and more intensely, in proportion as you have imbibed the spirit of these glorious words of Sacred Writ? High on His throne rules the Omnipotent, angels of light surrounding Him ; deep in the dust, a few degraded slaves beseech Heaven's pity in their wretched state. No earthly prince esteems them worthy even of a single look ; but from the heights of heaven an eye of pity is directed towards the disconsolate, who ever sink the deeper down into their sea of misery. Do they deserve to have bestowed on them by God such thoughts of peace? They scarce retain a single trace of Abraham's faith and Isaac's gentleness, of Jacob's courage and of Joseph's fear of God ; and what the Lord spake later, by Ezekiel, He may even now declare : ' Be it known unto you that I do not these things for your sakes, O house of Israel ; be ashamed, and blush for your ways.'<sup>1</sup> But if the Lord's compassion be quite undeserved, it is, besides, eternal, faithful, plenteous. Though Israel is now reared in Egypt as if by a step-mother, God still regards them as the heirs of Abraham's blessing ; and although the altars where His covenant was entered into now stand desolate, the covenant itself endures, firm and immoveable as Horeb's rocks. He still remembers, even when He but seems to forget ; the welcome words : ' Lo, here am I,' burn, as it were, upon His lips ; another instant, and the dark cloud breaks, His mighty arm is raised ! Stand here a moment now, ye who so often have complained with Jacob, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God !'<sup>2</sup> Once more we are reminded of the story told us in our youth by pious lips, how, in the days when French oppression, with its leaden sceptre, lay upon our native land, and people had even lost all

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xl. 27.

courage to complain, consideration of these words: 'And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them,' revived and comforted God's people in a way unknown before. What welcome words to a down-trodden nation, a poor family, or a disciple of the Lord who thinks he is forsaken utterly! But who has not yet learned that he must be of all men the most wretched, if he could no longer find support from this, the last and only comfort that remained: 'Thou hast seen it, for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand?'<sup>1</sup> Give ear to this, ye children of the Lord, who may perhaps, like Israel, have toilsome service to perform on earth, and an increasing struggle to maintain! Hear this, ye wicked ones, who often feel your heart creep when you look on others' sorrow which you cannot lighten or remove! There is One over all from whom no single groan is hid; and if He has established with you too, in Christ, an everlasting covenant of grace and mercy, then, although the hills and mountains may depart, His word and faithfulness can never fail. It is with you even as with Israel: your yoke is made the heavier, that you may learn to pray more earnestly; the sigh must rise to a complaint, and the complaint become a cry that finds an echo in the heart of God our everlasting Father. 'Forget!' The word is to be found in your vocabulary only, not in His; and there is not a silent tear which falls upon hands clasped in prayer that is not gathered carefully into the bottle of the Lord. 'When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. x. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xli. 17.

## 2.

But do you think these statements are extreme? Then do but come and see how *God breaks through His people's chains*. From Egypt, our imagination carries us to Midian, where we no longer feel quite strange. Picture a lonely mountain range, with rocks and cliffs dispersed throughout; to use the language of a modern writer, 'a dark sea of lava, with huge waves that reach to heaven, suddenly converted into stone when they are at their greatest height.' There, through the night, a solitary shepherd walks about, surrounded only by his peaceful flock; how changed he is since we beheld him last! It is no longer the proud youth, who drove away the shepherds in their rudeness, and then gave Zipporah's flocks to drink. The ardour of his youth has given place to calmness; the sapling has become a sturdy cedar; now the breath of God begins to play upon its branches, showing there its power. What strange sight is it he beholds in the vicinity of yonder Horeb? A bush that still retains its fresh, green look amidst the ruddy glow of fire. What voice is it he hears, when he approaches calmly to behold the wondrous sight? The voice of Him who is the Angel of the Lord, on whom the name 'Jehovah' stands inscribed, who is adored and revered as God, and in whom believers of all times have recognised the Son of God, who sometimes showed Himself to men before He took the human form. 'Moses, Moses!' sounds from among the flames; 'It is the Lord,' is the response that issues from the depth of his soul. How joyful was that moment, when, for the first time after four centuries had passed, the voice that had so long been silent was heard yet once more! And what a meeting, face to face, between this child formed of the dust and Him who is the God of heaven and

earth! Nay, when the line that separates between the two is overstepped, then must the dust of earth be shaken off the feet that press upon the threshold of God's holy place. But scarce has Moses shown obedience to the call, ere it appears who this is that has deigned to show a single ray of His own glory to a mortal eye. Are you surprised that Jethro's shepherd hides his face with both his hands while Israel's Shepherd speaks? And now, let any one describe to me the deep astonishment, the joy, the hope that entered Moses' heart, when, step by step, the Lord leads him into the secret of His purpose to deliver Israel! But what need is there for rehearsing, word for word, the whole of God's address (vers. 7-10), seeing you would require to listen with the ear of one like Moses, so that you might fully comprehend the grandeur of it all? If Moses had been able to conceive what riches of compassion would be shown him after this great exhibition of God's majesty, I fancy that he would have listened to the words from heaven, not standing, but on bended knees, and with his face bowed to the earth. The Lord assures him now of what could never have occurred to any human heart. He is aware of Israel's grief; He manifestly has come down from heaven, to which the cry for help has risen; He will deliver Israel from the Egyptians' hands, and lead them to a land that flows with milk and honey; already has the place been fixed upon where the descendants of His friends shall rest from toil and strife. What pleasant news for Moses! The dearest wish, then, of his heart is really to be fulfilled, just when he was afraid he must descend into the grave with an unanswered prayer. But what a prospect, too, for Israel! And yet they little think or understand how God, just at this very time, is busy in another portion of the world, engaged in strengthening

the arm that shall deliver them. Freedom instead of slavery, plenty instead of want, honey and milk instead of tears and streams of blood! And above all, how grand a revelation of the glory of the Lord! Possessing this, we do not need, like Moses, to inquire the name of Him whose words we hear. But tell me, which do you regard as the more wonderful,—the mighty power that breaks the fetters of the slaves as if they were but straws, and brings to Israel the freedom they had sought incessantly; or the great wisdom which allowed distress to grow to such a height that the deliverance might be the more astonishing and glorious? Or yet again,—the holiness which stops the sinner with the words, ‘Draw not nigh hither;’ or the love that condescends to make one who was born a slave its confidant, by making known the plan for rescuing a nation from its slavery? Or, finally, the majesty which clothes itself in flames of fire, or the eternal faithfulness shown in the words, ‘I Am that I Am?’ JEHOVAH! I venture not to sound the depths that word conceals, not from the eyes of men alone, but those of angels too. Nor do I venture to pronounce decisively upon the question whether this great name had hitherto been quite unknown to Israel, or whether, as some others hold, it had been known before, but afterwards was buried in oblivion. I merely ask whether you know of a more glorious name borne by the God of mercy, or a more appropriate occasion upon which He could Himself reveal and give an explanation of the name? Well might this Moses sing in after years: ‘Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth,—even this Horeb,—‘or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God!’<sup>1</sup> Well

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xc. 1, 2.

might Isaiah testify in later times : ' In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them ; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them ; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old.'<sup>1</sup> In flaming characters, there has been here inscribed for every age : ' Israel's salvation is the work of God.' ' Happy art thou, O Israel ; who is like unto thee ?'<sup>2</sup> Who, certainly, if not the many wretched ones that cried unto the Lord and gained His ear, and who are now constrained to render thanks unto the Lord, when they had almost groaned ' Impossible' ? Who more than you and I, if we can thank Him for deliverance still greater than that which was here prepared for Israel—deliverance, too, which, no less than the other, warrants joyous words like these : ' The Lord looseth the prisoners' ?<sup>3</sup> But is it not true, fellow Christians, that we have groaned beneath a yoke of bondage heavier by far than Egypt's, and that we were quite as little able to emancipate ourselves as the posterity of Jacob were to break their heavy chains ? Nothing had we to recommend us than our overwhelming misery ; but that which was impossible with men seemed possible with Him—the Lord our God. He knew us, just as He knew Israel, and loved us with an everlasting love ; and when we could not come to Him, then He broke down the separating wall and came to us. In Christ, He chose, called, justified us freely by His grace ; and He has put to flight, before us, enemies far mightier than those He scattered from before this Israel ; He has, besides, revealed to us the prospect of a better Canaan than that earthly one. He leads us thither, as it were by His own hand, out of the house of bondage, through the world into the heavenly home ; nor does He rest ere the great work of our redemption is completed

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

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. cxlvi. 7.

there. Well does that work deserve the name 'redemption;' and yet, even when this great concern has been for ever settled between God and our own hearts, how much experience we have, besides, that ever draws from us again the words, 'Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death!' <sup>1</sup> We cannot weigh or measure what these words contain; but even though we had no other proof, here they remain, a standing witness to the truth and force of what received such confirmation in the heart of Midian, and that, too, in a way so little likely to be soon forgotten: 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore 'ye sons of Israel are not consumed.'<sup>2</sup>

### 3.

What thanksgiving shall we accord Him for all this? Another special point, presented by the context, gives us the reply to what has now been asked. *A God who carefully determines all that is connected with the calling of His people:* such is the *third* ray of the light shed on us from the burning bush. We now have reached what properly was the chief object of this most mysterious phenomenon. Up till this point, it has been only Israel's future of which Moses was informed; now, suddenly, the enigma of his own life is solved. 'Come, therefore,' cries the voice (ver. 10), 'and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring my people out of Egypt.' Nay, it is no mere dream; he shall himself become the instrument employed by God to break the rod of the oppressor. He must even go and gather all the elders, and then tell them what has now occurred. He must again, casting aside all fear, enter that palace where, some fifty years before, he had been so well

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Mal. iii. 6.

known, though now he had become unknown; and in the name of Israel's God, he must compel His most rebellious subject on the throne to do his duty, and obey. Designedly, he must as yet tell Pharaoh only something of the truth; if there be a refusal even of the moderate request to go and offer sacrifice, then will come out what is within the tyrant's heart, and what the Lord shall do to humble him. No; Moses need not doubt that it is God Himself who gives him this commission; for this selfsame mountain (ver. 12), where he is to offer sacrifices afterwards with God's own people, forms to him the plainest token of his heavenly call. His call,—what can we say regarding this which you have not already thought of long ago? How honourable was this errand,—to be sent to Pharaoh with the full authority of Heaven; to stand as mediator between Heaven and earth; to come forth as the trusted servant of that God concerning whom the wisest men in Egypt could but form the merest guess! All honour to this great ambassador of God! He is the first who was endowed with a prophetic ministry, properly so called, and thus begins the series of those most venerable men of God, of whom the Lord's fore-runner is to be the greatest and the last. But what an arduous calling, too, this was, to stand forth, as the herald of a higher power, before a purpled tyrant; to re-inspire, with an elastic faith, a race in whom not even the slightest spark of hope remained; to stand alone before all Egypt, whereas, formerly, he fled before the shadow of a single Egyptian! And specially, how wise and holy was this calling! For if there be one single mortal to whom God can well entrust this task, which angels possibly would covet readily, who is more fitted for the work than Moses has become? No, not before; but now has come the time to take upon himself

the leadership of the oppressed, and save, not one, but a vast multitude—six hundred thousand Israelites! Till now, the prince and princess who adopted him were still alive, and them he could not face without risk of reproach for base, cruel ingratitude; but now another king is on the throne, one towards whom he feels no obligation, and of whom he is quite independent. Hitherto, God's Israel had not received sufficient humbling—had not been harassed and crushed enough in soul, so as to kiss the hand that came for their deliverance; but now, from every mouth and heart there comes one cry for liberty. Before this time, though Moses was endowed with many gifts, he had not been sufficiently matured for his important task; but now, he has not merely been at the preparatory school of Egypt's wisdom, but besides, the higher school of trial in the land of Midian. That heart, once as excitable as any sea, has now grown firm, like Horeb's granite rocks; that spirit, which in early life showed such rich blossoms full of promises, now gives plain indications of a fully ripened crop; that hand, which had so long wielded the shepherd's staff, has now at last attained sufficient steadiness to bear the rod of God with a becoming dignity. If God had waited longer still, then Moses' shoulders would have grown too feeble to receive the burden, almost quite beyond man's power to bear; if God had called him earlier, the instrument would not have been quite strong enough for all the work; thus, 'now or never' is the motto acted on in Moses' life! He hears his name called twice, just as, at later periods, the summons, 'Samuel, Samuel,' 'Simon, Simon,' 'Saul, Saul,' marked those thus named as chosen vessels of the Lord, even as it was with Moses now; and Horeb here becomes the grand dividing line between the second period of his life and that which

follows it. Once more: I am quite well aware there is a difference between this Moses and ourselves; but is not Moses' call a type and figure of a calling quite as glorious, prepared for Christ's redeemed? Yes, when we shall have actually been redeemed by Christ,—but not before,—then we too shall be consecrated prophets of the Christian faith. We have no more oppressed ones to lead out, but each one must work zealously for the promotion of his neighbour's highest joy; no longer have we to defy proud princes, but to show unto a hostile world whose we all are, and whom we wish to serve; no longer have we wonders to perform, but we ourselves are to be real, living wonders of the power of faith and love: such is the calling, Christian brethren, set before you by One who is greater far than Moses ever was! And no less sacred is it than the task here laid on us: the people of the Lord are destined to become a people not of kings and priests merely, but of prophets too. And as it was with Moses, so is it with every one of us; God, in His wisdom, fixes the position and the sphere of all. The word of God came unto us, your ministers, that we should feed the flock of Christ; it came to you who are the heads of families, that each one in his sphere should show himself a legible epistle to commend the gospel unto those around. The word of God came unto you, rich men, that you should show yourselves good, faithful stewards of the wealth lent you while here below; and to you who are indigent, that ye should work in quietness, and eat the bread of poverty. The Lord's word came to you, young men, in order that ye should be strong and overcome the wicked one; and to you, parents, that ye should bring up your children in the instruction and admonition of the Lord. Each one has his own sphere: Moses had his, and you have yours, as we have ours, distinct from that of every other man;

but all are called to serve one Master. This daily calling of the Christian may not quite accord with his own heart's desire ; but Moses is none the less engaged in working for the Lord when he leads Jethro's sheep, than when he marches out, the leader of the Israelites. Our daily calling in this life may change, often quite unexpectedly, and quite apart from any wish of ours : when Moses was quite willing, God in highest wisdom was not willing yet ; but as soon as it appears that the Lord is truly willing, Moses must needs follow Him. The duties which we must perform in following this calling may become, instead of lighter, heavier with the advance of years, but the potter certainly has power over the clay, to do with it what he may wish ; and when we have been placed, each at his post, not for ourselves but for the Lord, whom we can serve in every sphere, what harm is there though we must strive even unto blood, if only He is glorified ? ' Faithful is He that calleth you ; ' <sup>1</sup> and unto all His own He constantly repeats the words addressed to Moses : ' I shall surely be with thee ! ' <sup>2</sup> Ye who are called to be His saints, why do ye hesitate to answer Him with all your heart : ' Speak, Lord ; I too, Thy servant, shall incline mine ear ' ?

#### 4.

But possibly you put your hand into your bosom, quite dispirited, while the complaint escapes your lips : ' Who is sufficient for all this ? ' You are like Moses, in your feebleness of faith ! Come, and for your encouragement hear, fourthly, how the *Lord gives strength unto His own when they are weak*. Might we not have imagined that the call of Moses should have given him

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. iii. 12.

supreme delight? So far is this from the reality, that he even trembles, just as if he were upon the verge of an abyss. Shall *he* now go to Pharaoh, and experience once more the selfsame failure which befell him forty years before? One trouble brings another in its train. 'He does not even know in whose name he must speak to Israel. People will not believe him; they will say the Lord hath *not* appeared to him. He is not eloquent, but slow of speech and tongue.' And when the difficulties have at last been all summed up before Jehovah, then the timid words, 'I cannot,' are all but withdrawn for the rebellious words, 'I will not;'; so does he beseech that, as a favour, he shall be now let go free. Do you exclaim within your heart, 'The disobedient, the rebellious Moses'? I doubt much whether you who say so ever fairly looked into the soul of that great man of God, and fully put yourself into his place. Would you indeed have gone, unhesitatingly, at the first hint? Even if you had, the question would remain, whether you would have done your work so faithfully and well all through. A thoughtless man will go at once wherever a new road presents itself, although it only be to stumble over obstacles. A thoughtful man will hesitate and ponder what he does, but only to remain firm and immoveable after his doubts are overcome. Moses, undoubtedly, pursued his course of opposition much too far; and his concluding words especially, which roused the anger of the Lord Himself, we neither can excuse nor yet commend. But quite apart from that, if there were only something more of Moses' deep humility, we should not so much miss his strength of faith. Considerations such as these are just what we might look for in a man who hesitates to act again as he has done before, until he has examined what he ought to do; and let us add, in passing, that we have in this a striking proof of the

trustworthiness of the whole history. What forger, who endeavoured to show off his hero to the best advantage, would have ever put such words into his mouth? And when we read them now, who does not feel that they are taken from the life? Moses imagines he has buried in the sandy desert all his youthful dreams of power and ambition. Who can tell how frequently he must have talked in confidence with Jethro on the folly of his vain attempt? 'His best days now are past; no doubt it is too late.' No, Moses, not too late, for God's time is assuredly the best! First, Moses was quite willing, but was not allowed; now, he is quite unwilling, but he must, because self-seeking is extinct, and the gifted servant of the Lord has now, besides, become a humble one. Hear how, just like another Abraham, he freely vents his doubts and fears before the Infinite, and then say whether there can be anything less like enthusiasm and vain imagination than what meets us here in so sedate a character. But mark, too, how the Omnipotent here, as it were, stoops from His throne of fire, that He may change man's weakness into strength. First, there is proclamation made to Moses of a name which forms the pledge of everything; and do not fail to mark how that great name is constantly repeated during the interview, as if God would, with His own hand, engrave it upon Moses' heart. Then the future is made known to him in its details, that he may be even now prepared for the first disappointment and the glorious issue of the whole. And presently, three signs are given him, just like credential letters, so that every doubt, even the most obstinate, may finally give way. Observe that you have here the first recorded miracles of sacred history; and does it not occur to you, that those first miracles were medicines applied to the dejected soul of the great prophet of the Old Economy? False confidence in his own strength has been destroyed

in Moses' heart ; but now the real confidence of faith has yet to be stirred up and strengthened, and to this great work the Lord here turns, employing types and sacred symbols to express His promises. Israel has been cast out as if he were a leper ; but just as the leprous hand at once becomes quite sound again, so shall the people who have long been trodden down be raised once more. The shepherd's staff seems useless for support, but it will prove a mighty scourge for Pharaoh ; and if Moses but courageously defies all dangers, they will injure him as little as the serpent which he seizes, and which is immediately turned again to wood. The Nile has been a blessing unto Egypt ; but just as at Moses' beck the water turns to blood, so shall he make the righteous curse of God descend on the oppressors' land. The shepherd thus becomes a hero of the Lord, the stammerer becomes a mighty witness for His power and wisdom ; and what else shall be impossible to him ? If he lack wisdom, then the Lord will teach him ; if he cannot vent his thoughts in words, Aaron will stand beside him and be his interpreter ; nay, what is more, his God will march at his right hand. Go forth in this thy might, meek Moses ; multitudes besides thyself shall yet learn by experience the truth embodied in the words : 'When I am weak, then am I strong !'<sup>1</sup> But, brethren, have you not at times passed through a like experience ? Under the providence of God, you saw yourself called to a task which flesh and blood opposed with all their might : 'Lord, ask for anything you will, but not for *that* !' Such words as these you prayed within your soul. You saw a struggle imminent, the very thought of which caused you to tremble ; then you wished to hide yourself in deep retirement, but the Lord brought you into the foreground ; no more did you feel the smallest

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 10.

pleasure in what was most clearly shown to be your duty ; but it was a blessed thing for you if, just like Moses, you cast all your cares upon your God ! For whereas silence but depresses us, and making moan to men brings weakness, an outpouring of complaint to God brings us a share of His almighty strength. Did not He bear with you ? and did He not Himself remove your troubles one by one ? Here He directs our eyes to His eternal faithfulness, as our sure ground of hope ; there He assures us He has also cleansed us from the leprosy of sin, and thereby freed us from our greatest load. Yonder He presents to us, in men we meet, another prop to give more strength unto our drooping faith ; and elsewhere He converts the water of our pain, not into blood, but into wine of heavenly joy. Into the hands of all His own He puts a staff, which never breaks, and never fails—the staff of His own word and promises ; and has it not repeatedly occurred, that, when we came upon some noxious thing, it was as if the viper had, for us, quite lost its deadly poison ? Oh, how little does the world believe what superhuman power may be inspired into the friends of God, when they have once felt and acknowledged, to the full, that there is naught in them but weakness and sheer inability ! But you who are the followers of Christ have learned and felt the truth these words contain :

'Tis only when I bend the knee  
That I get wings to cleave the skies ;  
And I must bend even to the dust,  
That I may gain the strength to rise.

And it is only known in heaven how many have been braced and strengthened, through their intercourse with God, for fighting, with an almost superhuman power, against the world and their own hearts. Receive, maintain, increase that power, through constant drawing from

the fountain of eternal strength! Moses is only weak so long as he leans on his shepherd's staff, instead of leaning on the Lord his God; and there is not a Christian who has not in store for him experiences, hitherto unknown, of the deep truth contained within those wondrous words: 'I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me.'<sup>1</sup> No, never does the Lord require us to engage in any work without first reckoning how much support our weakness needs; sooner would Nature change her laws, than God prove faithless to His word. Blessed, thrice blessed is the man who only shows a constancy like Moses, as if he beheld the great Invisible!

## 5.

Lastly, we here perceive *how God rewards obedience in His people*. How could we neglect to cast at least a single glance at the conclusion of this portion of the wondrously attractive history? The loving-kindness and the terrors of the Lord at last have triumphed over the persistent, but withal most honest opposition on the part of Moses. The prophet does not say, in just so many words, the second time, 'Lo, here am I;' but he most plainly shows that henceforth he obeys no other will than God's. The last remaining trace of his own will has, as it were, been utterly consumed in the flames of the burning bush; now he can go, because he knows with whom he goes, and where he goes. And now observe how God rewards all those that seek Him, and how the first steps upon the path of true obedience have both light and blessing thrown on them by Him. When Moses tells his plan, Jethro has not the least objection to propose; a further revelation, too, assures him that

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 13.

his enemies are now all dead, and that his life shall be quite safe. It is remarkable how that consideration had not once occurred to Moses; but God takes away even unseen obstacles, provided He but finds the heart is right before Him. Presently his brother Aaron comes to meet him in the desert, as the Lord had promised; what a joyful meeting after such long separation, and with such a work in view! Again God shows His anger for a moment on the way; but even in wrath, our God remembers mercy. What a difference between that headlong flight from Egypt, and that almost unobserved but most courageous return; how much less of presumption there is now, but how much more of the true heroism of faith! Who, looking on that little company of travellers, with their humble beast of burden, would suppose that all-prevailing power lies in the shepherd's staff of one, while a momentous message from the God of heaven rests on the lips of the other traveller? The elders of the tribes are not slow in perceiving what a glorious dawn has chased away the long and dreary night; and the objections Moses looked for and suggested, he has not the least occasion to remove,—another proof that God, in the most wondrous way, can put to shame our little faith. Scarce do the leaders of the people see Moses' credentials, ere they no longer doubt that he is a divine ambassador. According to the beautiful account given at the end of chapter fourth, they bow their heads and worship; before the call of Moses, they had raised a cry for help, but now, instead of that, they raise a shout of thanksgiving. If Moses bowed his head with others there to worship God, who shall describe how that face blushed for shame over his former lack of faith; and how, times without number afterwards, he thanked the Lord because he had been called just *then*, and *there*, and *thus*? The peace which he already feels

before the coming strife is the first-fruit of prompt obedience ; and when he now puts his hand into his bosom, he feels his heart beat in anticipation of the coming victory. Nay, say not that the struggle was but properly beginning now, and that it was not until further on that Moses felt complete discouragement and disappointment of his dearest hopes. Beyond this point we cannot pass upon the field of history ; but it is quite enough for us to know he has had often to complain of men, but never of his God. Once like a sprout, but now an oak, each storm had made him send his roots the deeper down into the Rock of Ages ; and far indeed was he from ever having wished with all his heart that he had not been called, and that the shepherd's cot had been his grave. So true is it that the calling of God is not merely without repentance, but fraught with blessing, and that even on this side the grave there is abundant recompense for all the sacrifice we make in following the Lord's commands. No little trouble—I speak as a man—does it cost the God of boundless love in making us die wholly unto self, and bend our wills to His. But who among us has not, long ere now, both seen and felt that there is great reward attached to even a feeble but sincere attempt to do the will of God ? Scarce can we say with all our heart, ' Lord, Thou art now too strong for me ; Thou hast quite overcome me,' ere He shows to us, in every kind of way, that all His paths are faithfulness and mercy. The feeble steps of children walking in the path of new obedience are led and steadied by an unseen hand. Stones of stumbling, such as might obstruct our path or bring us harm, are carefully removed with far more than a mother's care. The Lord presents Himself to us when treading faith's dark path, and greets us now with kindly word, now with some great, astounding deed. Bonds that must needs be broken through, He

will Himself both quietly and easily unloose. Mists that might rise before us He dispels, ere they can hide the sun from us. Instead of those we leave behind for His sake, He gives other friends and brethren; and in communion with the saints He gives abundant recompense for all the friendship of the world we have renounced. There falls not to the ground a single word of all the good which He has promised to bestow on us when entering upon the narrow path; and actual experience soon shows that we are strengthened for accomplishing all that He promises we shall be able to effect, using our staff of faith. Sometimes He hides His face, and then we are afraid, as Moses, when upon his journey, was in danger of His life because his son had not been circumcised; but when, again, like Moses, we at once go forth anew, relying on the strength of God, our 'path is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'<sup>1</sup> And what, again, shall we have to expect when we arrive among the vast assembly of the Lord's first-born, written in heaven, and there tell how the Lord appeared to us too by the way, and meet again with brethren from whom we have been divided here by death? Surely we too shall bow our heads and worship; for what Moses saw will be the substance of our history: when the bush burned, but yet was not consumed by the fierce flame of persecution, then especially the Lord was near, although the very brightness of the flame prevented Him from being seen!

— 'The bush:' that word conducts us back again to the great scene of Moses' call. We have already seen the glory of the Lord; we have been shown, as in a glass, how God always reveals Himself unto His own. But when the past has in this way and in a certain sense become the present, what is there more natural than

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iv. 18.

that, taking our standpoint here, we should again look *back*, yea, and look *forward* too?

Would that our hearts condemned us less, when, looking back upon the way we have already traversed, we inquire whether we too, like Moses, have yet given heed unto the voice of God. We are, of course, aware that with the Father of Lights there is no variableness or shadow of turning; that He now shows Himself to us in a much more attractive and much softer light than in the fire at Horeb; that He has addressed us, not twice only, but innumerable times, through heart and conscience. And yet, are there not many of us here who must feel thoroughly ashamed when we are asked, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?'<sup>1</sup> Nay, is there any single individual who can obey the plain command, 'Put thy hand into thy bosom,' without the previous assurance that it shall be leprous when he draws it out again? The bright light of God's glory has indeed risen *over* every one of us, but it has not therefore arisen *in* our hearts; and who can tell me now how many there are here to whom the voice of God has come already, but who have not yet, like Moses, answered with a ready 'Here am I'? How many souls there are requiring nothing less than such a season of retirement and of thorough preparation as this Moses spent in Midian,—such, too, as Paul, in later times, spent in Arabia, just after he was called! Nay, what vast multitudes there are who never yet have turned their minds, with half the interest displayed by Moses in the burning bush, unto God's highest revelation made in Christ! How many are there so completely occupied with earthly cares, that even when they go into God's kingdom they have not so much as shaken the dust from off their feet! How many are there who, on the

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 9.

most frivolous pretexts, renounce their heavenly calling, but without acknowledging, like Moses, in all honesty, that they have hitherto quite failed! In short, how many are there that go forth, having before them death, the grave, eternity, while they have not that staff which all God's people grasp so eagerly! Nay, fellow-sinner, it was not that God has left Himself without a witness unto any one of you; but it is you yourselves who are to blame, because you still remain without a Moses' heart and ear. Secretly, perhaps, but obstinately, you have turned from that Holy One who called you to His service, and to have communion with Himself; take heed how you shall answer on that day, when He who here appeared to Moses in the burning bush shall, with devouring fire, take vengeance on those who have not obeyed the gospel of His Son! Nay, there is no communion between light and darkness: 'Draw not nigh hither!' These are words of God, still, as of old, addressed to every one who rashly ventures to approach Him with the dust of earth upon his feet. Oh, then, would that you but allowed yourself to be brought near unto that Son without whom none can come unto the Father; and that you forsook your path of error quite as readily as Moses did his desert wanderings! Perhaps, as in his case, the greater portion of your life has been already spent; still there is time, but soon it may for ever be too late! In Christ, the unseen God has first come unto you as He appeared to Moses; nor does He reveal Himself in dreadful majesty, but as a Friend: then come to Him, and let yourself be taught, guided, and consecrated as God's servant! You may approach, not with the anxious fear of Moses, but with childlike faith, and in His countenance behold the glory of the Lord. And then you also may believe—oh, pray that you may truly learn what these words mean!—this God is now *my* Father in

Christ ; His will is my eternal safeguard now ; His grace is all-sufficient, too, for me. Yes, only then, but then assuredly, the privilege of Moses will be yours ; ye shall run and not be weary, ye shall walk and not faint !

But are you willing for thè *future* also to continue walking in the clear light of His countenance ? ‘What need is there for such a question?’ some one may exclaim ; ‘what would life be if that light did not shine on my dark path?’ Yes, you have answered rightly ; only, see to it that deeds do not belie your words. Nothing of all that has been said in Moses’ praise do we retract. But can we part with him to-day without once more considering how, through the weakness of his faith and opposition to God’s will, he only aggravated his own troubles, and was almost on the point of missing his high calling ? Would that there were no Christians who, like Moses, we might almost say, delight in heaping up objections, and in answering that grand, irrevocable ‘Yea’ of God’s word with an everlasting ‘But !’ This was forgiven Moses ; but he was, moreover, wholly cured of it. The Lord will bear with this in you too, ye who are upright in heart, but not that you may always be as fickle-minded. You may rather see, in what is here, that doubt and controversy cannot form a standing-ground on which we may remain ; they rather are peculiar to a transition-time. God gives complete solution of the trifling difficulties and objections which we raise ; but after that, we must either retreat or else advance at His appointed time. ‘Retreat?—no, never !’ Then, in God’s name, advance ! from faith to stronger faith, and straightway, too, from light to greater light, from strength to strength, from victory to victory,—still on ! To this one point alone let us give earnest heed, that when, like Moses, we are asked, ‘What is

there in thine hand?' we may boldly reply, 'A staff, —the staff of faith!' At every step let us put our hand in our bosom, that we may feel conscious of our own uncleanness; but let it as frequently be laid in faith upon the sacrifice of Christ, that we may be cleansed from our leprosy. Let us march bravely on, although no rest awaits us now! The flame is quenched, but still the bush, though scorched, is flourishing; the time of trial passes by,—the fruit will ripen in eternity! However long or short the way may be, our staff shall never fail; and though 'that great sight' may vanish from before our eyes, we ever meet with revelations of the glory of the Lord, each one more beautiful than that preceding it. Even in the darkest night, only let that name shine on you as if it were inscribed with stars, the name which God here gives Himself, 'I Am that I Am.' Heaven and earth pass away, even this great Horeb disappears, but 'I Am that I Am,' saith He who is the Lord and the Almighty One. 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:' have you not heard, my fellow Christians, how Jesus, your own Saviour, has explained these words? 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him.' It is enough for us, He lives, and He abides; then, whether it be here on earth, or up in heaven, we must all live by Him, for Him, with Him! Amen!

## CHAPTER IV.

### The Journey.

‘Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.’—Ex. xiv. 15.

IT was a remarkable message that the Lord once sent by Micah the prophet to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, ‘Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest.’<sup>1</sup> That message was intended as a loud forewarning of the evils then so imminent, dangers from which, perhaps, there still remained sufficient time to flee; and what the words referred to soon became quite evident, when both the city and the temple were devoured by fire. We thank God that we are not called upon, especially on such a day as this,<sup>2</sup> to come before you in the character of one who has but evil tidings to announce. And yet, are you aware of any single sentence which—except, perhaps, the apostolic greeting—we could now employ as more appropriate to this occasion than what has just been expressed? And is it not as if the sounds of New Year’s morn united to proclaim these words to man, the mortal and the Christian, ‘Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest’? ‘Rest!’—we have never yet found it on earth, at least not in ourselves or men; and when does it seem to elude us more

<sup>1</sup> Mic. ii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> This sermon was preached January 1, 1858.

than just at the beginning of the year? As if the world were quite ashamed for having spent the few hours yesterday in meditation at the grave of the old year, she hastens, with exceeding joy, to greet the new-born year. Outside are crowds of those who wish men all prosperity, in words too often thoughtlessly expressed, and as mechanically listened to; and even the Christian feels it difficult to keep himself from being carried off into the whirlpool that roars around. Who can this day—at least, with the success he seeks for—say unto the sun of his own life, ‘Thou sun, stand still’? Or who has power to stop the restless flight of time, and make him bind his wings a while? But ‘Forward!’ is the universal cry, raised yet more loudly when the morning rays first break through night’s dark clouds; nay, let me say, it seems as if, each year, the sand-grains in the hour-glass of our lives fall faster than before. ‘Forward!’ It is the same whether we still have to ascend the summit of life’s mountain, or now leave it quite behind, and have begun, slowly at first, but with increasing pace, to make descent. ‘Forward!’ What could be more appropriate than this, to form the burden of our first address on this New Year? So rarely does it happen that the selfsame motto is presented by the world and by religion, that, when this occurs even once, we cannot let the fact pass unobserved. You have done well in visiting the Lord’s house now, on the first morning of this year. How very much does our success depend upon a well-considered start! Where could we hope to find more light regarding an uncertain future than before the face of Him who is assuredly the hearer of our prayer? ‘I am a stranger in the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me!’ But, risen from the presentation of this prayer, do you now ask what God the Lord requires of you this day? Do you ask this at

us, your ministers? If we inquire at Him together, it is just as if we heard this answer,

‘SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT  
THEY GO FORWARD.’

You will remember that, once and again in week-day services, we have already treated of some leading passages in Moses' life. So little reason had we, even for this hour, to set aside material so rich in its attractions, that, on the contrary, whatever other passages of Sacred Writ occurred to us as suitable for this occasion, we were always, as if by an unseen hand, led back to this. Was it to satisfy the wish of our own heart in marching forward on the path of life marked out to us? Was it because the Lord well knew that this or that one would be present, who might this day wish just for some words like these, rather than anything besides, because he feels his need of them? However that may be, we could not hurriedly pass over this, because, familiar though it be to all, comfort and light abound in it. If we have come together to consult with one another and with God, making His word our guide, as to the proper mode of setting out in this life's journey, let us fancy that we heard addressed again, to every one of us, the voice of God which spake in former times to Israel at a crisis in their history.

We only need a few words to connect the view here given with what has formerly been said. We left the prophet of Jehovah on the frontiers of Midian, in company with Aaron, his brother, ready to present to Pharaoh the credentials of his heavenly commission. But what a great deal has occurred during the interval between his entry and his leaving Egypt for the second time; and what fell blows have been inflicted on the stubborn tyrant by that rod used in the working of the

miracles, but now transformed into a scourge! The brief impressions made, at nine successive times, have always given way to insolent hard-heartedness; but now at last, it would appear, at this tenth time, his heart has melted through intensity of pain, though it is not yet broken by a true repentance. What a dreadful night was that on which Egypt, through all its length and breadth, became like one sad charnel-house; while, in the land of Goshen, cries of deep distress gave place to songs of the deliverance! The Passover is instituted, and the lamb is slain; the feast is kept with grateful heart: a few hours more, and Israel, freed from slavery, are on their way to the Red Sea, laden with Egypt's spoils. But does it not appear as if the sun of liberty had only risen above the low horizon to conceal itself at once behind dark clouds? At God's command, Israel has encamped between Migdol and the sea-shore; and scarce does Pharaoh hear of it, than it appears that his hostility towards Jehovah and His people is incurable. In hot haste the warriors are gathered, horses harnessed, chariots put in readiness: the Egyptians be upon thee, Israel, and with them they bring death—not merely slavery! Is it surprising that the groans excited by the love of life rise louder than the voice of gratitude in those who scarce are freed from slavery, and that they curse the hour which brought them to this fatal pass? Complaint is made to Moses, who in turn brings it, in silence, unto Him who is the only helper in this time of need. And—mark how well He understands complaints made by His people, even when these have not been expressed—the Lord does not confound with shame His servant, who has cried so loudly to the people to be calm and wait for the deliverance, but who has also called in silence on his God, seeking deliverance from Him. 'Why criest thou to me?' So speaks the voice

of Him who sits as King upon the flood: 'Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward!'

Oh, what a moment that was!—one of the most sublime and memorable in the annals of God's special providence,—one of the most critical in Moses' life! We cannot think of making even a remote comparison of what then happened with like instances, and of exalting what was but a special case into a universal law. Many of you, whose life flows on in smooth and noiseless stream, can scarce conceive what then was passing through the minds of that vast multitude. But 'whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning;'<sup>1</sup> and however different our circumstances are from those of Moses and of Israel, in this at least we are at one with them,—we must advance, whether we will or not. But does not that advance possess sufficient interest and importance to invite a special study of the case, for once at least? Methinks that every one who takes the smallest pains to think, must ask himself such questions as the following: Whence must I start? what path ought I to choose? how shall I find that path? how can I walk in it? and where, after my course is run,—be that course long or short,—shall I be found? The history of bygone times is there to give you a reply. It points out, with sufficient clearness, the best mode of journeying through life. 'Go forward' (1) from that point to which God has conducted us; (2) along the path God bids us take; (3) by the light which God affords; (4) with the staff which God provides; and (5) to the land which God prepares.

Such is the sketch of what we shall present for your consideration; further, we shall seek, in closing, to impress the whole upon your minds. Give us a patient hearing; but especially, apply the truth to your own

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

case. As for ourselves, we lift our eyes unto the hills, whence all our help shall come. Our help is from the Lord, who made the heaven and earth. Amen.

## 1.

You are, then, willing to go forward? But whether you will or not, you must. What better starting-point can you discover than that from which Israel began, — *the point to which God has brought you now?* ‘That is self-evident,’ this one and that one will reply; ‘what point can we set out from, if not that which we have just attained?’ Stop for a moment, my impatient fellow-traveller; we are not speaking of the point to which *you* have now brought yourself, but of that to which *God* has conducted you; and you must very soon, I think, feel that there may be an important difference between these two. For bear in mind that Israel had not been advancing to the land of liberty and rest, but they had been rebellious towards God and Moses; they had turned their face to Egypt, choosing there to wear their chains as slaves; and they had thereby brought themselves to such a depth of trouble and anxiety as made their prospect terrible: do you believe that, in this case, the voice of God would have been heard, ‘Let Israel advance’? ‘Impossible!’ you will exclaim; ‘God may, indeed, command us to go forward from the point to which He has Himself conducted us, but not by any means to make advance on that wrong path which we have chosen through our own folly and our sin. In such a case, God must have rather asked, ‘Why do you cry to me? You are yourselves the cause of your distress and misery; there is no safety on this road, but only death and horror; speak unto the Israelites that they return immediately!’ But

now, because the Lord Himself has pointed out the place where they were to encamp, between Pi-hahiroth and Baal-Zephon, they are in the position which He bade them occupy ; they now are standing in the place where He would have them be : now we may speak of going on. Do you not see already what is our design ? and are you not applying it to your own case ? ‘ Advance ! ’—it is a glorious word ; and that which it denotes deserves the application of our noblest powers. Who does not look with pleasure and with admiration upon him who strives to reach the mountain-top, who does not count the difficulties he has overcome, because he longs to find still greater things beneath him, and who, with unwearied feet, still rises, till he sees the whole beneath ? But, in advancing, the main question is,—not whether we are rising rapidly enough, but simply whether we are really on the right track, and keeping the great end in view. When those who lived in Noah’s time had urged each other forward in the sense in which that word was understood by most of them, the path they trod brought them at last into the waters of the flood ; and when, in later times, the Israelites urged one another forward on the path of disobedience, then they were destroyed by the Destroyer. Yes ; ‘ Forward ’ is still a glorious word, but not the first, scarcely the second that we should employ ; and you will be in a position to apply it with advantage to yourselves only when, like these ransomed ones, you have an Egypt at your back, and a Canaan before. But what think you ? Here is a man who, during all the year now past, has served the world with his whole heart, and been in love with sin ; it would have been a great deal had even the last days and hours disposed him to more earnestness and modesty ; then instantly there rises up once more the difficulty,—may our first, our

sole word be, 'Advance'? But yonder is another man, who, through great thoughtlessness, has fallen into trouble, and is on the track which he himself chose, in his utter selfishness; but now his feet are ever more and more entangled in a snare which he constructed for himself. Would it not be to tempt the Lord, if, in the name of God, we promised him deliverance, instead of earnestly inquiring, 'Is the path you tread indeed the right one?' It is easy to sing words like these,—

'Come, let us boldly march along;'

but it were better, first of all, to ask the question, 'Am I really in the position which God has appointed me, or is it through mere human influence that I have come into this path?' We are not, in our natural estate, like Israel by the sea-shore, but like Israel in Egypt. For we bend before the power of sin, unable to defend or save ourselves: the constant prey of death, we have no other prospect than to suffer ever deeper misery, unless God grant us, from above, deliverance and life. Are you, too, still sold unto sin, and quite as far from God at the beginning of this year as you have been at the commencement of so many hitherto? Then we shall not, to such as you, speak of advancing, but of humiliation and of instantaneous return. 'Thus saith the Lord,' we cry to you, in words first uttered by another man of God, 'stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'<sup>1</sup> O man of sin, the path you now pursue leads down to death; repentance is the only way to life,—regeneration of the soul the first, although perhaps the least felt requisite for entering on the new period. Nay, no advance ere you have first stood still, made full confession of your guilt, sought for deliver-

<sup>1</sup> Jer. vi. 16.

ance from worse than Egypt's bondage, and cried for blood more precious than the blood of even the spotless Paschal lamb, to hide your sins! Whoever you may be, do not advance another step till you have asked yourself, in the Lord's name, the vital question, 'Was the path that I have hitherto been treading the broad way down to ruin, or the narrow path to heaven? Am I, in thoughtlessness, but treading in the footsteps of the multitude, or listening to the voice of truth?' God does not speak to us of going forward till He has first taken us by the hand to speak with us of our salvation. And He promises to fight upon our side only when we no longer fight against Himself. To Egypt His command is not, 'Go forward,' but, 'Back, for your life, if you wish to escape swift death!' It is God's people only who can hear, on New Year's morn, like Israel, the call, 'Fear not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which He will show to you to-day.' And when we meet Him with the question, 'Lord, how shall this be?' the absolute command sounds in our ears, 'Advance

## 2.

'Advance!' The order may be given easily, but is it quite as speedily performed? Then listen, in the second place, to what is further given in the summons: *advance along the way which God commands.* 'Which God commands.' This, in a certain aspect, makes the thing much easier, but in another much more difficult. You will at once perceive this when you place yourself again in the position of the Israelites. Moses need not, in deep anxiety, inquire, 'Whither?' for there is but one path, and not another given him to choose. There is the most peremptory command not to go back; nor would good come of turning to the right or left; more-

over, there are mountains rising up to heaven, and rocks, which shut the people in, as if within a fortress. Forward, then! But there is a huge watery grave that threatens any one who dares advance one step; there is no vessel waiting by which even a single individual may cross; there is *no course left open*, for the utmost bounds of all hope of deliverance have now been reached. 'Wherefore criest thou unto me? Go forward,' says Jehovah; 'I have commanded the sea to make a way for you.' How Moses must have felt on actually taking the first step among the waves, and entering upon that path which never had been trodden hitherto! And how must Israel have felt when called to follow him, with all that they held dear around them,—driven onward as by a resistless power, in order to escape, if possible, from Pharaoh, but with death before them did not God prevent! Well might the sacred poet of a later period declare, 'O God, Thy way was in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps were not known!'<sup>1</sup> But well may we, also, in spite of not a little difference, find a resemblance to the path on which the Lord once more calls you and me to make advance. That way itself is, in its leading features, quite as plain, as difficult, and yet withal as safe, as that for which the Israelites now looked. If we are Christians, there is only one way possible for our understanding, our faith, our conscience; and that is the way God bids us go. 'Have I not commanded you?' asks God of every one of us, as He asked Joshua, and points us, as with outstretched finger, to the path He chose for us. The course of circumstances marks it out, and His unerring word makes it even still more plain. Backward we cannot, dare not go, nor do we wish; at least, to seek that would be quite as sinful as the hankering of Israel for

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 20.

Egypt's fleshpots. What lies behind us in the past must there be left in deep oblivion,—the world with its attractions, sin with its seductions, youth with its lovely but deceitful dreams! Around, there is as little to afford us a safe prospect as the rocks that stood in Israel's way. Before us lies the path on which the Lord is leading us,—the path of self-denial, toil, and conflict, with as little to attract poor flesh and blood as Israel's watery path. Oh, how much need there is for saying, from the bottom of the heart, and unreservedly, 'Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest! Speak but one word, and I shall go, even where I see no path, but only clouds and mists.' There you are sitting, my dear sister, with the precious memories of what is past full in your view, but from which you cannot turn your eyes away: hark! how there sounds your Leader's voice, 'Advance!' There you are standing, my dear brother, with a future all before you,—one on which you cannot ponder without covering your face behind your hands, in terror at the dreadful visions you see rising not far off; and yet you must abide that future! Nay, not merely wait for it, but go to meet it, and that by a path in which we feel the stones as sharp as Israel found the waves untrustworthy; or it is in the company of those with whom we find as little ease and comfort as did Moses when surrounded by a wicked race; or it is through a dry and weary land, as thirsty as the desert of Arabia, after the Red Sea had been left behind. What shall we say to you but this? See that the path before you is indeed the way appointed by the Lord; and do not venture on a single step before you bow the knee to Him in deep humility. But if it be quite evident that just this, and no other, is the road which God deems best for you, then act as if you heard His voice from heaven saying, 'Why do you cry to me? Surely you know that I

am not a God who says, "Go forward," without giving strength wherewith to go.' The great, the all-important question is,—not whether you see light, but whether you are truly willing to go whither the Father of Lights is guiding you ; not whether the way is through the sea or through the sand, but whether it is really God's way. If so, then what He promises on this New Year to all His people is, 'Fear not, for I am with thee ; be thou not dismayed, for I am thy God ; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.'<sup>1</sup> How many striking instances you have, how much light from your own past history, to prove that when the first decisive step was only taken with an eye turned towards God, He opened paths through tangled thickets, made your difficulties disappear, as did the waves from Moses' presence, and then brought to pass events as wonderful as the destruction of His people's enemies ! Nay, verily, God has not changed, so that He now should call His people to advance into the sea, and leave them there to perish in the flood. As we see here, even that which seems impossible to which He calls His people, must just for that very reason be quite possible ; nay, more, the issue plainly proves it was the very best—indeed, the only safe course to pursue. Suppose the Israelites, alarmed at the idea of advancing through the waves, had taken time to think, and then attempted to retreat ; or sought, amidst the mountains on each side, an opening by which they might escape approaching death : according to the judgment of the natural man, they would have acted with the utmost prudence, yet they would have but been hastening into the yawning grave. The passage through the sea turns out to be much safer than the path along the quiet shore, as soon as it appears that *God* is with us ;

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xli. 10

for—and let it be inscribed on all your hearts, so as to be remembered through the year—safety does not depend upon the road, but on the guide we choose. It is precisely when the prophet Jonah seeks to flee from Nineveh, and find a safe retreat in Tarshish, that such mortal danger comes so close on him ; and, on the other hand, when Paul, led by the Lord to Rome, courageously defies Euroclydon and every storm, his life is saved, although the ship is lost. Far better is it to pursue what seems a hopeless track, with God upon our side, than, without God, or quite against His will, to tread a path, however smooth, that flesh and blood has opened up to us. There is no danger if His mighty hand preserves us ; thousands may perish on our right, and tens of thousands on our left, whilst we remain unharmed. Our life is ever free from danger when we risk it in the service of the Lord ; because, as has been truly said, we are immortal while God needs us here. Not a single hair of Israel is hurt, although they now seem thoroughly entangled in a snare from which no power of men or angels can deliver them ; while Pharaoh, in the midst of all his hosts, already totters on the verge of the abyss ! Why should we, then, retreat a single inch-breadth, even on a road beset with every kind of difficulty, when the God who calls is also faithful, and does far above what we can ask or think ?

### 3.

‘ But what avails it me, even though I know the way, so long as, in short-sightedness, I still must grope about under dark clouds ? ’ You are quite right ; but you too, just like Israel, are this day summoned to advance *under the light that God affords*. You can imagine that you now behold the mysterious fiery pillar, scattering its golden rays upon the silvery waters in the darkness of

the night, and straightway turning its fierce lightnings on the host of the Egyptians. You see that, while the waters seem raised up, as if they were a wall on either side, the myriads advance quite fearlessly, because their eye is turned towards that emblem of Jehovah's presence moving slowly on. You will remember, too, how that mysterious cloud gave ever afterwards the signal for a halt and for advance again; and how Jehovah always showed His will to Moses out of that same cloudy pillar. However much of enigma remains connected with this subject, you can easily perceive that to go forward would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, had not the Lord Himself, in such a way as this, prepared one object to which all Israel might turn their eyes; and in your own mind you will have already been extolling the good fortune of the chosen race in having such a Guide. But say, has not God, in His written word, sent light from heaven sufficient in amount and clear enough to brighten, with its friendly rays, many a gloomy night and many a cloudy day? And have you ever been kept waiting long without an answer, when, with the earnest question, 'What will the Lord have me to do?' you took your precious Bible up, in silent solitude, not to consult it, like so many, just as if it were a kind of heathen oracle,—examining the first page that might open up to you,—but earnestly endeavouring to find out what the Lord desires? If you then looked upon your Lord as if He were before your eyes, and placed yourself, in spirit, at His feet, that you might know what is His good and perfect will; and if, as in His presence, you inquired, 'What will be most conducive to the Father's honour, to the joy of heaven, the highest good of all the brethren, and the benefit of my own soul?'—we pity you indeed, if yours was never the experience of Moses at those blessed seasons when the Lord removed for him the

veil of mystery, and spake with him as man holds converse with a friend! But is it not the case that we are just like that rebellious Israel,—constantly inclined to choose their own way rather than simply pursue the path to which the cloudy pillar guided them? And even after we have been already taught, on numberless occasions, through the shame and injury that have befallen us, we still direct our eyes continually to the *ignis fatuus* of human wisdom, when we rather should fear God, and give attention to His word. We all have naturally something of those whom Isaiah, in a certain place, describes as lighting torches for themselves in darkness, and encompassing themselves with sparks; but presently they fall, covered with burns, which their own kindling has produced.<sup>1</sup> During the year now closed, many miscalculations have been made, because God was excluded from the reckoning; on New Year's morning there are many clouds on many hearts, even of those who meet you with a free and merry air, because they do not lay to heart or credit the advice, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, no light shall dawn on them.'<sup>2</sup> Would that they only knew what mischief they were doing who desire, at any cost, to rob us of our childlike faith in God and His unerring word! If we gave ear to them, we would be now advancing in as much uncertainty and insecurity as Israel on that gloomy night, had not the fiery pillar shone high overhead. Would that all those who gradually have forgotten to employ the Bible as their safest chart in journeying through this world's wilderness, would but consider what must be the consequence if they will still allow themselves to be misled by guides who neither know nor can point out the way, and if they listen readily to every voice but that of God's

<sup>1</sup> Isa. l. 11.<sup>2</sup> Isa. viii. 20 [Dutch trans., and Eng. marg. rendering].

unerring word! Had conscience much on this score to accuse you also on the closing evening of the year? and had you to confess it as a sin before the Lord, that you allowed yourself to be misled by the prevailing spirit of the age, and failed in paying honour to the word of God? Consider, and your conscience but confirms the truth of what we say; think of the want of constancy and joy which now depresses you, as if it were a righteous judgment sent by Him who will not let His light be disregarded with impunity,—a loud and earnest call, too, that you should, like Israel of old, say, ‘I shall go and return, for then it was better with me than now.’<sup>1</sup> Yes, to return to God and to His word, and to become like little children, instead of foolishly and proudly fancying we have outgrown the word: such is the only way of having realized, in our experience, the lovely prospect given in the words, ‘Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.’<sup>2</sup> But whoso follows Jesus, the great central figure of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, shall not walk in darkness; and not until we once more make resolve, ‘I will hear what God the Lord will speak to me,’ shall we also experience the truth of which the Psalmist sings, ‘He shall speak peace to His people and to His saints.’<sup>3</sup> And what should hinder you from choosing that same word of God to be a lamp unto your feet, a light unto your path? Should the obscurities and enigmas that here present themselves to you prove such a barrier? Even the fiery pillar had for Israel its impenetrable and mysterious side; but this much they perceived quite well, that it afforded them more light than a thousand other lights. And there is something wondrous in the fact that this great light illumines everything, although you know not where it has its seat; nor can you find in anything besides a proper sub-

<sup>1</sup> Hos. ii. 7.<sup>2</sup> Isa. lv. 12.<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxxv. 8.

stitute when it has been removed. Or—just acknowledge it—are you offended at the vehemence with which the word of God denounces sin? Yes, verily, the cloudy pillar sent forth dreadful thunderbolts, but they were only aimed at hardened ones like Pharaoh; and that same light of God's unspotted holiness, which is so terrible to sinners, is the consolation of all those who make His mercy the foundation of their hopes. Or has that light no longer an attraction for you, inasmuch as it has lost the splendour of most novelties? Surely the fiery pillar was quite as invaluable in the fortieth year that followed Israel's Exodus, as in the first night when they were redeemed? And should you not be rather cheered by the consideration that, when everything to-day announces instability and change, the word of God endures for aye? So, too, the fiery pillar shone as gloriously over the heads of those who grew up in the desert as before the eyes of those who had beforetime dwelt in Egypt; and when Moses had attained his hundredth year, he saw another generation round him, but God's light in heaven still shone on him as friendly as before. Oh, look on it, rejoice in it, and walk by it, ye who have hitherto been out of Christ, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death! Yes, now, *now* there is light to guide us on our way, because the Sun of Righteousness gives forth its cheering beams!

## 4.

But do you make complaint—not against God, but rather against yourself? And do you fear your strength will fail? We could not urge you to advance, did we not also, in the fourth place, indicate *the staff which God bestows on us*. Once more turn to the Red Sea. How stately and how strong appears the form of Moses

when contrasted with the trembling hosts who even already fancy their last hour has come! But what is there, too, in his hands? A staff, which seems to have the power of driving out the waters from their bed. Lo, there they flee, as if some mighty arm pursued them! Hark! there sounds the voice of God once more: 'Stretch out thy rod, and let the waves close over Pharaoh's chariots, his horsemen, and his horse!' At once, after the song of gratitude has sounded forth, they journey on to Elim and to Rephidim, to Massah and to Meribah, to Horeb and to Nebo; but whatever Moses leaves behind at any spot where they encamp, he takes good care always to bring his staff with him. Each morning sees him take it up anew before Jehovah's face; encouraged, comforted, with it he ascends and descends the mountain where he sees his brother die; he does not set it down till he has taken the concluding step in his laborious career; and when at last this prop falls from his hands, lo, there he is before the Lord, who gave this staff to him! Do not your thoughts anticipate my words already,—in esteeming it a precious privilege that God does not refuse a staff like this to any one of us? To every one of His own people, at their setting out on the great journey of this life, He gives the promise: 'I will instruct thee, and teach thee concerning the way which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee; mine eye shall be upon thee.'<sup>1</sup> And as soon as, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, He has produced and strengthened in our hearts a living faith, then, too, He puts a staff into our trembling hands; and our experience is given in the prophet's wondrous words: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles.'<sup>2</sup> The staff of faith, the only, but,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxii. 8 [Dutch trans., and English marg. rendering].

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xl. 31.

besides, the adequate support upon the changing path through life: you know, of course, what we refer to now? We do not mean that faith which men may have, to some extent, even apart from Christ,—the belief that there exists a God who orders everything for good,—that all the evils which befall us will assuredly conduct to something good,—that when this life is ended, there will be another where all tears are wiped away. Verily, verily, we say unto you, there have been thousands in the year now past who never doubted this, and whom, nevertheless, their so-called faith did not prevent from sinking down into despair, and wringing their hands in deep perplexity! But this trust, founded on the everlasting word of Him who is Himself the Truth,—God in Christ, my Father,—all His promises yea and amen in Christ, for my eternal blessedness,—God on my side, so that whatever works against me is of no avail;—oh, I have yet to see the man in whom such faith has been begun, maintained, recovered after wrestling on his knees, and who has then sunk down again, because he could not take another step! Without this faith, as we must carefully point out, there is no sadder morn, for any one who has not yet lost every spark of earnestness, than that which has now dawned upon our sight. The path which lies before you still remains, indeed, as much concealed from you, as much beset with dangers, and as much beyond our powers of calculation, as the path made through the desert of Arabia. On one side we are threatened by our spiritual foes, who are as irreconcilably opposed to us as Amalek was towards Israel. Upon another side are found some feeble friends, who, just as Jethro did to Moses, come up with us at a later period, and who can give us good advice, but afterwards go far enough away from us again. And yonder— But why should we thus pursue, into minute detail, such a comparison between

the path of Israel and the path of faith? Let it suffice to state that, without living faith working within the heart, it is as hopeless to set out upon life's journey as it would have been impossible to march through the Red Sea without the all-prevailing, wonder-working rod. Poor man, you rise up, but you know not whence; you wander here and there, but do not know how long; you ask for strength, yet know not whence it may be gained! The Lord's words are most true: 'Cursed is the man that maketh flesh his arm. . . . Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord.'<sup>1</sup> But have you never found, too, in the year gone by, that all things are possible to him that believeth, and that even mountains of difficulties seemed to dwindle away into molehills when touched by this wonder-working staff? But such a remembrance of the past is likewise a prediction of what the new era will bring; and may it be with you to-day as if you also heard the word of the Lord: 'If ye could believe!' The time will often come when you shall stand before a task for which your own unaided wisdom will be quite unequal; but the prayer of faith works wonders, and strength comes down from above into the heart which owns, in deep humility, that it is naught but weakness when apart from God. The days may be at hand when you, like Israel contending against Amalek, will have to wage a spiritual warfare of intense severity; but if the hand of faith can then be merely raised to heaven, like the rod of Moses when upheld by Aaron and Hur, the result will be a victory, in view of which you too can build an altar, and inscribe on it the words, 'The Lord is my banner.'<sup>2</sup> The years, as they flow by, will show if God wills that your life shall be as dull, monotonous, and joyless as the eight and thirty years for which the Israelites were forced to wander in the wilderness; but

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvii. 5, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. xvii. 15.

if you only see to it that nobody deprives you of your staff, it will be with you also, in the inner man, as has been said of Moses: 'His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.'<sup>1</sup> Scarce will you touch the everlasting promises of God with that believer's staff, ere the refreshing streams from heaven will flow to you, just as the water issued from the rocks; and as the rod of Moses swallowed up the rods of all the Egyptian sorcerers, so does the power of faith enable us to triumph over every obstacle. Oh, do take up this staff of God before you venture on another step! On this first morning of the year, see whether you have still a reed, or now have something better far on which to lean; and ask whether your rod is genuine, cut from the green wood of the Tree of Life. But see to it that you know well what and in whom you trust; and do not let your heart be troubled, even though you saw the last ray of the sun of your joy grow dim. Thus speaks the Rock, whose work is now complete: 'Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and thy God thy glory!'<sup>2</sup>

## 5.

'An everlasting light!'—when could we better feel the value of a prospect such as this, than on a New Year's morn? Verily, we spend the days of the years of our pilgrimage like thoughts; and afterwards,—yes, after that! Here, unbelief stands still; here, scepticism turns quite away; but faith views calmly the decisive words that stand upon the book of life abruptly closed,—'The End.' The Lord arouses us to march on *to the land which He prepares for us*. You are aware that Israel

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. lx. 20.

was called not merely to forsake the land of Egypt, nor even to spend a desert life in peace and liberty, but to march on into a land which God, ages before, had promised to bestow on the posterity of those who were His friends. Not one of all those multitudes who passed through the Red Sea had ever seen that promised land. Upon the ground of credible authority, they were constrained to the belief that it was a reality awaiting them beyond the flood. Not even the wisest of them all was free to choose the mode of access to that land which flowed with milk and honey. At one time they were forced to move, even after they had been encamped at oases with water and palm-trees; while at another time they were compelled to stay, sometimes for months and years, around one spot, though it had nothing to attract. But their great Leader ever held Himself responsible for the result, although the moment when the earthly paradise was to unfold its gates was still kept in deep secrecy. On one occasion only did He let them actually see and taste the pleasures and refreshment it contained, of infinitely greater value than what Egypt, with its treasures, could afford.<sup>1</sup> And had they not themselves,—how sad the thought!—through their impenitence and unbelief, rejected that precious inheritance, they would have marched into Canaan a few months only after they left Egypt. Nor are we called to wander aimlessly, and to march on without exactly knowing where we are to go. The Lord from heaven has appeared on this vile earth that we, exiles from Eden, might have an eternal dwelling-place; and though no messenger has come back from the habitations where He has prepared us room, we know, as surely as we live, that what no eye hath seen, what ear hath never heard, what hath not entered into any human heart, is hid with Christ in God for all

<sup>1</sup> Num. xiii. 23.

who know and love Him. Whoever will draw back unto perdition may perceive, in Israel's case, that while God presses upon sinful men His heavenly gift, He will by no means let Himself be mocked. Sentence of death has been pronounced upon the soul of him who will have Egypt rather than Canaan; how many do we see, just for this reason, falling in the wilderness from year to year! This makes the words come up before our minds: 'So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest.'<sup>1</sup> But if we run with patience and in faith the race before us, blessed are we; for we may not only say, through our sighs, this day, 'A few more years (if even years!), and then I go whence I shall not return;'<sup>2</sup> but we may also add with joy, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him till that day.'<sup>3</sup> Many more storms, indeed, may rise and burst over our heads ere we, through grace, obtain the crown of life. But it is well that we are not aware of all that is contained within the bosom of a year, perhaps even of its early weeks or months. If Moses had been able to count up beforehand all those whom he was to see cut down and buried in the desert's sand ere reaching Pisgah's height, and how many thousand paces still remained to take between the Red Sea and the Jordan, he would surely have entreated that *that* burden might be taken from his back. But full well do we know that, though the heaven and earth may pass away, the promise itself of our inheritance remains. The way that leads to it may not, perhaps, be quite the shortest (and those who, like Israel, are slow to learn require a longer training-time), still less is it the most agreeable, but most assuredly it is the best. And the inheritance itself will only seem more beautiful if we, like Moses, are obliged to wait a

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcvi. 11; Heb. iii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Job xvi. 22.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

long time on God that we may get possession of the whole. Here is a joyful consolation for all you who, on this New Year's morn, perhaps behold some seats now empty, but which, last New Year, proved centres of attraction: if your friends have fallen asleep in faith, they have already crossed the Jordan, just as Israel crossed the gloomy sea, and the celestial city of palm trees has now received them all within its walls. How blessed such a prospect is for us, when we begin to feel, as we do sometimes, that the outward man is perishing, and that our strength no longer lets us execute that which the will would gladly carry out: it must be even so,—the tabernacle will break down to make way for a habitation in the heavens! Then speed thee on incessantly, thou night of life, with thine uneasy dreams; the morn draws nigh that shall awake us, not to time, but to an eternity of bliss! Who are among us here, friends of the Lord, for whom there is reserved in God's fair heaven an inheritance which cannot fade? What matters it although the solemn tones of the church clock have now been ringing in for you the year of death, if we can write at once upon your grave, 'Gone home,' or even, 'He has obtained his dearest wish'? There is no reason to lament the death of those who fall asleep in such a hope; but those for whom we sorrow are the living who have still no prospect of such joy. Do you know any prospect more inspiriting than that of one day having done entirely with that daily dying which we now call 'life;' of our at last, some time or other, breathing with a pleasure and a freedom we have never yet felt here, where every day brought us more than enough of its own ills; of once more hearing there, too, the command, 'Forward!' and then advancing through the spacious fields of heaven, but finding nowhere near us any foe, nor seeing any wilderness before? Surely, even though

it cost us other forty anxious years, as it cost Israel the Promised Land, what one of us would think the price of such a calling far too dear? But why do I say 'years,' when our appointed days are but one span? 'Yet a little while,' says New Year's morn, 'and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.'<sup>1</sup> There is He, even already, He who opens up for us the heavenly Canaan. Christians! which one of you will be the first to enter after Him?

That word itself conducts me to the close of my address. We have been holding consultation as to the best mode of setting out on the great journey of this life; and we may promise him who gives intelligent attention to these words, that he shall there find good. But now, in closing, let us ask, to what should we be led by all that we have been considering?

It seems to me that, first of all, we should be brought to ask the *decisive question of the New Year*, Am I among the Israel of God to whom this 'Forward' comes? Be not astonished that, considering the vast importance of this point, we cannot close without once more regarding it; so utterly deceitful is the heart, which we have brought with us out of the old into the new year, and so readily inclined to seek for comfort in the gospel promises, while seeking to release itself from gospel claims. Just as, at the Red Sea, not only Moses, in full confidence of faith, but also Pharaoh, in his blind temerity, ventured to cross, so there may also be among us now a multitude who are quite willing to advance, but in the path of their own wisdom,—as they choose, in their own strength; and they are ready, even after they have sinned against so many calls from heaven, to heap up new transgressions on the old.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 37.

Need we remind you here of Moses' words, when Israel afterwards, in their self-will, with weapons in their hands, went up the mountain,—‘It shall not prosper’?<sup>1</sup> Your own conscience has been already telling you that you are pressing forward on a way that leads to death; and—‘the face of the Lord is against them that work iniquity!’ Even though you were as strong as Pharaoh, you are as impotent before God as he was; it is not his sceptre, but the rod of Moses only that you need. Astounding thought,—that there should be a single one on earth who, spared through undeserved forbearance on the part of God, forthwith becomes, in the midst of his sins, a monument to show how much God's justice has been provoked, and sinks into a depth where no eye can endure to look! Sinner! you have seen greater tokens of God's power and grace than did that heathen king: your end shall be more terrible! Oh, if you can still tremble at the thought, thank God your heart is not yet wholly hardened; and consider now, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! Like Pharaoh at the sea, perhaps you are already by the side of the grave that is awaiting you. Perhaps your name heads this year's death-list; flee from the wrath to come,—betake yourself to Christ! Pray earnestly that, in you also, old things now may pass away, and all things become new. Soon will no choice be left to you; you will be forced to take what you have chosen here, even though it were the curse and not the blessing you preferred. But blessed will you be if you can this day break with all that one must needs forsake to enter on the way to heaven: that would be a New Year's Day such as you have never seen!

But though our face be turned towards the promised land, we can ourselves do much in rendering the path

<sup>1</sup> Num. xiv. 41.

we take more difficult or easy for ourselves. The *New Year's counsel* which, in all earnestness, we tender you in the Lord's name, will serve to make your path more smooth. Perhaps this year may sometimes bring you days when you will feel, like Moses, in perplexity you cannot hide: 'here, all my wisdom and my power completely fail.' It may be with you, as with him, that while you keep a bold and brave appearance in the eyes of men, your whole soul goes out in one cry of pain and anguish; then learn this truth at once, that secret prayer to God gives us our real power. Your circumstances may themselves remain unchanged in answer to your prayer, just as in this case here; but there will be a calm within your heart, while all around you foams and seethes, as in a boiling sea. And in your progress, carefully avoid two rocks,—faint-heartedness on one side, and presumption on the other hand. Let 'Forward' be the watchword for the day: be not like children, squandering in play the time that should be spent in marching on; still less be sluggards, sleeping though the sun has risen high; and least of all be like weak-hearted ones, who blindly gaze upon the sand found in the desert, but who never seek to cheer themselves by looking at the mountains of their native land! Commit your way, without reserve, to the great Guide who counts the steps of every single day; not seeking active work when He commands us to sit still, nor yet, upon the other hand, desiring a continuance of rest when He is beckoning on us to mount the hill,—such is the patience and the perseverance of the saints! Let it but be your constant aim to make advance; and if your company be not quite suited to your taste, remember that, while one is travelling, he takes to what he would in no case choose at home. Bear one another's burdens; and if you perceive a fellow-traveller stumbling, do not

deem it but a loss of time to offer him a helping hand. But if you stand alone, then learn, like Moses, to cling more closely to the unseen One, just in proportion as you find less satisfaction with that which is seen; and look more longingly to heaven, the less you find on earth—whether around you or before—that promises but little good. Thank God—although it may not be without much tears—for everything that makes you hang more loosely to this earth; and pray that, whatsoever else may disappear, faith may not fail,—that patience, too, may have her perfect work. And, as a rule, do not depict to your own mind a future that is either far too pleasant or the opposite; above all, never let your peace and comfort hang on the fulfilment of a single wish, or look for something quite unusual, when life goes smoothly onwards in its wonted course, monotonous and slow. Judge of your progress less by any joy which you experience, than by the fruit you bear; and let your next great test be, whether these two things grow daily dearer to your heart,—the cross which God appoints you on this earth, the crown which He reserves for you in heaven!

And now, to close: what else should be the substance of our *fervent New Year's prayer*, than just that all this may be mightily increased? Indeed, on this point, our desires and prayers become simplicity itself. As for ourselves, our New Year's prayer is fully comprehended in the Psalmist's words: 'And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee: deliver me from all my transgressions.' And if this last petition be presented in all earnestness, there is no need for adding, 'Make me not the reproach of the foolish:'<sup>1</sup> the Lord in faithfulness will carefully attend to that. From you, we only ask increase of prayer on our behalf, and undiminished love,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxix. 7, 8.

that we may terminate our course with strength and joy. But over you we now lift up our hands to bless, and may it be with Moses' faith and Aaron's spirit,—‘The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!’ If one may further ask for you those benefits which time can give or take, much more does it become the minister of Christ. We do not pray that you may have experience of unmixed good, but merely that even ills, which certainly shall come in their own time, may work together for your good. And above all, we pray that this year may be one of happiness for all those who are still far off, a year of mighty increase unto those who have drawn nigh; that everything God sends or suffers may but serve to bring us truly nearer our eternal destiny; and finally, that, through the preaching of the cross, our faith may gain more light, our love more strength, our hope more stedfastness, our piety more fruit. Then shall this year become, perhaps not one of those in which we have experienced most comforts, but assuredly a very blessed time; and should swift death come on us unexpectedly in the ‘Advance,’ the last breath here below shall join with the first Hallelujah up in heaven. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,—unto Him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end!

AMEN.

## CHAPTER V.

### The Intercession.

‘But Moses besought the Lord his God.’—Ex. xxxii. 11.

IS there a single science to be found, in which, after whole ages of research, incessantly pursued, less progress has been made than in the knowledge of the human heart? Such a phenomenon is most remarkable, and yet one that may be explained: while every other science is incessantly enlarging its domain, our knowledge of humanity is less advanced than that of generations long since dead. It has been well and truly stated by the philosophical poet, ‘The best study for mankind is man;’ but, alas! why should we have to add immediately upon the back of this, that there is no branch of study which is paid so poorly, and which furnishes less satisfactory results? Though we have had our earliest lessons in the school of self-knowledge, we remain but little else than strangers in the school where there is taught the deeper knowledge of mankind; and even though man, as such, may have been made the object of our study all through life, yet individual men present themselves to us at every turn as just so many enigmas. At one time, we may represent them to ourselves too favourably, at another time, quite the reverse; and while the thread which runs all through this maze is constantly escaping us, our lips take up the prophet’s sad

complaint, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?'<sup>1</sup> And it is no wonder, verily, that we feel thus constrained anew to make complaint at every turn; our arm is far too short, our eye too dim for us to fathom the whole depths of that small world in even one mortal man. We see men round about us as they outwardly appear, not as they are in their hidden reality. What we behold are isolated acts; but all the wheels and springs by which the clock is made to move in this or that particular direction still remain concealed from sight. If we would form a judgment truly fair regarding any man we may observe, we would require to be in a position to lift up the veil of secrecy that hides his inner nature from our eyes. We would require to follow him whenever he forsakes the bustle of the world, and is alone with God and with himself. We would require the power to cross the threshold of the inner chamber, the door of which is scrupulously closed, in which all that conceals what is disgraceful is quite cast aside, and where, in short, a man has not the smallest interest in making it appear that he is something different from what he really is. Each one of us is truly what he there appears to be; and 'the hidden man of the heart,' as an apostle<sup>2</sup> calls it, is the real man before the eye of God. 'But,' I hear some one ask, 'where can we get to know the man in this way, stripped of what is merely *on*, but not most truly *in* him, and not ornamented with the tinsel of an outside show that easily misleads?' Not in our daily life, as you well know, not even in the sphere of common history, but rather in the field of sacred history. Truly, the Bible has well merited this name,—the book of the history of the human heart. This is the very feature in these old historical accounts which drew us to them, even in childhood's days; not

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 4.

merely do they let us linger in the outer fore-court, but they also let us penetrate into the inmost sanctuary; they picture man not merely as he stands related outwardly to other men, but specially in his relation personally towards God. But does this statement seem too strong? and does the difference we make between profane and sacred history require to be explained still further and confirmed? Let Moses' name suffice for proof. Even writers whom we call profane know how to speak about his deeds, his laws, and his deserts; but where, outside of sacred Writ, do you find out the story of his hidden life before the eye of God?

Then do not be surprised that, when we now resume the golden thread of Moses' history,<sup>1</sup> we cast a reverential glance into the sanctuary of his solitude. The deliverance, the probation-time, the call, the march of Moses at the head of the children of Israel, were certainly important pages in his wondrous history. But all these things had reference more to his outward than his inner life; they pointed more to what it was incumbent on him to become and do for Israel,—less to what he himself was, as before the face of God in all His holiness. And yet attention must be specially directed to that point, if we would have the picture given of him set in its proper frame of circumstances, and if he himself is to maintain his honourable place within the cloud of witnesses that now surround us on the Christian course. We must find out the key which shall unfold to us the secret of that greatness so peculiar to himself, of that placidity so imperturbable, and of that meekness which knew not a bound. The key lies hid behind a cloud upon the summit of the hill which we see him ascending more than once to seek the face of God. We thus invite you, then, to-day, to make a pilgrimage to the majestic

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached November 7, 1858.

Sinai—yet not there to be witnesses of the revelation of the law in its sublimity, but that you may behold the lawgiver himself, soon after that law was revealed, in secret intercourse with God. The words of the text present a stand-point from which we may carefully survey, in its entirety, the history this chapter contains; while we assume that you will not deny to us the right of briefly pointing out to you, in passing, other such like scenes occurring in the life of this great man of God.

Let us go on, then, to consider Moses' *intercession* pointed out in these few words, that we may come to know him as the mediator under the Old Covenant, the generous and noble friend of his people, but especially the confidant of God. 'Moses in prayer:' does not this statement of our subject of discourse immediately entice you to give ear? May these our meditations serve to lead us all, either at the beginning, or as we proceed, to such a life of prayer, in faith and love, as only really deserves the name of 'life.' That we may fully see the nature, worth, and blessedness of such a life, we only need to look at Moses as he is presented in the context. We find him in succession, (1) highly privileged, (2) deeply grieved, (3) raised to a holy frame of mind, (4) visibly answered, (5) abundantly strengthened.

Lord! send down Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead us, and bring us to Thy holy hill and to Thy dwelling-place. Amen.

## 1.

Many events have taken place since Moses, at the Lord's command, drove back the waters of the Red Sea, and the song of the deliverance voiced forth from heart and mouth of many myriads. The first shower of the manna has come down, and the first stream of water

issued from the rocks of Meribah ; the earliest victory has been obtained over the treacherous Amalekites, and the first foundations laid of the covenant between Jehovah and His people. Amidst the sound of thunder and of trumpets, Heaven has already spoken to the earth, and Israel's camp has now for weeks been gathered round Mount Sinai, waiting patiently till Moses shall return. 'Return!' Where is he, then, you ask, and where can Amram's son remain with more advantage than amidst the people, who, as is already fully evident, cannot remain without his help and guidance for another single day? 'Where?' as if Moses could have been himself had he been always living in the abject sphere in which this Israel moved ; as if a man to whom the Lord Almighty has vouchsafed a look into celestial mysteries should hasten back to earth again! 'Come up hither,' were Jehovah's words ; and the voice drew forth from Moses' heart the answer, 'Here am I!' Although the people have been strictly warned to keep outside the barrier placed round the holy mountain, yet the barrier that separates the child of dust from God, in His unspotted holiness, is now removed for Moses to come near. Higher, still higher—yea, so high that earth has disappeared from sight, and nothing is around him but the heavens—he ascends at God's command, and breathes the breath of life in a far higher realm of the creation than what now we see. 'The people,' as we elsewhere read, 'stood afar off ; but Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.'<sup>1</sup> For near six weeks on end, the days go swiftly by as if they had been hours ; and while deep silence is imposed upon his bodily desires, he too can, in his way, declare that he has other meat than the manna with which, each morn, the wilderness is strewn. What mortal man shall venture to

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xx. 21.

set forth, in earthly speech, all that then passed between him and his Lord, whose messenger he was? The story of those forty days is written in heaven's register; and if Moses were himself still here to give his witness as to what occurred, perhaps he would repeat the words of Paul regarding the most blessed hour of his experience, 'Whether it took place in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell,—God knoweth.'<sup>1</sup> It is enough for us that he receives the law there through the medium of angels; that at this time he may have had withdrawn for him the cloud, which hitherto had quite concealed from human eyes God's counsel in its grand development, as now revealed in these last times; that there is now made known to him, not merely the grand principles of law to regulate the Jewish commonwealth, but God's express appointments as to everything relating to the life, both civil and religious, of the chosen nation, even to minute details; that he is now allowed (and this, the greatest privilege of all, I mention last) to pray in such a way that he most truly lives in close communion with the Infinite. Oh, happy Moses! who shall tell in what a stream of deep enjoyment you must then have bathed; how much refreshment your soul must have drawn from the full cup of God's delights; and how oblivious you must have now become of all the troubles which so often, like a leaden weight, oppressed your soul on earth? How high stands this great man of God above the carnal Israelites, who long for nothing so incessantly as for Egyptian flesh! Give to a Moses even the greatest dainty in all Pharaoh's court, and surely he will die with hunger, since it is but in communion with his God that he can find both rest and pleasure, life and blessedness. See how the world around him everywhere, except this little Israel, is still asleep in heathen night;

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3.

even Israel as yet honours Jehovah only as the chief and the most mighty God ; and only Moses knows Jehovah—that is, in so far as He could be made known to any human being under the Old Economy. But what is more, Moses may speak to God as man speaks to his friend. He looks upon the brightness of God's holiness, but his eye is nothing dazzled by the sight ; he knows the power of God's wrath, yet his spirit is not perturbed thereby ; and he receives the tables of God's testimony, yet is his hand not thereby withered up. Among those born of women, there has not been one, belonging to the days of the Old Covenant, that stood in such an intimate relation to Jehovah, except, it may be, Abraham alone : in this respect, again, we look on Moses as a happy man. But why should you be ready to regard him with an envious eye ? I know, indeed, that his high rank, as the prime minister of Israel's King, has been bestowed on none of us ; no voice from heaven has summoned us to make approach into the inmost sanctuary, wherein God shows His glory. But the greatest privilege which Moses had at Sinai—confidential intercourse with God—is granted to each one of us who know Him in His Son. Nay, Christians need no longer stand far off in fear, like Israel at the foot of Horeb, there entreating that He may no longer speak to them, and with the secret fear within their heart that he who has seen God shall die. We have already seen God in the face of His beloved Son, yet our life is preserved ; and the voice of God, and not of man, is ever calling us, like Moses, to draw near to Him. No tables made of stone are put into our hands, but God is still establishing His covenant with us and with our seed for ever more ; and His law is written by the Holy Ghost upon the mind when its regeneration is begun. No barrier prevents approach to His high throne ; in Christ we may draw

near with confidence, by faith in Him. No longer is there any palpable Mount Sinai marked out as the place where we must worship God ; the hour is come, and now is, when men are neither at Gerizim nor on Horeb to kneel down in prayer ; for God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. In every Christian sanctuary, in the days of the New Covenant, God's promise made to Israel is fulfilled : ' In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.'<sup>1</sup> Nay, more, the blessedness of fellowship with God is not attached solely to places such as these, however sacred, and however dear to us. Wherever there is any supplication made, the Father in Christ is there, as near His children as He was to Moses while he prayed : yea, more, wherever in your heart you seek the face of the Infinite, be it in midst of toil and weariness, or on the bed of rest,—in midst of nature's calm repose, or in the busy whirl of worldly things,—in every place, the Lord will open up a spring of living water for all those who thirst for fellowship with Him. You do not need to climb up Sinai's heights, nor to descend into deep clefts of rocks ; for the Eternal One Himself is nearer you than your own shadow, ready to address kind words of comfort to your soul. All true believers, priests ; and every priest called to draw near with as much confidence as Moses did : such is the joyful message which the gospel brings. As if our Maker thought the distance between Him and the posterity of Adam, in their helplessness, too great even for Himself, He has been the first to span it, and has come far nearer us in Christ. And when, in later ages, human wisdom had obscured this foolishness of God, and placed the universal priesthood of believers almost wholly in the shade, that human mediators might again be brought

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xx. 24.

between God and the creatures He has made, then (as we have been thinking lately) He raised up the Reformation champion, who longed to have one of the trumpets used at Jericho, that he might raze the walls of the great Jericho of error, and once more proclaim, even to the weakest of believers, 'Ye are a royal priesthood!' Raised to be priests in Christ, we stand to God in a relation even far more blessed than did Moses; and we may address Him, whose unutterable name he scarcely durst take up into his lips, with the sacred name of 'Father.' What blessed times are these, when, in our solitude, each separating wall that intervenes between the children's and the Father's hearts seems to fall down before our face! Our pleasures then are better far than what the world affords in the most choice of sense enjoyments; and even hours (alas! why are they still so few?) may hasten by like dreams, while we are thus allowed to breathe the vital air belonging to a higher world. Strangers on earth, although your portion were vexation and such toil as Moses had, even the least privileged among you has still one privilege; and happy are ye when ye value it above all else: ye can, ye may—nay, ye must *pray!*

## 2.

Yet do not think that such a privilege exempts you from a multitude of struggles on this earth; rather, when you but look at Moses' case, and find how deeply grieved he was, the contrary seems true. He is still standing in God's holy presence, raised above the dust of earth, when suddenly he hears the words addressed to him, 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.' 'Thy people:' these are bitter, cutting words. Is it not just as if Jehovah meant to say, 'A

people such as this can no more be accounted mine ?' What has occurred to rouse the Holy One to wrath ? You know quite well already, though you willingly hear it repeated now, because you would not otherwise be fit to sound the depths of pain in Moses' soul. The absence of the lawgiver has proved a snare to Israel ; and Horeb's thunders scarce have died away ere fear has vanished from their hearts. Their inclination soon is seen to be no longer now after Egyptian meats, but rather after the Egyptian calf-worship ; Aaron, in weakness, shamefully sides with the people's wickedness ; even self-interest and love of show keep silence now, to give full scope to the desire of sense-enjoyment, though prohibited. Loudly and blasphemously sounds the voice of their rejoicing through the stillness of the desert and of Sinai's rocks : ' These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.'<sup>1</sup> O wretched nation, thus, when not much more than called to liberty, to stretch their hands out for the fetters of unrighteousness, and, as it were, before the eye of that Jehovah who touched yonder mountain-top and made it tremble, thus so quickly to transgress the first requirement of His holy laws ! Oh, what a cruel insult cast on Him who bore that nation through the ocean's waves, like as the eagle carries all her young ones through the desert, now to see the cords of love, with which He had by this time almost bound them to His service, torn asunder, just like cobwebs, by the hands of the rebellious ones themselves ! But we may also readily imagine what unutterable grief it was to Moses in particular, that even while in the immediate presence of his God, a dark cloud rises on His face. Is *this*, then, the reward for all the faithfulness with which he has devoted his whole energies to such an arduous work as Israel's deliverance ? Is *this*

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxii. 4.

the seal confirming what the people, scarcely forty days before, declared, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do'?<sup>1</sup> Is *this* the highest pleasure of a people that but lately fled in terror from the presence of the only true God, but were unable to restrain their ecstasy when they beheld a lifeless lump of gold? Where are the songs of thanksgiving that echoed all along the shores of the Red Sea? They now are changed into the shouts of a rebellious mob. Where is the spoil that the dismayed Egyptians gave up? It has been spent on the adorning of an idol. Where is the prospect now of national prosperity to be enjoyed if men observed the ordinances of the Lord? It is as dark as that black cloud which caps the mountain where the law was given; for, hark! the ill-foreboding words sound loud in Moses' ears: 'I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them.' 'Let me alone!' how well we recognise, in these few words, the living God, who glories in omnipotence combined with faithfulness, and who will not even let His anger burn without forewarning this, His faithful servant, of the dreadful work He is about to do. But we may also easily perceive that words like these to Moses must have come upon him like a thunderbolt, more terrible by far than all the thunders of that morning when the law was given. It is but one condemning sentence that is passed, but it concerns the lives of many thousands who are truly guilty, and that, too, of deep offence against the majesty of God. Nor have they sinned far from the presence of the Lord, but under Sinai's shadow; nor is it merely through their own self-will and waywardness, but also through the weakness shown by Moses' own brother, that the people

<sup>1</sup> Deut. v. 27.

have transgressed. Then surely Moses must have felt as if the granite underneath his feet began to open up and to give way. On more than one occasion after this did he see Israel upon the verge of swift destruction ; but now, more than at any other time, was he involved in danger with the rest. Now for the first time, almost three months since the Exodus, quite unexpectedly, and in a way incomprehensible, with one accord the people have rebelled against their lawful King ; and the existence of the nation hangs by but a single thread, that trembles in the hands of a most righteous Judge. But ye should be in something like a proper state to understand the depth of this man's sorrow,—ye who had saved your dearest child from certain death, and who, just at the very moment when you fancied all was safe, beheld the one whom you had rescued rushing wilfully into the jaws of death. But wherefore should I speak of sorrowful experiences like these, as if they were the only ones through which God's faithful servant was to pass on earth ? Well do we know that every man, but specially the Christian, must in this world engage in anxious strife ; and every day bears witness to the truth, that there is not a single spot in any heart which may not unexpectedly be pierced with poignant grief. But which of us, my fellow Christians, has not at some time had experience like Moses' in that memorable hour ? We may have deemed ourselves blest in our fellowship with God, when suddenly the harsh, discordant sound of sin was heard,—the clash of weapons in the struggle of this life. For the disciple always finds even yet, as did his Lord of old, that the desert where he undergoes temptation immediately adjoins the Jordan of self-dedication ; yea, just in proportion as, like Moses, we are placed in higher station, and more privileged than other men, we often find our trials too are heavier : the lightning

sparing the lowly bush, but scorches the proud oak in its broad and leafy crown. Like Moses, too, we often see our noblest efforts for the good of men in general rewarded with most base ingratitude; or, in a few brief hours, what we have raised by dint of sweat and toil, continued through successive years and months, is broken down through careless weakness on another's part. In utter disappointment, we pour out our grief before the ruins of the edifice we reared so carefully; and when we would continue to rejoice in hope that God will yet fulfil His promises, it seems as if God hid His face from us, and we are terrified. We stand, like Moses, all alone, with little understanding of our case, while it appears that all—yes, everything—is quite against us. The voice of conscience lets itself be heard more loudly than the voice of faith and felt experience; and tremblingly we see that there is only too much ground to fear the worst if He will enter into judgment with us men. Past joy seems irrecoverably lost; the present is a night through which there gleams not even a single ray of light; and the future—oh! must we not often strive to think as little of our own future as Moses did concerning Israel's? The wilderness has kept the secret of its own unutterable griefs; nevertheless, if all the inner chambers could but open, and if every heart that had experience of disappointed hopes, of hidden griefs, and of unutterable woe, could then pour everything into those inner chambers, do you not think that the whole book of Moses' law would be too small for the long list of those who had a like experience with him? Truly, although the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold, the fiery trial sometimes lasts even longer than the trial of the gold; and just as surely as the Lord liveth and thy soul liveth, sooner or later you shall fail when you, like Moses, cease to *pray*!

## 3.

Would that we all were but of such a holy frame of mind as was the servant of the Lord, whose utter disappointment you have hitherto been witnessing. Does not the simple fact that Moses, at a moment such as this, betakes himself to prayer, say very much for him? But which of us, that suddenly perceives what deeply grieves us, is at once inclined to pray, and not, instead, disposed to cry out in despair, but most of all disposed to silence and to utter inactivity? Moses (it is his highest praise) at once betakes himself unto the Lord with his grief, and there must needs address Him out of the abundance of his sorrows and his thoughts. Now it is well for him that he still lingers at the top, not at the foot of Sinai, for he is near that God to whom he never called in vain. Moses pours out his supplications in the quiet solitude—for whom? Is it for himself, that God may give him strength to bear the burden of such oft rejection by the people? But wherefore should he think about himself, when his heart is quite filled with the thought of Israel's salvation? Why should he think of men in their rejection of himself, when they so shamefully provoked the Lord? Nay, here the lawgiver becomes a mediator, interceding for his people in their sins, with but his prayers for an offering; words fail me in attempting to describe his true nobility of soul, which comes out in his prayers and pleadings here. Read for yourselves, in this and other passages, the words by which he seeks to influence Jehovah to withdraw the dread death-sentence; and then tell me if there has at any time been offered, upon this vile earth, a prayer more beautiful and touching than this is.<sup>1</sup> Does it not seem as if love were exhausting all its energies in trying to find out, not

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxii. 11-13, 31, 32, xxxiii. 13-16; Num. xiv. 13-19, xvi. 22.

some slight palliations of the shameful conduct which must be pronounced quite inexcusable, but some good grounds for not requiring, in this case, full satisfaction for the vast amount of guilt incurred? Now he reminds Jehovah of the great deliverance He has already wrought for Israel, and asks Him if He really intends to bring destruction upon His own handiwork. Then he points out to Him what the Egyptians and the other nations well might say, when they would learn that the object of their hatred was destroyed. Again, he lays before Jehovah His own promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he asks what must become of that, if He do not turn from His wrath in time. And finally, he earnestly entreats the Lord, if it must even be so, to take away his life, if Israel's life, now forfeited, cannot be bought at any other price; he far prefers to die with than to live without a nation, whose connection with himself has brought him,—shall we say, so much of joy and pleasure?—nay, scarce anything but constant pain and grief. Have ever praying lips poured forth more touching words than these: 'Forgive their sin; and if not, then blot my name out of Thy book'?<sup>1</sup> To be blotted out of God's book!—surely one would require to be a Moses thoroughly to know the dreadful meaning of that thought. In his own way, Paul gave expression to a sentiment of kindred import when he wrote that, for his brethren's sake, he could wish that he were accursed of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Nay, rather let him undergo the worst, if need be, than let him see Israel removed from the high rank among the nations of the world to which it had been destined: what is life to him if he live not with, and among, and for the stiff-necked Israel? 'But, Moses, think of this: the Lord must needs have a peculiar people; have you never heard that He desires

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ix. 3.

to make of you a great nation, instead of them ; yea, as is elsewhere said, a nation greater still and stronger than even this ? But let the vial of vengeance, which you now restrain by these your prayers, pour forth its contents, and your fame shall rise out of the ruins of Israel's greatness ; and the greatest benefit of which an Oriental dreams—a vast posterity—will then be yours, according to the promise God has made.' What a temptation lay for Moses here ! But do you ask if it was not almost too strong ? Mark, then, that in his prayer he speaks as if Jehovah had not used these words at all ; he scarcely pays regard to them ; he makes no use of them in his own interest ; he is far more concerned about the honour of Jehovah than for a numerous posterity. By all means, then, destroy his trunk, stripped as it is already of its leaves, provided that the forest trees of Israel be not cut down ; for he already sees the axe laid to their roots. In the full strength of interceding love he can be quite oblivious of everything except the sinful Israel ; nor does he leave the mountain-top till he brings down with him the promise that the sentence, merited even though it is, shall be delayed at least, if not repealed. Does not a holy rapture seize you when you listen to a prayer like this ? Here, we deliberately say, there is one greater even than Abraham, when pleading in behalf of guilty Sodom ; for those wicked men had not rejected Abraham, at least in person, and the patriarch did not express his readiness to give his own life as an offering for sin. One prayer like this would be sufficient to secure a name and fame for Moses through all time ; yet this one prayer is but the first of hundreds more ; or rather, let us say, it is the key-note of a life of faith, and prayer, and love on Moses' part through forty years,—a life that dies not, even when he gives up the ghost. ' Now, therefore, forgive their sins ; ' how frequently,

and in how many ways, the man of God presented this same prayer! Now, when the spies sent out to search Canaan have returned, and the people stubbornly refuse to march still on, Moses—pardon the words—holds up before the face of God the shield of His long-suffering, that so the arrows of His righteous recompense may not bring injury to Israel. Then, when at the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the voice of God sounds forth, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment,’<sup>1</sup> Moses and Aaron fall upon their faces, pleading for the life of Israel. Soon after that, again, when fiery serpents glided round the tents of the rebellious ones, the prayer of Moses brought about what no snake-charmer could effect. But what need is there for adducing further instances? I would require to follow Israel with you step by step, in all their wanderings, to show you Moses in his constancy of prayer. ‘They fell upon their faces:’ these are words, applied to him and Aaron, which we meet at every turn; and who can tell how frequently this selfsame prayer for pardon was repeated in their friendly intercourse with Israel’s God and King? It is this very perseverance in entreaty for the good of Israel—when, almost at every moment, they have turned anew to corrupt practices—that gives to Moses’ intercession something of the unselfish, the pathetic, the sublime; and thus, just like the man himself, we find it standing in the books of the Old Testament almost alone, unparalleled. But it is also just this feature in the prayer of Moses that shows us professing Christians how we should conduct ourselves in secret intercourse with God. Come hither, ye who seek to understand what true prayer is,—what kind of prayer it is that pleases God; behold that man, who wrestles like another Jacob, not for

<sup>1</sup> Num. xvi. 21.

his own life, but for Israel's, and who, like Israel, earned for himself the meed of praise that as a prince he had power with God? Who does not feel that prayer like this truly deserves the name; while, on the other hand, so much of what bears that fair name is little more than a mere mumbling over of some forms, and that, too, in a way the most mechanical,—if it be not, indeed, but covert sin? Nay, it is not enough that you should cry to God for help whenever your own want and misery oppress your soul; Moses calls loudly, 'Pray for others too,'—and the more earnestly for them, as they are more unfortunate, more sinful than yourselves, and more unthankful and unkind to you! Neither is it enough that you present to Him your own and others' miseries; for Moses says again, 'God's honour must be made the one great object in your prayer;' woe to the man whose prayer is but self-seeking, who does not endeavour to extol God's majesty! Nor yet, again, is it enough that you should raise your heart at special times in prayer, but soon abate your zeal; Moses cries out to every one who strives on earth, 'Continue, persevere in prayer; the faithful friends of God are the best friends of men!' Happy, thrice happy, is the nation, church, or family that counts among its members those who strive like Moses in their prayers. Eternity shall one day show how much earth owes to those who have thus learned to live in constant intercourse with Heaven!

## 4.

But does not this still further and more plainly show itself when you perceive how *Moses was heard* in prayer? There is (may I express it so?) something beyond description, human or divine, in these words found in ver. 14: 'Then the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to

do unto His people.' Nay, what man could expect by prayer to make God alter His decree? what godly man could wish to have such power? God has determined at all times to show His grace to sinful men, but He is gracious only to the humble prayer; and now, when Israel themselves neglect to pray that He may take away impending judgments, Moses puts himself in the position of the sinners; and no sooner does he venture on his intercession than he obtains God's pardon for them all. Say not that Moses' prayer was, nevertheless, not fully heard, because Jehovah will not promise any more than that He shall send forth His angel to become their guide (ver. 34), and further threatens them, with evident unwillingness, 'that He shall assuredly visit their sins at the appointed time.' For much had been already gained, and, in a certain sense, the whole has been obtained. Full pardon was what the most Holy One could not by any means bestow, so long as it did not appear that Israel repented in sincerity. Yea, so thoroughly does even Moses feel their punishment is just, that next day he will not go any farther in assuring Israel than this: 'Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.'<sup>1</sup> Yet even here, too, it appears the Lord cannot cast off for ever, so as to become a gracious God no more. For an appointed time the people must sit down in sackcloth and in ashes, at a becoming distance from the mountain where God's glory is revealed, that they may be led back again, through deep humiliation, to the highest honour God can give. But oh, the unutterable riches of His grace! to that dread height it is impossible to rise, unless Jehovah be Himself the guide. Do not object, in answer to all this, that many thousands fall because of this same sin; that the most fearful judgments of the Lord continually make the wilderness a place of

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxii. 30.

burial for all the dead, a place of torment for those left alive ; that a whole generation must ere long become extinct before the land of promise shall be reached. Moses has prayed for grace, but grace does not in every case mean quite the same thing as impunity ; and Moses himself is fully conscious that the nation must atone for its own sins, even when it is not visited according to its sins. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.'<sup>1</sup> These words, penned by the Psalmist, form the motto of God's dealings with Israel. When God exterminates some hundreds, He acts like the surgeon, sparing not the knife though it inflicts much pain, nor hesitating to remove most precious, yea, important members, that the body may itself be saved from otherwise inevitable death. Thousands must sometimes perish in the midst of their unrighteousness ; but that whole myriads, as guilty, still are spared, must be attributed to nothing else than Moses' persevering prayer in their behalf. That generation sinks into the grave, but Israel itself remains, an everlasting people, born as it were again upon the verge of ruin, by the breath of this same prayer, to an undying life ; and though Moses also is himself soon gathered to his fathers, yet the fruits arising from his intercession still remain while he himself has gone from earth. That the desert did not swallow them all up, just as one man, is certainly the gift of grace, but it is quite as certainly the blessing that has come through Moses' intercession in behalf of Israel. Nay, more ; if that same race, the most remarkable of all the nations of the world, has never yet irrevocably disappeared from off this earth, do you not think that Moses, looking down from heaven, would count this, too, among the fruits arising from his humble pleading, that was answered by the Lord in

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcix. 8.

measure far beyond what he even asked or thought? But what a stream of blessing is it we behold arising from the fountain of a single intercessory prayer! and what inestimable gain has Moses brought his nation, when he seemed to have been doing nothing for these forty days! Yet what is it that prayer cannot do,—humble, believing, fervent, persevering prayer? It opens up the treasures hid in God's paternal heart, and shuts the flood-gates of His penal judgments; it brings blessings down upon the head already laden with the curse of sin; nor has it lost its power, although the mouth of him who offered it is long since silent in the dust of death! I know, indeed, that we must not in every case expect such palpable and such immediate answers to our prayers, if we are to avoid the risk of tempting Him who is the Lord our God. The same God who so constantly gave ear unto the prayers of Moses, offered up for others than himself, at least on one occasion most decidedly refused to answer his request when it concerned himself. But I am also well aware that the fulfilment of the promise, 'He that seeketh findeth,' is delayed and hindered by the weakness of our faith far more than anything besides; and that a quite distinctive blessing is attached unto the loving prayer of intercession made for others,—a blessing, too, whose full amount can only be conjectured, at the best. Does it not seem as if this selfsame Israel were borne upon the wings of prayer, by all the most illustrious men of God, over successive abysses? Thus, Samuel goes before the people in the breach, and the thunderstorm that threatens to destroy their fields passes away over their heads.<sup>1</sup> Then Hezekiah and Isaiah hold out each his clasped hands against the whole army of Sennacherib, and the presence of the spirit of true prayer becomes the signal for the coming down of the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 17 ff.

destroying angel, whose it is to slay the multitudes of the Assyrians.<sup>1</sup> So Daniel seeks the face of God for his people and the holy city, and immediately he is informed through Gabriel that, even in the beginning of his prayer, there has gone forth a message from the Lord announcing better times.<sup>2</sup> We need not wonder, then, that God does not permit prayer to be made to Him when, for a time, He will no longer spare His people ; and no stronger words of threatening are to be found than these : ‘ Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people.’<sup>3</sup> And is the history of the Israel of the New Covenant less rich in illustrations of the truth, that God desires to have entreaty made to Him not merely by but also for His people, so that He may pity them? Run over, then, yourselves, the annals of Christ’s reign, and ponder specially the record made of your own history. What keeps the sword from Peter’s head when that of James already is removed? The Church sends up in his behalf a constant prayer, that keeps the rock from falling down. What has the Christian Church to thank for her great teacher, Augustine? The prayer of Monica ; because a child for whom so many tears were shed could not by any possibility be lost. What is it that brings back Melanchthon from the gates of death? Luther at once betakes himself to heaven’s gate, and there pours forth a stream of prayers and tears, declaring, in the full assurance of his faith, that he shall keep him, and his hope shall not be put to shame. What saves the Reformation when its greatest crisis had been reached? Not the protection it received from any prince, not the support of wise and learned men, not any influence wielded by noblemen ; but that same Luther, who, when he imagines there is no one listening, prays

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xxxii. 20, 21.<sup>2</sup> Dan. ix. 22, 23.<sup>3</sup> Jer. xv. 1.

thus: 'I know of a surety that Thou art our God and Father, and that Thou shalt put our persecutors to shame. If Thou dost not, the danger is as great for Thee as for ourselves. The whole is most assuredly Thy work; we have but been constrained to enter into it; and truly Thou shalt care for it!' Yes, after such wrestling in the dust, we feel that we can venture boldly on, quite confident that we shall win the day, when, in the fiercest fight, we make our motto that expression of heroic faith, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.'<sup>1</sup> What man can tell how many, who, in secret, cherish sin, are sitting here, and from whose guilty heads the sword is still averted through a father's or a mother's prayer, while they have never made return for all that love; who would, moreover, keep us from acknowledging that, deeply sensible of our own weakness, we pour out our soul in secret for the much prayer made in our behalf? Delightful thought, that even the poorest, by his prayers, may thus become a benefactor of his fellow-men, as Moses was of Israel; and that the clouds of prayer that rise from earth to heaven return again from heaven to earth in gentle showers of blessing for us men! Christians! if you most truly seek your brother's and your own salvation, persevere in prayer!

## 5.

'Your own salvation'—yes; it is just here that our own interest, which we so fully understand, combines most beautifully with our brother's too. Come, look at Moses, in the last place, *fully strengthened* after prayer. Let us once more look to the sequel of the history. When you behold the man of more than eighty years descending from the mountain of the Lord with all the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxviii. 17.

fire of youth still full in him, do you not recognise in that the power of fellowship with God in heaven? What calmness in his eye, what firmness in his gait, what firm decision in his actions, and what strength combined with moderation, as this very page can testify! There may be error on the part of Joshua, but not on his; Aaron may make excuse,—he knows exactly what the value is of the apology; the Levites may slay thousands with the sword,—hundreds of thousands have their fate decided by the sword of Moses' mouth. Surely you do not disapprove of what he did, when, in a boiling rage, he cast away the tables made of stone, so breaking them, and strewed the dust obtained by pounding down the golden calf upon the water used to quench the thirst of Israel? 'See my zeal for the Lord!' So Moses might have said with better right than Jehu did in later times;<sup>1</sup> for his was anger without sin. And we confess that we would scarce have looked on him as Moses—yea, would almost have despised him—had he not, on this occasion, cast a single glance of deepest anger upon the abomination now committed by the Israelites. What would have been the meaning of such intercession for a race of sinners, if the intercessor had esteemed the sin itself as trivial? Nay, verily, there must be no occasion given for any one to say that Moses is most powerful in prayer, but weak when courage, energy, and promptitude in punishment should be displayed; then let him who has been before the face of God show that he does not fear the face of man! Not merely is the order given to single out the guiltiest, he does not spare the strongest, nor the weakest, nor the dearest, when he has to wield the fierce chastising rod; and wading through a sea of blood, he can at once appear with confidence before Jehovah, and there show that he esteems sin not more

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings x. 16.

lightly than the Holy One of Israel Himself, even though he has made intercession in behalf of those who sinned. Do you not recognise, in that one trait, Moses just as he was,—of tender sympathies, but never weak before the sinful Israelites,—pleading, indeed, with God to show His grace, but never asking that He should renounce His sacred right? Now he descends from Sinai's height. But what a life is this that, properly, takes its beginning here! He marches on, deeper and deeper still into the wilderness with those who are so frequently chastised, but never bettered by the chastisement! No less than forty years, from day to day, he has, as prophet, to explain the will of God; as God's lawgiver, to uphold His claims; as mediator, to stand up between a sinful creature and a holy Heaven, and to do this unweariedly, uninterruptedly, almost without support,—not reckoning the feeble Aaron and the seventy elders:—how was it possible? And had this man received some superhuman power to do what we can scarce conceive? Nay, it is not astonishing that even he could feel, at least sometimes, dispirited. Just hear how touchingly he speaks on one occasion, and see from this that he was really a man moved by like passions with ourselves: 'Wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people on 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?'<sup>1</sup> But who, that knows what a refreshing stream there ever flowed for Moses through the sultry desert's sands, can fail to understand that those hours of dejection gave immediate place to years of strength? The prayer of Moses was the power before which more than Amalek was forced to yield; for the inscription on the altar built by Moses, 'The

<sup>1</sup> Num. xi. 11-15.

Lord is my banner,' becomes the watchword of his inward and his outward life. Prayer proves his stay and strength when such as Miriam rise against him, and when such as Aaron leave his side; how little can he need who finds all in his God! Sometimes, indeed, the day is hot and sultry; but when, at the eventide, he turns again into his tent, and the cloudy pillar shuts him in, then is he all alone with God; and the people, as they stand far off in reverence, scarce can imagine what is uttered there. But Moses reappears, as if he had been born anew, and girded by an unseen arm for all his work, feeling quite equal to the task awaiting him. Whatever storms may play around his head, they can at most destroy the branches of the tree—never its roots; and even his death scarce can deserve the name, for what was his last breath but pious prayer? How could we ever think of instituting even a remote comparison between life's struggle, fought by one who lives among ourselves, and Moses' life? Still, Israel's journey through the wilderness remains the emblem of our life on earth; and every Christian finds himself, while here below, like Moses, placed in a position where, each day, there is but strife without and often fear within. How wretched, then, must be the man who knows no other strength than that of mortal flesh and blood! And how should not the burden, that even Moses now and then felt almost far too much for him, appear to such a one wholly unbearable? But if, at every point in our career, we see our inner chamber open, as he saw the Tabernacle of Witness, and if it is a good thing for us to be near to God, then certainly, though much may happen, this shall be impossible,—that we should be compelled to ask, like Israel, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' At every turn we find new proofs in our experience that His strength is perfected in our weakness;

and what human nature cannot do is taught us through His grace. Then, even though the world be all opposed to us, the Lord, in His eternal faithfulness, remains upon our side; though even our dearest friends may fall, the Friend who cannot die still watches us; although the head may bend through weariness, the heart that still can pray renews its youth. Behold in this the explanation of the mystery, why two men, both engaged in the selfsame life-struggle, may yet fight in ways so utterly dissimilar, that while the one sinks under wounds he has received, the other issues from the fight victorious; the one required to carry on the war at his own charges, while the other had Omnipotence itself upon his side. Have you never met with them,—those fortunate unfortunates, whom one could never look upon without remembering the well-known words: ‘As chastened, but not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things’?<sup>1</sup> Rise up again before our eyes, ye countless hosts in heaven and on the earth, who serve, like Moses, as examples of the power of prayer and faith! Grow on, even in our midst; bear witness in the face of the great world of unbelief unto the truth that the Lord’s arm is not shortened yet! And Christians, if you wish for proof which no man can refute, that the prayer of faith gives strength for everything,—yes, even overcomes the world,—see specially that it be not wanting where it can least of all be missed,—in your heart, in your mouth, in your life!

We have been looking upon Moses while engaged in prayer. But how could we conclude without bestowing a sad look on all those we perceive so far *beneath* the place which Moses occupied? And how, again, could we

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

depart from this without a look of hope and joy at Him who stands so far *above*?

Have we no reason to affirm that many,—that the most of us,—that (let me say) we all remain far in the rear of Moses with regard to faith and prayer? But what a painful feeling seizes us, whenever, from that mount of prayer, we cast our eyes down on that vast assembly,—nay, into our own heart especially! I am not even speaking now of those who carry with them, not a Moses', but a Pharaoh's hardened heart; I wish to believe that you know better, by experience, what prayer is than I have been describing it to-day. And yet do you not feel, just like myself, that when you look at Moses in the exercise of prayer, you are constrained to cast your eyes upon the ground in shame? Prayer is to him the sweetest pleasure of his solitude: say candidly and honestly—if an account were written of *your* solitary hours, would it not show some traits quite different from this? The prayer of Moses rises for all Israel, for sinners, even for those who have offended him; say candidly, how many of your dearest relatives there are whom you have seldom or never remembered in your prayers; and have you many enemies for whose forgiveness and conversion you have earnestly besought the Lord? This Moses, in the light shed by the Old Economy, prays of his own free will; why, in the light shed by the New Economy, do you so often stand far off in such timidity? Moses does not desist from prayer before he gets an answer from the Lord; why does the least delay in the fulfilment of your hopes make you abate your earnestness in prayer? But why should we continue the comparison, each point in which reveals new ground of blame for us? Who, in this whole assembly, will be bold enough unblushingly to place himself alongside Moses while engaged in prayer? Alas! although I seek for men

who pray like Moses, I can find, at best, men weak as Aaron was,—with good intentions, certainly, so long as there is nothing hazardous to be attempted, but who speedily are borne away, like reeds, by every stream that brings temptation, when they rather should have remained as firm as rocks! What did I say? ‘I seek;’ nay, it is God that seeks for men who pray like Moses, ‘for the Father seeketh such to worship Him;’ and He finds thousands like apostate Israel, not on the top, but at the foot of Horeb. But is it not quite undeniable that the same dividing line seen in this case is also to be drawn among ourselves; and that, of those who will not let themselves be brought out from among the mass of the apostate Israelites, by fostering a prayerful spirit such as Moses showed, the number is from time to time on the increase? Only five verses back, before the words found in the text, I find a wholly different account: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and then rose up to play;’ say candidly, is that not rather your own history? Does not the spirit of the times drive hosts of thoughtless people into dissipation and a careless mode of life? Are you, too, not aware of any idols towards which the heart is drawn far rather than to Him whose promises are so attractive,—yes, but whose requirements, too, are strict to a degree elsewhere unknown? Have not you also precious offerings,—as Israel had its gold,—ready to give when there shall but be need of them to gratify your heart’s desire? Do not you also feel an inclination to unite, like Aaron, what never possibly can be combined,—the worship of the one true God and that of idols? You who can tell of a deliverance greater than that of Israel from Egyptian bondage, who know of better manna, and who hear the messages of God as clearly as the Israelites,—can you, too, be at heart as faithless, unimpressible, ungrateful, and as fickle as were

they? Then your prayer may possibly be like the prayer of Israel, of whom we read, 'when He slew them, then they sought Him,'<sup>1</sup> but certainly not like the prayer of Moses, who derived from it his chief delight; then, too, that sentence which God uttered to that praying one applies to you, 'Whosoever sinneth against me, him will I blot out of my book!'<sup>2</sup> Moses, if thou didst well in being wroth, and casting from thine hands the tables of the testimony, when thou sawest Israel in all their sin, how wouldst thou look upon so many now who boast they have a better covenant, but yet despise it through a like insensibility? Oh that the contemplation of this prayerful man of God had but inflamed a multitude of hearts with holy zeal, that they might seek in some degree to be like him! Why should we seek this any longer in a world which can as little satisfy the deepest wants of human hearts, as the golden idol could have heard the prayers of Israel? Why are we standing still before it, ever weak as Aaron was, whereas a prayerful Moses has been showing us how we may be always courageous, always strong, and always full of hope? Rather let us bewail in briny tears our grievous folly, in that we could possibly continue for so long a time seeking the living water, not at the only fountain, but at a troubled stream! Let it be with each one of us this day as if, like Moses, we perceived the Lord's voice calling us to the ascent,—to seek the face of God with all our troubles and our cares, but first with all our sins; nor let us rest till we are sure the Lord can also say to us, as unto Moses, 'I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.'<sup>3</sup> Let us regard each disappointment, though most saddening, as being possibly prepared for us even as for Moses, that it may become a means in God's hands of improving us in prayer; and

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. xxxii. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. xxxiii. 12.

let us deem each loss a gain, as making us less bound to earth, and more prepared for fellowship with Him. Our life is valueless, our future dark, our death devoid of hope, so long as it cannot be said of us, as it was said of Moses, that the Lord is become *our* God!

And how does He, the Holy One, become the God of such unworthy sinners as ourselves? Here my eye rests upon a scene, in view of which all Sinai's glory pales, and the angels that gave out the law but veil their faces in deep reverence. Fifteen long centuries have passed since Moses bowed in prayer, and now the mountains of the Promised Land behold another One who prays during the quiet hours of night; the solitudes hear this Man speak with God, as if a child addressed the father whom he loved. Moses has been our theme till now; but how could we here end with him, when we know One who is the Mediator of another and far better covenant? On Sinai, Moses prays for a rebellious nation; on Golgotha, you hear Jesus pleading for His executioners when He was being crucified. Moses invokes God for His grace towards Israel only; Jesus, for that same grace to sinners of all tribes and tongues, peoples and nations,—yea, even towards you and me, in all our guilt. Moses but offers to make his own life a sacrifice for sin, while Jesus actually gives His life as a ransom for many. Moses obtains for Israel no more than mitigation of the penalty, not full forgiveness; Jesus can bestow a full salvation on all those who come to God by Him. Moses expires when he has watched and prayed for forty years, seeking the good of Israel; but Jesus ever lives, appearing in God's presence for our interest. Nay, Israel, we do not envy you of this your prayerful mediator; we thank God that we look unto a higher One. While other men rank Moses high among the saints, and

earnestly desire that he may pray for sinners, this is our sole wish,—that we may have an intercessor with our God in Him whose way even Moses has prepared. And we have blessed comfort in the certainty that He shall intercede if we but come to Him as sinners. Nay, Jesus does not say, like Moses, ‘*Peradventure* I shall make an atonement for your sin.’ Even though your sins were red as scarlet, only believe; then, through His intercession, they shall all be covered, blotted out. But if you have indeed found peace in Him, then see to it, ye Christians, that no praying Moses put you to shame henceforth as heretofore! Moses must lead you unto Christ, but Christ bestows on you the Holy Ghost, who gives you power to become, not merely such as Moses was,—though even that were much,—but even more than he. Disciples of the Lord, go then to Him, and ask that He Himself may teach you by His word and Spirit how to pray aright! Ye soldiers of the cross, members of the Church militant on earth, kneel daily ere ye gird your weapons on; so shall ye surely be much more than conquerors! Ye who are faithful to your native land and to the Church, pray, even as Moses, the more earnestly the more you see decline around; were but the spirit of true prayer more fully asked for and bestowed, then there would be less reason, but less inclination also, to complain. Ye whom the world misunderstands and wrongs, learn, like the prayerful Moses,—nay, like Jesus in His sufferings,—to bless them that curse you, and to pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. Ye fellow-travellers to the same celestial Canaan! the path is steep, the time remaining may be short, your best strength may be spent; then let us promise to each other and the Lord, that we shall pray more earnestly for one another, and that we shall thus complete what is, alas! still wanting in our mutual

love. Ye children of the dust! a few more moments, and our footmarks here on earth shall disappear, even as Israel's in yonder wilderness. But yet, what matters that, if so be that the story of our inner life, like that of Moses on this earth, can be comprised in words like these, recorded in Heaven's chronicle: 'He was a man of prayer and faith'? As Moses ascended to meet with God, so let us also quickly shake earth's dust from off our wings, and through eternity enjoy the blessedness of which he had refreshing foretaste in those forty days. To none of His own chosen ones shall God say on that holy mount, 'Go, get thee down!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER VI.

### The Festive Time.

‘Then said he, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory.’—Ex. xxxiii. 18.

‘As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.’<sup>1</sup> Thousands of years have now gone by since these words first were heard; and they may possibly have been employed hundreds of times by your lips and mine. But whence is it that they never fail to find a deep response within the inmost sanctuary of a longing soul,—yea, that not only in our own esteem, but that of others too, among the Psalms, that of the panting hart forms the great ornament and crown of all? To such a simple question there is but one answer possible: the want, for which the sacred writer found expression so felicitous, is the deepest need, not only of the Hebrew, or the Christian, but, when we carefully consider it, of every human heart. A Christian philosopher<sup>2</sup> has well said: ‘It is not only fear or terror, bearing us along as on the wings of wind, or in the rattling of the thunderstorm, which has shown man that there is a God; nor has he first read God’s great name inscribed among the stars. Deep, strong as the instinctive influence through which the new-born babe longs for the mother’s breast, which it has not yet known; loud as the cry raised by young ravens for the food, whose taste they never yet have felt; strong, and

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xlii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Schubert.

yet silent, as the attraction for the light, not yet perceived, felt by the scarce developed plant, and the, as yet, unopened eye,—the inward thirsting for the everlasting Source of all that breathes and lives makes itself deeply felt within us all.' Were we to take the wings of dawn, that we might fly unto the utmost bounds of space; did we descend into the depths where every trace of life and joy quite disappear,—even there we should discover that we were alone with God. Nowhere, in all this world which we behold, is there a spot where heart and soul can find a lasting resting-place: 'Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself; therefore our heart is ill at ease in us, until we find our rest in Thee!' The sinner, certainly, well understands the fatal secret how to stifle conscience when it speaks; but the secret of becoming truly happy without God, thanks be to Him, no son of Adam ever has found out. 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:' such is the sentence constantly repeated at the last, as well as at the first, draught taken from the cup of sensual delight; and even when we have enjoyed the Lord's best gifts unto the full, the heart continues poor and empty still, so long as it does not come into personal communion with the Lord Himself, who gives. Nay, more; the man who never felt a strong thirst after God is, most emphatically, dead in soul; and only when he can, with his whole heart, repeat the Psalmist's words, 'I stretch forth my hands unto Thee; my soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land,'<sup>1</sup> then only has a spark of spiritual life been kindled in his heart. We need not be astonished that no one can understand the psalm of the panting hart more fully than the Christian, who has been first conducted by the Lord unto living fountains of waters. He is not satisfied when he has but begun to know the Lord; he seeks to make advance, in that new

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxliiii. 6.

path, from light to light, from strength to strength, from one stage to another in true blessedness. The more he knows about the Infinite, the more he seeks to know ; the more he has enjoyed, at first, of fellowship with Him, the more he longs to taste of it ; the more God condescends to him, the higher does he seek to rise to God. And though, amidst life's toils and pains, this feeling is too frequently asleep, yet he knows, if not days, at least hours and moments, when his confession too was that made by the Psalmist in the words, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God !'<sup>1</sup>

Do you know what it is to long in soul for personal communion with the Lord ? The question is at all times a momentous one ; and yet, perhaps, it never is of such great moment as just in connection with the subject now presented to your minds. Even when you have some understanding of the nature of that want, the page from Moses' history, before us now, has its own dark, mysterious side ; but if that disposition of the soul be something wholly strange, unknown to you, we must despair of leading you to feel, and to appreciate aright, its excellence ; for here, too, as in other instances, the words of the apostle hold quite true, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.'<sup>2</sup> It is no easy thing to speak, in some degree as we would need, about the revelation made to Moses by the Lord ; but who could hear with profit, had he not an eye to look on Moses' heart, or had he not himself a heart by which he could appreciate, at least in some degree, the honour and the great good fortune Moses had ? But if that eye and heart are not things strange to you, you may now hear the words once heard upon Mount Tabor sounding in your ears, when you are, in the spirit, building tabernacles on Mount Sinai,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

—‘Lord, it is good for us to be here.’ *The festive time in Moses’ life* is what you shall this day behold, and celebrate with him.

Does it not sound most strange and enigmatical, to hear about the festive season of the man to whose prayer, made for others, you have only recently been listening? I grant that few have felt more fully by experience than he, the truth of his own words,—that grief and toil abound on earth. Were we allowed to name no more than one of all the human race, to whom, after the Son of man, we could especially apply the words, ‘a man of sorrows,’ we should not hesitate in writing them beneath the statue of Moses. But yet, God is not so unjust, or so unfaithful, as to permit His servant to be tried beyond what he is able to endure, or work incessantly without a rest. Rest and refreshing even Moses now and then enjoyed, not merely for the body, when his daily task was done, or when the Sabbath sun had set,—not only for the soul, as when, with Jethro, he sat down to eat the sacrificial meal,—not merely for the spirit, as when God so often gave him light upon his path, bestowed His comfort, heard him as He did no other man; but also, and especially, in that ever memorable hour, when, in the fullest meaning of the word, he felt on earth a foretaste of the joys of heaven. Even were it but for Moses’ sake alone, we should rejoice over the revelation, the account of which is given at the end of this, and the beginning of the chapter following. But how shall we, besides, make you sufficiently alive to the importance of this revelation for all later times,—yea, for each one of our own selves? One of the grandest pages in the history of the Old Covenant lies open now before our eyes, and we scarce know to which point first, and specially, we shall direct your thoughts. If we look back in thought, we

here perceive a dim past lighted up by rays of heavenly light. If we look round about, we feel ourselves, in many ways, as highly privileged as Moses was,—nay, even more highly privileged. If we look forward, even the dark future is visibly illumined by the brightness of the light that streams from Sinai's height. If we descend into our hearts, we there hear sounds and voices which repeat, confirm, and send forth their replies to God's words from the cloud. But we must stop; for you have long been wishing yet once more, in thought, to place yourself upon the lonely mountain-top, and see the Lord pass by before our eyes. May we but be permitted, with a Moses' heart, to tarry there. Come, and behold in this communication, asked for and obtained by Moses, (1) *the crown of the Old Covenant*, (2) *the mirror of the New*, (3) *the promise and prediction that God's glory, in its fulness, would in future be revealed.*

Lord! our soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken us according to Thy word! Lord! our eye is blinded by reason of sin; open it by Thy grace, that we may behold Thy glory!

## 1.

The festive shouts, that Israel raised in honour of the idol they first made, are silent now; and the avenging sword, at Moses' prayer, is now averted from the nation's head. Only three thousand sinners have endured the righteous punishment deserved by many more,—by nearly all. But how has there been brought about a re-establishment of the relation which obtained between Jehovah and His people, broken through so recklessly by Israel? He has, indeed, engaged to send His angel to conduct them to Canaan; but what is even the guardianship of angels for Moses' heart, that will be satisfied with nothing short of God Him-

self? It was, we know, the special and peculiar privilege bestowed on Israel, above all other nations, that the one true God Himself should dwell with them; and the fairest crown had fallen from their head when the tables of the law had been destroyed. Well may that nation sit in sackcloth and in ashes; yea, and Moses well may pitch the tabernacle of the congregation outside the camp: still, there remains the widest difference between a Judge who does not punish men according to their merits, and a Father who forgives with all his heart! Thus hours and days, and possibly even weeks and months, pass slowly on in sad uncertainty, and yet no outward change is brought about in the condition of affairs. But Moses feels himself, at last, no longer able to restrain his wish for further light: He prays the Lord to show whom He will send, and what He means to do with a nation that is still His own. And when Jehovah gives a distant glimmer of the possibility that his most earnest wish shall be fulfilled; when Moses further states, most positively, that he would prefer to go no farther, than remain without the guidance of the Lord Himself; then, filled with joy and with astonishment, the man of God essays to take one further step, and gives expression to his heart's wish in the prayer, 'Show me now Thy glory.'

Who shall determine what it was that Moses understood, and felt, and wished, when he employed these words? We know, of course, that ere this time he had seen much more of God's glory than all other men. The bush that burned, and yet was not consumed; the Red Sea moved out from its bed; the manna rained down from above; the arid rock changed to a source of living streams! Alone, upon the top of Sinai, and amidst most dreadful signs, he had received the law of God; moreover, with the elders of the Israelites, he had beheld

the pavement which the King of Israel laid for the palace where He sits enthroned,—what seemed transparent sapphire-stone.<sup>1</sup> What more is it that this insatiable, this high-minded servant of the Lord desires? The Lord Himself gives answer to the question, when He (ver. 20) in so many words declares, ‘My face cannot be seen.’ That is to say, Moses has hitherto but heard the voice of Him that spake out of the cloud; now, he beseeches that the veil of mystery shall be removed, and that he may be shown the face of God, beaming with heavenly light. Say not that this request comes from a narrow mind; above all, do not say that it is unbecoming and irreverent. Even Moses, as this prayer of his sufficiently makes plain, had not yet got beyond all sense-conceptions of the Supreme Being; and if the question unintentionally indicates the limitation of his views, we must especially remember that he pleads out of the fulness of a warm and loving heart. I know full well from whose hearts such a prayer could never possibly arise; but I question whether they would find so much of grace as Moses in the sight of God. It was the very multitude of promises which he had just received that gave him all the greater boldness to ask more, and to express a bold desire that long had slumbered in his pious soul. When, through a lengthened period, we have received a multitude of loving tokens from a friend residing in a distant land, many kind letters, many kindly gifts, we can no longer curb the strong desire to see and speak with him. Even so this Moses asks the Lord, who had already shown him so much of His ways and works, that He would now at last reveal to him His proper nature in its full magnificence. Up till this time the angels had been called to mediate between him and the Lord; but now he would approach the Lord directly and immedi-

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxiv. 9, 10.

ately. One aspect of that nature Moses has already looked upon, when he received the law; but he thinks there are still other aspects, hitherto concealed from him, and his spirit cannot rest till he has also looked on these. Do you not think, too, that the man of God would be quite startled at the boldness of his own request, immediately on having uttered it?

Nevertheless, the Holy One of Israel is not wroth, when the child of dust puts forth his hand presumptuously to draw aside the curtain of His dwelling-place. He rather seeks to show (as we must understand the second half of ver. 19) that He is truly gracious unto those to whom He will be gracious, while towards the man to whom He will show mercy He will be truly merciful. It certainly may be impossible to gratify the wish of Moses to the full. What mortal would be able to behold the face of God, and yet not be immediately consumed by the intensity of glory there revealed? Nevertheless, as far as possible, at least the spirit of this pious prayer shall be observed, though Moses shall not find it literally fulfilled. With the full revelation of His kindness (a lovely word, which we would not exchange for any other one), the Lord shall cause His glory to pass by, proclaiming to the listening ear of Moses His all-glorious name. Near Him, upon the holy mount (ver. 21), there is a spot whither the man of God is to betake himself ere morning dawn. When the decisive moment comes, Jehovah, as it were, shall shield the man against Himself, and lay His hand upon His servant's face to cover it. Then, when He has passed by, the hand shall be removed from off his eyes; and what he shall behold will be, not the Invisible Himself, but only the last portion of His royal robe, the mere extremity of His celestial dress: such is what Moses shall behold.

How grand these promises! Can it be possible to find a statement anything more excellent than this,—that God is a Spirit, dwelling in light that cannot be approached, and whom no human eye hath seen, neither can see? Not God's face in itself, but only the last fold seen in His royal mantle,—such is the most, the only thing that He can show to any creature upon whom He will confer the highest privilege! Thus there is pointed out once more, not merely the unlawfulness, but also the absurdity of the idolatry of which the Israelites had just been guilty. But the command to bring with him two new stone tables, upon which a heavenly finger shall once more inscribe the words of the law, reveals, besides, the most delightful prospect. The Lord Himself, by His free grace, seeks to restore the broken covenant, and to reveal Himself towards the mediator of the Old Covenant not merely as the Great Invisible, but as a God in whom compassion flows.

Imagine the emotion of the man of God, and how he must have watched throughout the sleepless night for the expected hour! Must there not have been heard a voice, speaking within his heart, and saying, in the words which he himself addressed to the rebellious Israelites the day before the manna came, 'To-morrow thou shalt see the glory of the Lord'? And let us further picture to ourselves Moses, prepared to meet the Lord his God, before the sun has yet arisen. How different was the ascent from that upon the morning when the law was given! There are no thunders now, no shout of trumpets, nor is there even Joshua to lead; alone, he makes his way up the ascent, while nothing but the sound of his own footsteps, and the beating of his heart, quite audible, breaks in upon the stillness of the scene. At last, with thankful heart, he gains the summit of the mountain he had left, but a few weeks

before, with prayers and sighs ; the cleft made in the rock has now been reached ; nothing here intervenes between him and his God but just the body,—that light covering of dust. Earth has now sunk beneath his feet ; heaven shall disclose itself before his eyes ; he shall behold the glory of the Lord. And now, while he stands there, trembling with sacred awe, and waits and worships, he beholds the cloud of testimony coming from afar ; and there breaks in upon his life a moment, in describing which the pen falls from the hand of every one except Moses himself. Suddenly he feels an unseen hand laid on his dazzled eyes ; and, lovely as the sound of angel-harps, he hears these words proclaimed, amidst the stillness all around, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and to the fourth generation.’<sup>1</sup> And when the heavenly voice has ceased in silence, there is granted him a moment’s view ; and a stream of light that flows towards him from the cloud as it slowly passes by— . . . But nay, we must not think of giving a description here, when Moses scarcely ventured even to cast a single look. With head inclined, he casts himself upon his glowing face, and Horeb becomes, for him who is the confidant of God, a Bethel, a true gate of heaven.

We have refrained from all attempts to give a natural explanation of what here occurred ; but he who takes offence at the miraculous in sacred history will here find plenty of material. Perhaps he may feel most inclined to think of some great striking natural phenomenon,—a purple morning-cloud, for instance, or some other sight,

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7.

whereon a voice from God proclaimed in Moses' heart, *i.e.* whereon Moses *said to himself*, that the Lord is the merciful and gracious One. How utterly opposed such an explanation is, both to the letter and the spirit of this narrative, you certainly need not be told. Why should it have been far too wonderful and great that the living God should make an audible voice proceed from heaven to Moses' ear and heart? In our opinion, all this revelation, both in form and contents, bears indubitable marks of true sublimity, while it is also worthy of our God. Jehovah mostly showed Himself to Israel and to Moses, more especially in later times, simply in the light of His offended justice; here, on the other hand, it is proclaimed that holy love is the grand aim and the centre of the divine nature. On Sinai, at the bush, Moses was taught to view Jehovah as the Infinite; at the giving of the law, as the God of spotless holiness; but here, moreover, as the God of everlasting mercy. This revelation forms the bond by which God joins Himself once more to Israel; and unto Moses, as a compensation for the fact that his most earnest prayer has not been answered to the letter, there is promised the fulfilment of his earlier request,—that the Lord Himself will go with the nation. And let it carefully be noted, that the revelation of the glory of God's nature is, for Moses, here connected with a statement which, although he is a prophet, highly gifted and enlightened, he must but accept in humble faith, even as a little child. Moses desires to see; but God desires, above all things, to make him hear and follow Him. But what he now hears is the grandest revelation ever made by God under the Old Economy; the only scene we can compare with that before us now, *viz.* the revelation granted to Elijah on this very Horeb, only showed that man of God, in sacred symbols, the same truths here audibly proclaimed to Moses by the

voice of God. Truly, there is no wonder, then, that Moses tarries other forty days upon the mountain-top in heavenly ecstasy; and that his countenance beams forth with heavenly glory, when, bearing in his hands two tables made of stone, the pledge of the renewal of God's promises, he leaves the consecrated ground. Even Aaron scarce durst look on him, for, at first sight, he seems less an inhabitant of earth than heaven. But we, who have accompanied him all along in spirit, cannot help exclaiming, when we call to mind the story of the festive hour of all his life, 'Happy Moses, unto whom, at least on one occasion, it was granted, even on this side of the grave, to contemplate to such a large extent the glory of the Lord!'

## 2.

'Happy Moses:' are these words found on your lips too? Then surely you will joy when you remember that the privilege, accorded in those days to him, is equally attainable by every Christian now. Come, give us your attention still, while, in the revelation, viewed already as the crown and glory of the Old Economy, we also let you see the mirror of the blessings of the New. The glory of the Lord is shown us in another way, but with no less of clearness than before. Is this too strong a statement? Only look to the person of the Redeemer, the work of redemption, the guidance of the redeemed; and then see whether you have any ground for feeling envy towards Moses in his privilege.

'Show me Thy glory!' It was more than a mere personal want to which Moses gave expression in this prayer. It was the wish that lived, consciously or unconsciously, within the heart of multitudes, in whose eyes this whole earth, with all its glory, was too poor and small to

satisfy the deepest wish felt by the longing heart. Men felt that God—yes, God Himself—must needs appear on earth, if earth were to become a gate of heaven. ‘Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow at Thy presence!’—such was the strong expression of the feeling in the prophet’s heart.<sup>1</sup> And lo! the heavens did open when the fulness of the time had come: ‘The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father.’<sup>2</sup> Is it not as if the fulfilment of Moses’ wish, now made, had only been deferred, in order that it might be fully gratified when fifteen centuries had passed? ‘Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.’<sup>3</sup> He who is very God was manifested in our human flesh: but what is here shown to Moses, viz. that *God is a Spirit, God is Light, God is Love*,—how plainly may we read this in the gospel, as if written there in heavenly characters, when we look to the revelation of God’s glory in the Son of His love! Ye who, like Philip, will not take instruction that is offered you, why do ye any longer ask, ‘Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us’?<sup>4</sup> Assuredly, he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father; and to the Christian there is given, in the beloved person of his Saviour, a far grander revelation of God’s glory than the works of nature and of providence present. For us also the words still hold, ‘No man shall see me and live.’<sup>5</sup> ‘God is a Spirit;’ the secret here announced to Moses is uttered by our Lord, in three words, to a woman of Samaria. Nevertheless, what may be known concerning God has been made manifest in Christ; and every comparison between the Old and the New Covenants draws John’s words from our lips: ‘No man hath seen God at

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lxiv. 1.<sup>2</sup> John i. 14.<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.<sup>4</sup> John xiv. 8.<sup>5</sup> Ex. xxxiii. 20.

any time : the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'<sup>1</sup> How God's unspotted holiness beams towards you, in Him who well can ask at friend and foe, 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?'<sup>2</sup> who always sees the Father, just because He ever does what is well-pleasing in His eyes ; who prays without ceasing, but in no case for the forgiveness of His own sins ; and who awaits His being glorified, not as a favour, but an undisputed right ! And the love of God :—but where shall I find words with which I may describe the love of Christ, divine in origin and splendour, but a splendour which is tempered by its covering,—a lowly, human form ? Behold Him as He traverses the land, comforting the sorrowful, raising the fallen, strengthening the weak, healing the broken-hearted ones, enduring even the worst because of His great love, while not a single murmur of complaint escapes His lips ; and now, behold that love, which died not when He died, which He has carried with Him to the throne from which He rules the universe, that He might intercede for sinners there ! Well might He ask, as He did once, before performing one of His most splendid miracles, 'Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?'<sup>3</sup> But that glory does not shine forth from His works alone, nor does it merely manifest itself in what He says ; it beams upon us from the splendour seen in His whole mien. And that appearance, too, exhibits as calm majesty as God does when He shows Himself to Moses here : He does not cry, nor raise His voice, nor cause it to be heard in the streets ; but when we look on Him, we feel like Moses when the cloud passed by before his eyes ; surely we see in Him more than the hinder portion of the royal train—we see God's greatness in the face of Him who was God of God

<sup>1</sup> John i. 18.<sup>2</sup> John viii. 46.<sup>3</sup> John xi. 40.

and Light of Light, whereunto no man can approach, but who has yet come near and lived in humble servant-guise. If here the revelation given by God is made to Moses only, it is now, in Christ, bestowed upon the poorest whom the Holy Ghost has taught to see the Father in the Son. If here, through Moses, God reveals His nature to one single people, now the light arises over all the nations that but sat in darkness heretofore ; for here, 'there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.'<sup>1</sup> Oh, hadst thou seen Him, Moses, highly honoured and exalted as thou wert in Israel, how wouldst thou have made haste to bow profoundly at His feet! For us, who are permitted to behold what kings and prophets have not seen, God's special revelation is complete in the appearance of the Christ ; and the voice out of the cloud receives its explanation in the gospel of God's Son.

And how much more impressively that voice sounds when we venture on a second step, and meditate on *God's redeeming work!* What is the sin which, in God's eyes, polluted Israel, compared with the abominable sins which stand against a whole lost world,—against you and me,—before the God of unspotted holiness? We all deserved that God should turn away His friendly countenance from us, as from that people ; and that He should not guide us by an angel, but, instead, give us the portion of the fallen ones. But have ye not known, have ye not heard, hath it not been told you from the beginning, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'?<sup>2</sup> 'God so loved:—in order to appreciate these words aright, one must have stood first on a height like that of Sinai, then

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 11.

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

looked down into a depth like that of our own misery. Here is a God so glorious and high that the greatest of the prophets can hear something, but can scarce see anything of Him, because His majesty fills heaven and earth; a God who is so holy that He visits sin, not merely on the sinner who himself has sinned, but also on his son and his son's son; and who must needs Himself employ extraordinary means to spare His chosen creatures, whom He may even once admit to His immediate presence. If even a Moses cannot look on Him, then how shall Israel dwell in the presence of this devouring fire? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!—a God like this is well-disposed towards such sinners! He, the Holy One, loves sinners, loves them specially, loves them so well that He gives up His Son for them. The Supreme, the Absolute, the ever-blessed One, has thoughts of life and peace towards a little dust and ashes, of whose praise He has no need, and who are in revolt against His government; in Christ He gives them, not another law, as He gave the two stones to Moses, but full pardon, grace, salvation. Nay, do not fancy that you now have seen the highest revelation of God's glory upon Sinai; to behold it in full splendour, you must tarry on a mountain wholly different,—the bloody Golgotha,—but with the spirit of the publican. When you behold that cross, encompassed with thick clouds during the three hours' darkness, then examine Horeb as it now peers through the gloom; and when you have, to some extent, attained an understanding of those grand words, 'who loved me and gave Himself for me,'<sup>1</sup> can you help being overwhelmed by multitudes of thoughts? are not your eyes suffused with tears? must not the lips of the most eloquent be seized

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

with stammering? 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord:' nay, even Sinai's thunders do not proclaim that truth so loudly as the cry that comes from the expiring Son, who feels Himself forsaken by His Father, when, laden with the curse of Horeb, He was made sin for us sinful men. And yet, what is even the assurance of God's pity and His grace that Moses learned, when we compare it with the matchless fact that the Beloved of the Father dies for His worst enemies, and that God in Him not merely shows us heaven opened, but unlocks to us the heaven we forfeited? It is just here especially that we, no less than Moses, fail in finding words with which we can express our thoughts; but this we feel, that, louder far than anywhere besides on earth, the voice out of the cloud is found *re-echoed from the cross*.

Now let us take one other look at the *guidance of the redeemed*, who, like Moses, found favour in the sight of God. Does it need much to show that, in this too, the glory of the Lord is seen almost at every step? 'Merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness:' the experience of even the most debased among us bears strong witness to these words of God; for what would have become of you if the Lord had ever dealt with you according to your sins? But ye who are the Lord's redeemed have an experience that speaks more strongly still; for not merely do ye live by His long-suffering, but ye continue in His favour and in fellowship with Him; and ye learn by experience, like Moses, that He never puts to shame or pours contempt upon the humble prayer of faith. And surely you, too, know full many a spot, as Moses did the crevice in the rock, where you sit gladly down, there to review the way by which the Lord, in His eternal faithfulness, has thus far been conducting you? I hear you say already that the sum of your inquiries is comprised in this: the voice out of

the cloud has been the voice addressed to me through all my life on earth! God's way, indeed, was often dark and deep; and to a creature, in his nothingness, it is a little given to understand God's plan of guidance as to see His face. God's ways were often otherwise; but how frequently, besides, have they seemed higher than our ways; and how often could we afterwards find ground for thankfulness in what, at first, seemed but material for deep and just complaint! And we have found, too, that God's holiness is certainly a thing not to be mocked; it testifies that there are thorns set for our feet, growing beside the roses of sin; wounds in our conscience, too, which our own hands have made! Nevertheless, that love of God, proclaimed so loudly now from heaven:—oh, even though every other voice were hushed, surely each follower of Christ must sing aloud, repeating from the bottom of his heart the words, 'Merciful, gracious, long-suffering!' How well has God dealt with each one of us,—ineffably beyond what we can ask or think! There is no heart without its bitter sore, but neither is there any sore without its heavenly cure. There is no life without its doubts and its unanswered questionings, but neither is there any doubt that does not sometime yield to grateful astonishment. Like Moses, we must often work and strive, but at each turn the Lord surprises us with proofs that He is not forgetting us, but still bears us in mind. And when, as in this case, He gives no answer even to earnest prayers that we have uttered in our thoughtless haste, He frequently bestows, instead, what is far better,—yes, and always just what we can bear, and what we specially require. The God of everlasting mercy ever finds out ways of showing His compassion for us men. The God of boundless patience bears with imperfection in His servants, who are often little better than rebellious enemies at heart. And God's

beneficence:—ye stones of Horeb, even though ye were raised up as altars for thankofferings, ye would be all too few to mark the spots where we should feel constrained to kneel and cry, 'Ebenezer; hitherto hath the Lord helped us!'<sup>1</sup> Of how great moment does this frail existence show itself; how clear becomes the dark life-path, when, with a Moses' eye, we everywhere behold the rays fall from the revelation of God's glory, and, with a Moses' ear, hear from each dark, impenetrable cloud above our path the voice from heaven repeated constantly, 'Merciful, gracious, abundant in goodness!' And yet this is the privilege, not of a single individual, but of millions of redeemed ones; the sum and substance of your history is that of countless generations who preceded you, and multitudes who yet shall live: this revelation of God's holy love is destined to be ever going on, ever becoming clearer, and never adequately praised. What matters it, my fellow Christian, although you do not in the body stand next Moses on Mount Sinai? Is not the voice out of the cloud *sealed by the voice from your heart?*

### 3.

Like Moses on that morn, we have ascended higher by degrees, but still we have not reached the highest point. No wonder, for we also ever tarry here below. But would it not be possible, looking into a mirror such as this, to see there something higher than the earth? Our thoughts speed on, away beyond the past and present, to discover something different and much more beautiful; and the festive time of Moses' life becomes, lastly, to us a *prophecy of the future revelation of God's eternal glory*. When you, like Moses, must depart, you

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. vii. 12.

should not fail in making the acknowledgment that you have seen, at least in some degree, the glory of the Lord. But that something, though we had the power to multiply it even a thousand fold, what is it when compared with the far greater, the entire amount of what believing hearts desire? Our deepest need, our highest blessedness, is, not to hear the voice of God, but to behold the Lord Himself; but that is just the very wish denied us here on earth, even as in Moses' case. Nay, more; we do not even stand, like Moses, on the top; we dwell, like Israel, scattered in tents at the foot of the mount of God's glory. 'We walk by faith, not by sight:' such is the motto of the New as well as of the Old Economy; and it is well for us that this grand principle is never modified. How should we ever be prepared for heaven, if, in this life, the school of faith were now already closed? And what surprise of pleasure could the future bring us, if this day or yesterday beheld each enigma sufficiently explained? 'How very little after all is it that I have seen!' must Moses frequently have said when he looked back upon that morning. And, that almost nothing has been reached must be acknowledged, not by those alone who make a hasty search, but also those who have even specially devoted a long life to the investigation of God's character and things divine. Sit down, ye pensive Christians, in solitude, like the prophet in the quiet cleft of the rock; by the hearing of your ears you hear the voice of God, but 'now mine eye seeth Thee'—nay, these words we can never utter here below without great limitation. We hope for the salvation of the Lord, but how wide the difference between the living hope and the desired enjoyment! We watch for the morning of the future, but it ever glimmers far off in the Orient; the full-orbed sun still hides itself beneath the far horizon of our view. Is our experience not often that of Moses?

We have moments of presentiment, of spiritual intercourse, of (I might almost say) immediate contact between the Eternal Spirit and our own; and at such times a voice comes whispering, 'Thus shalt thou see hereafter.' Yet something always intervenes between this heart of ours and God; He lays a covering hand upon the eyes of His most faithful worshippers, that they may not yet fully see the truth; nevertheless, they make their own conjectures with regard to it, they constantly draw nearer it, and almost seem to grasp it with their hands while they engage in prayer. So is it here; so must it be on earth; but so it will not always be. With God's hand laid upon our eyes, we grope along for days or years in deepest gloom until we reach death's vale, . . . then the Lord passes by before us, while the chilly breath of him who is the King of Terrors blows upon our face. 'Show me now Thy glory:' thus faith entreats with almost faltering lips; and never, God be thanked, did Heaven continue silent at the last prayer breathed on earth. The Lord, as it were, makes all His goodness pass once more before His dying friends, since 'He is truly gracious towards those to whom He is gracious.' He leads them through the gloom as if by His own hand; He plants their feet, like those of Moses, on a stable rock; and draws near as a friend, clothed in the light of an eternal morn. Now He reveals Himself once more, but far more clearly and far better than He here appears, not on an earthly Sinai, but within the heavenly Sion. More closely than at any time before does He approach, while He proclaims His name before us, . . . then He lifts His covering hand from off our eyes, and lo, we see! It is no longer but another view presented in a mirror, through dark speech; it is a sight from face to face; there is not now seen but the hinder portion of the royal train, but the full riches of paternal love; it is not now a sight for

moments merely, as when Moses looked, but for undying ages, for eternity. How shall the words then sound out from the clouds of heaven into the hearts of the redeemed from angel-harps, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth!' Oh, how shall it be then, when every cloud is swept away, and that which was believed in, though in spite of many doubts, shall be made plain in noon-day light: God, only light,—God, everlasting love! Christians! if Moses longed impatiently for the appearance of that morn on Horeb, tell me, does not your soul, too, long vehemently in prayer for that morn when God shall make the full and final revelation of His glory, and—of all His sons?

'And all His children!' These words at once conduct us back from heaven's heights down to the depths of our own heart. Why should the eye, that has so long been pointed upwards, not be now turned inwards with redoubled earnestness? Come, follow me a little longer, while, in closing, we address three questions to your heart and conscience.

The first question is, have you, too, ever yet desired what Moses sought so eagerly? 'How could I do that?' some one perhaps will silently reply. 'Does not this history itself give evidence that this desire was prompted by narrow ideas of the Supreme Being, and that, from the nature of the case, it was of no avail?' Narrow conceptions. Oh, how I could wish, for many of you here, something of those contracted notions,—if, that is, the frame of mind, which is the great consideration here, could not be otherwise attained! We do not ask, of course, whether you have already given as clear expression to those very words, 'Show me Thy glory;' but whether there be really within your heart the want which forms

the ground of the desire,—whether you curb that sense of want instead of letting it have unrestrained expression,—whether, specially, you have already sought and found that way through which the satisfaction of this want may be attained by every one of us. Must I ask other questions still, to raise the blush of shame on many a face? Ah! if each one of you were plainly asked, What is your chief desire? how many, nay, how few, Lord, could lay their hand upon their heart and say, I desire nothing more earnestly than living, personal communion with God! Perhaps, indeed, an evanescent wish for something higher, better, may not be unknown to many here, especially when earthly things bring disappointment, and the future is concealed from sight. Nevertheless, that deep, that dominant, that earnest longing after God which does not rest content till it has found Himself, and *in* Him perfect peace and spiritual life,—are we unjust in fearing that the string here touched upon is out of tune in many a heart, if not indeed quite broken now? But how many eyes there are which have a longing to see everything, except God and the Lord; how many hearts that take delight in this world's glory, but feel not the glory of the gospel; and how many lips that long to drink the stupefying cup of sensual enjoyment, but thirst not for the living streams! Among the ancient Romans, there was often heard the cry raised by the common people, 'Bread and plays!' and with these they were satisfied. But are there no professing Christians quite as content if only earthly bread is gained, and the play of earthly joys is played? And when sometimes—although, of course, we are unwilling to believe this true of every one of you—the soul's necessities assert themselves, and that soul has begun to cry for God, oh, what a constant tendency there is to seek peace where it cannot possibly be found; how every kind of artifice is

tried to smother heart and conscience when they cry ; how frequently, like Israel at the foot of Sinai, we sit down smitten, chastised, and stripped of all that formerly adorned us, but without true penitence, without true longing after God ! Poor man, thus to be ever going through the same old dreary round of useless efforts, cares, and sins (who knows how long all this has been ?), and still not to be wearied with each new beginning ! When shall your eye at last be turned towards that heaven where you now behold but sky and clouds ? And when shall Asaph's testimony ever issue from your lips,—‘ Whom have I in heaven but Thee ; and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides Thee ’ ?<sup>1</sup> Oh that this day's consideration of the majesty, but specially the love of God, may kindle in your soul that sense of need which has so long been slumbering ! What more has the world for you than the desert had for Israel, so long as you remain as far removed from God as they, and feel that you are not a sharer in His friendship ? Even here, as you have heard, the Lord by no means looks upon the guilty as if he were innocent ; what shall it be when once this world, with its attractiveness, has passed away, and you shall be obliged to look on and accept, as Judge, that God whom you have failed to honour as a Father in this present life ? Nay, verily, His love, to which the voice that issued from the cloud gave witness, and which even now still calls on you, is no unholy weakness. Even the glory seen by Moses here is nothing when compared with the fierce ardour which, when God appears, shall cause the heart of the impenitent to quake. Then shall the Lord pass by before you, but not to return once more, making a revelation of His grace ; and if a voice be heard at all, it shall be that of threatening and despair : ‘ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 25.

of the living God.<sup>1</sup> 'Pass by you:—not yet has the Lord passed by for ever from before you, ye apostate children! The compassionate, long-suffering One still cries to you, 'Return unto me, and I will heal your backsliding.' Do not despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance; say from the bottom of your hearts, 'Lo, we are here; we come to Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God!' Go where you found Moses, into the still solitude, there to engage in strict examination of your heart, and pray that the ineffable compassion of the Lord may also be displayed to you. Rest not content until you know that the God upon whose grace you may not only calmly hope, but reckon with most perfect certainty, has now become your God and Father. And inasmuch as we may come unto the Father only through the Son, accept the testimony God has given of His Son; believe in Christ the Lord, that, ere you come to die, you may behold the glory of the Lord!

This brings me to the second question: *have you, too, already seen what Moses saw?* There is no doubt of that, if you have really, by faith, beheld the Christ of God; but, on the other hand, how many are there here at whom the Lord can ask, as once at Philip, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?' Or are there not those who are carried off by a most fatal spirit of the times, and who will not believe what they do not first understand? And yet, a single glance at such a picture as is here presented us is quite enough to show how pitiable is the pride that seeks to penetrate into the hidden things of God, and to apply the measure of our finite understanding to the Infinite. Ye fools, who still display so proud a spirit, when a Moses, feeling giddy, bowed his head, conscious that, even while he was looking on, he had seen almost nothing thoroughly!

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 31.

Are there no others who go constantly astray, finding their compass for life's voyage in their feelings, which are changeable and overstrained, when they should let themselves be guided in the path of simple faith? Yet here the Lord has plainly pointed out to Moses that his faith must not be founded on impression, contemplation, or experience, but, above all, on His own word.—And do we merely meet with individuals so wholly steeped in earthly things that, as it were, they have no organ whatsoever for perceiving higher and eternal things? But wherefore should we wonder any longer that there are so few, comparatively, over whose dust, if they should die to-day, the testimony could be borne, 'They have seen the glory of the Lord'? If you indeed desire that such a witness shall apply at least to you, do not forget that you, like Moses, must especially concern yourself with these three things,—*a clear eye, a pure heart, and constant prayer.* The eye of faith is the organ of the soul, by which we see the glory of the Lord in Christ; and He Himself must open that for us. But even though that eye has been already opened, there are evils that beset it, as some others do the eye of flesh, and against these you cannot watch and guard yourself too carefully. One little speck of dust may cause such floods of tears as to conceal the sun from you; the dust of earth but hurts the eye that would behold the glory of the Lord! Then give good heed lest you be drawn aside and carried off by worldly matters in all their attractiveness; and when abundance of this earth's good things has been bestowed on you, watch the more carefully, lest you should set your heart on them. Stand still, that you may clearly and distinctly see how God in Christ is glorified in your salvation also, through the riches of His grace and faithfulness; and seek the communion of the Holy Ghost,

who gives you the desire and strength through which you may destroy the works of the flesh! Wherefore was Moses much more capable than Israel of seeing the glory of the Lord? Because his heart, even from the first, had been more purged from sin than theirs: 'Blessed are the pure in heart; they, they alone, shall see God!' The impure can and will not see Him as He is in His own nature, ways, and works; the godly man beholds God's glory everywhere,—in nature, in the realm of grace, and in that God who is his faithful Father in Christ. Oh, how much of the carnal still remains in us to be destroyed, in order that the spirit may be truly fit for even the least amount of living fellowship with God! Pray without ceasing; if the eye of faith is to see much, the body's eye must frequently be closed. Think not that such a life of prayer is dull and cheerless: who toiled more and felt more joy than Moses,—but who, too, prayed more than he? Be ever making ready, even as he, to meet your God; and let all your prayers more and more resolve themselves into this one prayer of the text. Ye who are much concerned about your sins, pray, 'Show me Thy glory!' until the Lord shall make you also understand that everything is finished that concerns your good. Ye who are feeble in the fight of faith, repeat each day the prayer, 'Show me Thy glory!' that ye may be strengthened with all power after the inner man. Ye who are bent beneath the weight of this life's cross, let all your various desires rise more and more, to culminate in this as the supreme,—general, yet not indefinite,—that God may show His glory unto you, whether by the removal of the burden which you bear, or its continuance, or, if it must be so, by even increasing it. Along that path of secret prayer, you, too, as long as you remain on this side of the grave, will look upon the hours as days, when you have been

as near unto the Lord, as closely joined with Him, as Moses was; and you will feel as much resigned unto His holy will as Moses was upon that hallowed morn. Have you this day—this day, perhaps, as never hitherto—beheld the glory of the Lord; and has He also met you with His peace? Like Moses, keep that festive season of your inner life in constant memory; and if heaven hears your thanksgiving, let earth enjoy its fruits!

We have still another question as a final one: *have you already done what Moses did?* The sequel of the history informs you of the earlier, but also of the later influence of what was now revealed. Bowing in deepest reverence, and well assured that he has found grace in the sight of God, the mediator of the Old Covenant repeats the prayer, 'Let the Lord, I beseech thee, go among us, for this is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance.'<sup>1</sup> Oh, what a glorious, but also blessed calling, to be like the man of God in this point too! Does it not strike you how, in pleading here for Israel, he does not speak of *their* sins, but of *ours*, and puts himself upon a level with those rebels? When we look at such a revelation of God's holiness and love, even the best and greatest feels his vileness, his unworthiness, his insignificance. If we, like Moses, have indeed beheld the glory of the Lord, we too shall feel that it is not a duty merely, but a deep requirement also of the heart, to walk clothed with the garments of humility. We pray, then, even as he, not merely for ourselves, but also (and do not hesitate to take it as a proof of the reality and strength of your life of faith) for those who still are unacquainted with the glory of the Lord as seen in Christ, because, alas! the god of this world has blinded their minds. We, then, commit the

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxiv. 9.

future unreservedly to Him who has reserved unto Himself the right to choose, but who requires of us that we should follow Him; and finally, we have but this desire,—to be most truly His, and so remain for evermore! But this desire, as we have seen, is not poured out in vain before the face of Him who is eternally the faithful One, even though we have anew proved faithless towards Him. The Covenant, broken by Israel, God, of His own free grace, once more establishes; the guidance which had been disdained by Israel, God mercifully promises now to renew. Why, then, are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith? Faith's pathway may become more steep, our times of blessed contemplation may for us remain as brief and interrupted as before:—how many joyless years was Moses forced to spend under the glimmering, though friendly light shed by this hour! But the Lord has twice proclaimed the selfsame thing: 'Merciful, gracious, long-suffering,'—such is His name and glory still! Even barren deserts and bare mountains, such as Sinai, He turns into scenes for the display of His eternal love; and ye who feel quite solitary, surely you must confess that such a solitude as this of Moses, far from the world, but near to God, is one that well may be endured. Here there remains for us, even as for him, the termination of all sight and knowledge,—faith; the life on earth stands in the same relation to the heavenly life as the Old Testament does to the New. It is a preparation, a foreshadowing, a prophecy of doubtful interpretation; nevertheless, praise be to God, we, even as Moses, have our mountain-heights to which we may ascend, that we may have a wider view; yea, even this very day we might climb one of these! Now, it is true, we must, like him, descend the mount and enter the dark vale; but what is it that we can need, if but we have the Lord with us, and our whole nature, like His shining face, gives evidence

of our close, friendly intercourse with God? Even as He veiled that strange, mysterious lustre from the eyes of Israel, we too must often hide, from an unholy world, the blessed mystery of our own inner life; but when we go into the solitude, and there approach God's throne of grace, how priceless is this privilege, that we believers may, like Moses, cast off every covering, and then find our refreshing in His kindly light! 'We all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' The blaze of light on Moses' face was destined soon to disappear; see that the change which you experience be one that ever makes increase. Your true life still is hid with Christ in God, and it has not yet been revealed what God's redeemed children shall be. But, as I need scarcely say, you know your Saviour's prayer, 'The glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them.' And already do I hear a voice, like that which came to Moses, nearer, clearer every day, 'Be ready against the morrow!'

'Arise,' my soul, 'and shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER VII.

### The Stumbling.

‘And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice.’

—NUM. xx. 11.

IT was a revelation from the Lord fraught with the deepest meaning to which Eliphaz the Temanite gave utterance, when, in his turn, he felt he must begin and give some answer to the passionate complaint of Job in his distress. Thus, in mysterious tones, he tells his story to his friend: ‘A thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, He put no trust in His servants, and His angels He charged with folly; how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth? They are destroyed from morning to evening; they perish for ever, without any regarding it. Doth not their excellency depart with them? They die, but know it not!’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Job iv. 12-21.

A little thought will soon enable you to understand exactly the idea here presented so poetically by the sage from the far East. No creature (he means to say)—not even angels, and much less man—is wholly pure before the eyes of God. There is no child of Adam that can ever hope to be acquitted, if his Maker takes a strict account with him. Even the most exalted virtue shown by one who dwells in the dust is like a garment that is only fit to be cast off, in the eyes of Him who weighs the spirits of men in His just balances. With me, you must admire the beauty of the form employed by Eliphaz to give expression to this thought. But would there really be need for further revelation being made to any one of us, in order to afford immediate assurance of its truth? Alas, even though the voice of God in Holy Writ were silent on this point, our own experience and that of others daily affords most ample ground for constant repetition of the said lament, 'In many things we all offend.'<sup>1</sup> We do not now refer to those who still are wholly carnal, sold to sin. But even when, with Paul, we can testify that we delight in the law of God after the inward man, what one of us must not, like him, confess with deepest shame, 'The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do?''<sup>2</sup> Surely the sigh of that heathen philosopher who seriously doubted whether he had not two souls—the one absolutely inclined to good, the other incorrigibly inclined to evil—finds a response within the hearts of all who ever cast more than a superficial glance into the labyrinth of their own souls. Yes, even the best of us (but is not this the death-blow to that sense of one's own worth and power which swells the bosoms of such multitudes?) affords a standing proof that man, on this side of the grave, never entirely ceases to serve sin. Just as, in even the clearest winter night, the

<sup>1</sup> Jas. iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vii. 19.

moon is never seen so free from clouds but that a single speck must, here or there, reveal itself upon the disc ; so, on a close inspection, we behold, even upon the most beautiful and venerable face, the traces of a spot that witnesses to a connection with the first transgressor. Well mightest thou doubt, O thoughtful Eliphaz, whether a man is righteous in the eyes of God,—one who has been accused before his Judge ! What one of us can dream of standing, when he sees even a Moses fall ?

The stumbling of Moses :—are we the only ones who cast a look of sadness upon this page of his history ? How wide the difference between the festive season, which we scarce could celebrate with him, and the false step we contemplate to-day ! Then, he was crowned before the eyes of all,—now, he is marked as publicly with deep disgrace ; then, he was almost brought within immediate sight of God,—now, he is disinclined to trust God's word ; then, he was honoured with the highest favour of the God who sent him forth,—now, threatened with the revelation of His holy wrath ; then, he seemed superhuman,—now (yes, that proud word must be rejected here), suddenly he has become most vacillating, weak ! Were we to read that the immoveable foundations of Mount Sinai had been changed, we scarce could feel more deep astonishment than now, when—nay, it is no dream—we see the crown reel on the head of the great lawgiver, who, on Mount Sinai, entered the mysterious cloud. We could desire to blot this page entirely from the history of the man of God, or cast a veil over the sad event ; rather would we conduct you to the heights of Nebo, than bid you stand and view the streams at Meribah : but we have had enough. ‘ Whatever any one may be, his name has been already given ; and it is known that *he is a man.*’<sup>1</sup> These words of the wise Preacher

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. vi. 10 [Dutch rendering].

will apply to Moses also ; and it may be well to mark the greatest men of Scripture history in their weak moments, that we may the better see how, on the earth, they were not master-builders, but frail instruments, and that the strength they had was not their own, but God's. If all that has been written formerly was written for our learning, the remark applies emphatically to a history which offers us a ready introduction to the treatment of a subject that is difficult and delicate, yet one of most extreme importance,—the sin of those who fear God, and their guilt before His eyes. If there are any who regard such sins as trivial, we wish to bring them to a more exact consideration of the case ; if there be any who condemn these sins unmercifully, we desire to bring such to a more kindly judgment. It will not be in vain that we have this day stopped at Kadesh, if, impressed more vividly than ever with a sense of our own deep corruption, we can learn to judge ourselves as rigidly as we so frequently judge others, and to be as tolerant towards them as we are, mostly, to ourselves. But I am now anticipating what will naturally find its proper place in the course of my address, while I have not yet told you of the path on which I wish to guide your thoughts to-day. Let Meribah, then, for the present, form the central point for meditation ; and let us, in the first place, speak especially of Moses,—in the second, of ourselves. For two questions you may well expect a satisfactory reply :—

1. *To what conclusion must we come regarding Moses' stumbling ?*

2. *How should we improve the stumbling of Moses ?*

If the answers to these questions do not lead us to such great sublimity of thought as did our pilgrimage to Sinai, they at least will make us search to greater depths in our own hearts. Lord, who can understand his errors ?

Cleanse Thou us, even from secret faults. And let the words of our mouth, with the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

No one who knows our human nature will be ready to allow that we are naturally prone to be too tender in the judgments which we form as to our fellow-men. But, supposing that we had not been precisely told why Moses was denied admission to the Promised Land, and that we had been left to form conjectures as regards the misdemeanour that had merited so hard a punishment, not one of us would have imagined it was such a slip as that of which the sacred documents inform us. Involuntarily we would have bethought ourselves of something extraordinary, something astonishing, something terrible,—of a deep fall like that of David or of Solomon; and if, at last, we were informed of what it actually was that brought him such sad consequences in its train, we would have almost perfect confidence in saying that most people, if not every one, would exclaim, ‘Is that all? I was afraid of something much worse!’ ‘Is that all?’ It is well worth while to give ourselves a definite account of an extremely moderate impression such as this, that we may see which of these two is right,—our feeling that would make out Moses to be almost perfect; or our faith, that needs must bow before God’s judgment. We take the balance in our hand, then, that we may, in justice and in honesty, place on the one side all that can be adduced in Moses’ favour. But neither must we keep back, from the other scale, all that decides and aggravates his guilt, however much of trouble this may cost. It seems, indeed, as if it were not little that could

here be urged on Moses' side. But, on the other hand, there is no lip that loudly testifies against him. Our attention must first be directed to each of these separately, if we are to obtain sufficient light for coming to a judgment as regards his stumbling.

We say, it seems that there is not a little to be pleaded in behalf of Moses here. But say yourselves, what is the nature of the misdemeanour here condemned? When was that misdemeanour committed? and through whom was it occasioned?

What is the character of the misconduct here condemned? To give an answer to that question, we must place ourselves, in thought, back in the fearful-looking wilderness, which has already received the dust of thousands of the rebels into its barren womb, and has just seen Miriam, Moses' sister, laid in her final resting-place. The Israelites once more are brought to the most pressing want; for neither at Kadesh nor in its vicinity can water in sufficient quantity be found for man and beast. The eye turns to the heavens, but not a speck of cloud appears upon the whole expanse,—and to the earth, but there is not a single drop of the refreshment found at Rephidim. Even brackish water, which had been refused at Marah, cannot here be got for gold; and the Jordan, long though men have heard of it, seems still far off. Then out there bursts the storm of loud complaints over the heads of Moses and his brother, who are but regarded as the proper cause of so much misery. Compared with such a life as Israel now leads, the fate of those who have already perished in the various judgments sent by God seems enviable. 'Have we left Egypt only to be overwhelmed beneath a flood of want and misery?' Such a reproach, that issues from the mouths of myriads, pierces the soul of Moses like a dart. Whither shall he betake himself for refuge from this

terrible display of overwhelming force, conscious as he is of his utter helplessness,—whither, but to the only One who is far more than all? With Aaron, he prostrates himself in prayer before the door of the tabernacle; and anew they press for answer to the old and rousing question, 'Is the hand of the Lord shortened?' The tokens of Jehovah's personal presence in the midst of the nation reveal themselves. Moses and Aaron are commanded to take up the well-known rod, to assemble the congregation, and, before them all, to bid the rock at once give forth its water. Such is the wonderful command,—one, too, which would be quite incomprehensible, did we not bear in mind the almighty power of Him who is creation's Lord; who often has concealed the sources of the most refreshing streams behind the granite walls of rocks almost quite inaccessible; and who can, with a single nod, bid hidden waters break forth from their prison-house of stone. But what could be too much for the faith of one like Moses, who has already found so often that the God of Israel is a God that worketh wonders? He raises no objection,—there is not even any indication of astonishment; but Moses forthwith takes the rod that lay before the Lord (ver. 9),—not, as it seems to some expositors, the almond-rod of Aaron that had blossomed, and that had been laid up in the holy place for an everlasting witness, but that rod of God which he received at the commencement of his great life-task, and which was also laid up in the tabernacle of the Lord. What grand and precious memories that staff alone awakes within the heart of him who bears and looks on it! And verily it seems that it has not yet lost its former power. Scarce has the rock been struck with it, ere there run down, in broad and silvery streams, the heaven-sent waters on the thirsty ground; in copious draughts, both man and beast imbibe health,

life, and reinvigorating power, and countless hearts press forward to thank God and Moses. . . . What should keep us too from greeting him, in spirit, as a good and faithful servant of the Lord? A little matter, it is true, has, contrary to Moses' usual, been wanting in the strict performance of the mandatè given. Jehovah has commanded that the rock should be but spoken to; the rod in Moses' hand, we scarce need say, was not intended as an instrument by which to smite, but merely as an emblem of authority which could be seen, so that the people might be roused to look for their relief to this great miracle about to be performed. But Moses, on the contrary, has—yes—*smitten* the rock; but, speak or strike,—smite once, or twice, or even thrice,—does that make an essential difference? Indeed, the nature of the sin—if that harsh word be not here out of place—has nothing which, at least at first sight, could bring even one sleepless night upon the man of God, who was now evidently discomposed.

But, furthermore,—when was that sin committed? Here we must cast a single glance backward and forward, that we may quite understand the cause of Moses' wrath—yea, we might almost say, to see how laudable his anger was. No more than a few pages intervene between this and the thirteenth chapter, where (ver. 26) we are told, as here, that Israel had encamped at Kadesh; but between these points there is an interval at least of seven and thirty years. You know the reason of that lengthened stay of Israel in the desert of Arabia. The Lord had sworn that the rebellious generation who, through foolish fear, would not march to Canaan, should not enjoy His rest. Then there succeeds a time of silence in the history of the wandering nation; the rod that wrought such wonders is at rest; the road becomes, for a tirne, a dwelling-place; that generation must be

rooted out before Jehovah shall again speak more familiarly to the folk of His inheritance. From day to day the grave receives its prey; at last, the time of punishment has reached its end. There still remain but few of those who left the land of Egypt after they had reached their twentieth year; and these may well feel sure they shall not see another year. Joy now to you, O Moses, who, in your innocence, have been condemned so long to wander with this guilty race; the last year of the wandering has dawned! See how, once more, there is a gathering from far and near towards one central point, where, for so many years before, there has resounded the dread sentence from the Lord; a few months more, and then the foot shall tread on Canaan's soil! What else can Moses look for than that the people, after so much chastisement, after so much disgrace and suffering, shall, in some small degree at least, be wiser now? that the younger generation, risen from the dust of those who had been doomed, shall show a vast improvement on the older one? and that, in short, he now will enter and subdue Canaan, leading God's Israel, renewed and born again not merely as regards the flesh, but likewise in their minds? A pleasant dream, but one that lasts no longer than a few brief hours! The people, high and low alike, again plunge shamelessly into wild mutiny: it seems that they have not forgotten anything—above all, they have not learned anything; the old complaint, which he had thought was buried in oblivion, is raised again: 'Why hast thou brought us out of Egypt?' Thus has the thought of Egypt once more risen in those stubborn hearts, and that, too, just when Moses is expecting that, louder than ever, they will seek to be led on into Canaan. Thus even God's heaviest judgment is in vain; and in the first experience of want, the Guide and Saviour through so many years

till now is once more quite forgotten. What is it that Moses possibly can do with such a race? Must not his courage fail, when he but thinks of praying for them any more? Oh, let us not forget the words, 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil!'<sup>1</sup> But who among us—if he saw that grey-haired man, with trembling hands, lift up the wonder-working rod to smite the hard rock twice—would have sufficient courage to reprove him when he cries, in anger unmistakeable, 'Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?'<sup>2</sup> Verily, Israel merits something worse; yet living water is presented them, while Moses is presented with God's cup of wrath!

(2) 'To Moses there is given God's cup of wrath.' But *who occasioned the commission of this misdemeanour*, against which, like a thunderbolt sent from a cloudless sky, the stern condemning sentence falls, 'Ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them'? We must not deify our fellow-men; yet every one must feel constrained to overlook this one transgression, and to think upon those very many points that make us almost look on Moses, like the God who sent him, as beyond all praise from lips defiled by sin. How long a road he has traversed ere he has reached this fatal Kadesh, and how exemplary has he been throughout! How much he has endured already from the fathers of these sulking sons, without becoming wearied or embittered by it all! Israel was often like a rock, but he has never struck *that* rock; for 'the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.'<sup>3</sup> Through all those years, his life was but a daily sacrifice of faith and true obedience,—a daily prayer for his people's good; must, then, all this be held of no account whatever, when the sum of Moses' short-

<sup>1</sup> Isa. v. 20.<sup>2</sup> Num. xx. 10.<sup>3</sup> Num. xii. 3.

coming is reckoned up before the strict, unerring Judge? Even an earthly judge must not pass sentence on a crime viewed in itself, but he must ask about the former life of the accused, to see whether this tells against or for him, and the sentence must be modified accordingly. Shall heaven's great Lawgiver do less,—the God concerning whom, even under the Old Covenant, the well-known words were sung, 'He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust'? And Moses, if he then was wrong, has certainly not sinned designedly, but in his haste; and when is weakness visited with such severity as wantonness? Moses is old; he is already six-score years, save one; he has grown grey in serving Israel's King; may not the old man be forgiven what, in the younger, well deserved the most severe reproof? And Moses will not but grow hard, like Israel, when God reproves him for perversity, but he will make amends—if need be, publicly: is there not, even with God, for such a one as this, full pardon to be had? Then, O Thou Judge of all the earth, at least forgive us this presumptuous question, when we see a sentence such as this passed upon such a man. Is this a confirmation of the words, 'Justice and judgment are the supports of His throne; mercy and truth shall go before His face'?<sup>1</sup>

Yes, here too these words hold quite true; and we have possibly been seeking far too long for some excuse of what even God, with His own finger, points out in His chosen servant as a great defect. We have been hitherto conceding all to Moses that he could, with show of justice, claim; but now we turn the leaf, and give God what is His. And certainly, not less strong is the testimony borne against the man of God. To show the righteousness of our Creator, we have only to take up once more the same three questions, though now to view

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 14.

the subject in the light of faith, in the light of God's unerring word.

First, then, we ask again, What is the nature of the sin God here condemns? And we at once remark, that however insignificant it seems, it exactly answers to the just description which is given of sin by an apostle of the Lord. 'Sin,' says John, 'is unrighteousness,' or, literally, 'lawlessness,'—the disowning of a holy, absolutely inviolable law.<sup>1</sup> At which of you, who feel the greatest sympathy with Moses, must I ask, in the name of the Lord, if Moses' conduct does not manifest the same essential character as the repeated insubordinations of the Israelites? As you are well aware, the Lord desires him to address the rock, but Moses speaks to Israel. God wishes him to speak a word to the inanimate stone, and Moses strikes it twice. God still is willing that the people shall remain as His inheritance, but Moses evidently treats them with ill-will and much offensiveness. And even the writer of the 106th Psalm, although he praises him repeatedly at other times, cannot disguise the fact that Moses' spirit was embittered, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.<sup>2</sup> And to crown all, the Lord Himself elsewhere employs, in reference to this sin, the strong word *rebellion*; <sup>3</sup> and that hard word is surely not too hard. There is no distinction more arbitrary than that which we are wont to make between greater and less sins; between transgressions which we scarcely could forgive ourselves, and others with regard to which we do not much disturb ourselves. In judging thus of moral evil, we must less regard the accidental form and the outward setting of the action, than its inward and essential principle; and very much that we have set down in our list of sins as trivial, is pronounced before the bar of God as worthy of the very highest punish-

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cvi. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Num. xxvii. 14.

ment. Is not one inconsiderate partaking of an apple, in its way, as unimportant as the repeated smiting of a stone? Yet, on the first, there rests the loss of Eden to our father Adam, while the other brought on Moses his exclusion from Canaan; for Moses, who smites when he should speak, rebels as much against the Lord as Israel did when they would not march forward, but preferred to go back to Egypt. The aged Moses, who smites the rock with his wonder-working rod, and the young Moses who slays the Egyptian with the sword, both let themselves be guided by the selfsame principle,—strong self-regard: ‘The minding of the flesh is enmity against God;’<sup>1</sup> and it is quite the same whether it is obeyed in greater or in less degree. Moses cannot say he did not understand the will of God; the oracle spoke unambiguously enough. As little is it true that so much passion was required to bring about what was desired; the experience of the past reads us a lesson wholly different. And least of all can he allege that he was urged to such a course by love, either to God or to His people; for his conscience loudly testifies the contrary. Thus, then, the lawgiver has truly broken the commandments of both tables, in their spirit: but what *caused* this sin? Listen to the judgment of that God who knows the hearts of men unerringly, before whose eyes the deepest folds of Moses’ soul lie plain and open: ‘*Because ye believed me not.*’ Thus God perceived, in Moses’ actions, that which Israel possibly had not once seen,—what none of us would, on our own authority, make bold to charge against the man of God; and the bitter root, from which the fruit of disobedience sprung, was unbelief. Any conclusion we may come to as regards this unbelief, viewed in relation to God’s dealing here, may, in a certain sense, be quite a matter of indifference: it is sufficient

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 7 [Dutch version and English marginal rendering].

for us now to mark that here is unbelief, when God has spoken! Do you know of any sin which throws a greater insult on the Lord Most High than this, by which the poor, frail creature man reproves the God of truth, full in His face, as if He uttered lies? But what was it, if not this very unbelief in God's word, that induced our mother Eve to lend an ear to the first tempter, and made Israel turn their backs upon the Promised Land? Nay, sins of unbelief are, in the eyes of the Great Judge of all, something quite different indeed from trifles that are scarce worth mentioning, especially (and do not fail to mark this) where they are succeeded by such consequences as now actually followed in the train of this false step on Moses' part. Hear what the Lord still further adds: 'Because ye (for Aaron, too, has sinned in silence, just as Moses by his speech) believed me not, to sanctify me (*i.e.* to glorify me) in the eyes of the children of Israel.'—'I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me,'<sup>1</sup> were the words of God to Aaron at a moment which he never could forget; and who had a more special call thus to give glory to the Lord, than Moses and himself? But now, when God is here robbed of His glory in the eyes of a whole nation, that especially regards these leaders . . . do you not think the balance that decides regarding Moses' guilt or innocence begins to veer towards the left?

(2) We ask the second question for the second time: *When was that misdeed done?* We saw that, after tedious years of inactivity, there now has dawned another epoch in God's dealings with the Israelites. The Lord begins once more to turn His face, in favour, to the sons; while from the fathers He had turned away in holy wrath. Jehovah looked upon the people's murmuring

<sup>1</sup> Lev. x. 3.

with remarkable forbearance; when their discontent arose from bodily necessity, God's judgments were considerably lighter than when a haughty, disobedient spirit urged them on to raise the standard of revolt. He wishes to relieve, and give refreshing to the people in their thirst, and Moses is selected to co-operate with Him in all such joy; but mark how, on this very day, a deep discord between God's inclination and the mind of Moses shows itself. God is inclined to grant forgiveness,—Moses inclines to punishment: before, the very opposite seemed rather to prevail. God is forbearing,—Moses, filled with bitterness; God seeks to glorify His grace,—with Moses, self, not God, comes into prominence. 'Must we,'—not, 'must the Lord,'—but, 'must we fetch you water out of this rock?' We see now, in this prophet, strong at other times, the first plain indications of decay and weariness. He has grown tired (and truly, it should not seem strange, for which of us could have sustained a struggle such as his for half the time?) of carrying these stubborn children any longer now. This man, so truly great, has never for an instant hitherto forgotten his own dignity in presence of all Israel; but now, he is no longer master of himself. His sin is, if you please to call it such, not so much a personal as an official one; but it is one which, at a juncture such as this, becomes invested with twofold significance. At this juncture, I repeat; and mark attentively the great importance of this moment. The time for waiting has gone by, the time for action come. Now, there must be no more delay in making ready for the fight, in which the Land of Promise is the prize; now, more than ever, there is needed an unswerving faith, and unconditional obedience to the Lord. All efforts hitherto required are, in a sense, as nothing in comparison with what shall now be asked for; no

slackening of energy can be allowed, but there must rather be much more intensity displayed, if this, the last, and the decisive year of Israel's wandering, is really to be most blessed in result. This slip of Moses, under less important, ordinary circumstances, might have been attended with less evil consequences; but now, just at the very time when more exertion was required than ever previously, Moses, as he had never done before, falls far below his great, high destiny! His heart, which beat at other times so much in sympathy with those for whom he mediates, now plainly shows a coldness towards them; wormwood is on his lips, while water streams forth at his beck; you are inclined yourselves to think this cannot, may not, must not be the case. . . . Alas! is not the scale upon the left beginning to sink deeper down?

3) And now we ask the final question yet once more: *By whom was this misdeed committed?* From all that has been said in Moses' praise, we take back nothing, but we add these words, 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.'<sup>1</sup> Who is to maintain Jehovah's honour in the eyes of Israel, if this Moses does not; and what sentence will hereafter be allowed by the transgressors as quite fair and just, if the Lord makes a particular exception for His favourite with reference to the awful words, that He 'will not justify the wicked'?<sup>2</sup> And now this very man has acted utterly unlike himself, and sunk down to the level of the people, in whose presence, and above whom, he should have always stood at an unattainable height! This doubting Moses,—is it really the same who has already wrought so many miracles of a like nature, with this very rod? This Moses in such violent passion,—is

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. xxiii. 7.

it he who once prayed for the leprous Miriam after her disavowal of his high authority? who, when Eldad and Medad prophesied, asked, 'Grievest thou for my sake?'<sup>1</sup> Is it the same who, in the only other instance besides this on which we find him wroth,—when Korah and Dathan rose,—can ask no more than this, 'Respect not thou their offering; I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them'?'<sup>2</sup> How clearly do we here perceive the working of that very flesh and blood which, nine and seventy years before, sought, through its own inherent strength, to bring deliverance to Israel, and murdered the oppressor, an Egyptian! The old man, even in Moses, has been overcome by the new man,—yes, but he has not yet been quite cast out! Am I mistaken in believing that the wavering began within before this, when, instead of making a bold stand against the mutineers, he silently betook himself unto the tent of witness? Perhaps the mind is more or less affected by the bodily decay; or has his zeal diminished through his resting here and there for eight and thirty years? All this, indeed, is not unnatural, and may be in a way explained. But, on the other hand, who could be less excused than one who saw so much of the glory of the Lord, and who even now would have been able to exert a large amount of beneficial influence, if he had but gone forth in the midst of that younger generation in all his dignity, as one sent from a higher world to show, even without speaking, that the God of their fathers is the living God? But now, instead of that, though everything is done that was to be performed (for the miracle is wrought), yet the desired impression is but weakly made; the revelation of the power of God is not, indeed, quite negatived, but undeniably diminished in its influence; and he who does all this is Moses, one from whom even Israel—not to say God

<sup>1</sup> Num. xi. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Num. xvi. 15.

Himself—might well expect much better things. What sorry conduct in a hoary-headed man, who, in the school of faith and true obedience, far surpassed almost all other men! Do not attempt to palliate the guilt by bringing forward what must rather tend to aggravate it,—namely, the fact that it is Moses to whom all is due. Men may seek to lull themselves and others into peace, by cherishing the pleasant notion that God sees no evil in His chosen ones; the Bible teaches otherwise, for it declares that God will not permit a single stain upon His elect. It is just *their* sins (and this is necessary for their sanctification) that are so often punished, not more lightly, but more heavily than those committed by God's enemies. Other men may, in multitudes of instances, be passed by, it would seem, unpunished; but if Abraham even once tells only half the truth, he will incur great inconvenience. God, in His mercy and long-suffering, may spare and bless atrocious sinners; but when, in an unguarded moment, the man according to His own heart becomes both an adulterer and murderer, death takes away Bathsheba's child, and the sword departs not from his house, because he has caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Crowned slaves of sin may bathe in the streams of luxury, while their power goes on increasing; but when wise Solomon, in later years, becomes so foolish as to let himself be led away by his strange wives into idolatry, his kingdom shall no longer be established, just because he is the Jedidiah, 'the beloved of the Lord.' He who knew the Lord's will and did not perform it, shall be visited, not with less, but double punishment; and it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, on the great day, than for Capernaum, that saw the Saviour's mighty works. When a poor slave of sin continues marching on the road that leads to death, God's angels weep; but when God's children stumble in the narrow

way to heaven, then Satan grins for joy. The grace of God reveals itself when it averts the sword of justice from above the sinner's head, where it had been suspended by a thin, a single thread. But God's unspotted holiness shines out more clearly in the fact, that He is least inclined to tolerate the sins of those whom He has favoured most; for (we repeat) God says, 'I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me.' When we judge Moses, then, above all other men, according to this rule, does not the scale upon the left side—that of guilt—press down upon the earth, while that upon the right swings light and high?

## 2.

However, it is not our business to pass an irrevocable judgment on the man of God, who has long since been raised above the blame of men; but we are rather called to think what real profit we can gain from that which was so palpably his loss. This brings us to the second part of our address, in which we draw the general application from the special case that we have been considering. *The sin of godly people* is the mournful subject which we once more seek to place before your thoughts. We have to guard against misapplication, and be careful as regards the proper use of what is given here.

A threefold misapplication is made of such narratives as that which we have been considering: first, a misapplication made by *unbelief*; next, a misapplication made by *enmity*; and, lastly, a misapplication made by *carnal security and indolence*: permit us to address you a few words on each of these.

Hear what is said by unbelief: 'Fine men of God these are, forsooth, set forth before our eyes in Scripture as the bearers and interpreters of special revelations made

by God! A man who cannot even guide himself must be placed at the head of millions,—and by God Himself! A messenger of God, whose heart is stained with sin, is to behold the Truth without an intervening cloud, and utter it infallibly! Truly, it would appear that, after all, such highly-lauded prophets were but men of like passions with ourselves; yet, on the word of fellow sinners with such failings, am I to accept that which my common sense quite fails to understand? and is a history exhibiting such a large number of soiled pages to receive the honourable title of an extraordinary revelation? And wherefore dost thou think, O unbeliever, that God must needs make holy angels of the men whom He has destined to be prophets or apostles, and that thou shouldst be expected to receive the word of God as God's own word, only when it is brought to thee through lips quite undefiled by sin? Are the treasures of the kingdom lessened in their worth because they are contained in mere earthen vessels? and is the message from above less true because thou seest more of earth's dust than thou wouldst wish, clinging to the feet of the messenger? Nay; rather let me show thee, in those very features of the sacred history, the clearest proof that it is true and credible. 'Moses must have been an impostor:' but would an impostor have been anxious to commit to writing, for all later generations, an account of his own faults and sins? 'The evangelists must have composed cunningly devised fables:' but why, then, did they not keep silence as regards Judas' betrayal of his Lord, Peter's denial, the contention that arose among the twelve for the pre-eminence, in all of which they but expose their weaknesses and sins? Does not such candour form an argument for the reliability of the whole history? When it appears from such accounts that the greatest saints had their defects, is it not abso-

lutely inconceivable that a few fishermen and publicans should have been able to invent the perfect picture of the Son of man, in His unspotted holiness? Did they not rather copy from a living model too sublime for human power to conceive? Truly, it is just scenes like these, which we have been contemplating to-day, that unequivocally proclaim to us that the history of God's revelation, as recorded in the Scriptures, is most *true*. But if the history be true, so also is the revelation itself, for the two are indissolubly conjoined. And if the word of God be thus faithful and true, what fate canst thou expect, thou unbelieving one, for stubbornly refusing to receive the truth?

Hear what is said by *enmity*: 'There are pious folks for you! A shining cloud of witnesses surrounding you as you pursue the Christian race! A Noah, who was guilty of deep drunkenness; a Jacob, who allowed himself to do such tricks as every honest man must feel ashamed of having done; a Moses, who, even in his hoary age, forgets himself, and sins; a Peter, who displays such cowardice before a single servant maid! It is by traits like these alone that we can properly discern who they are that assume the designation of God's friends and chosen ones! They are all hypocrites, who would give out that they are better than the rest of men!' But, do be somewhat less severe, child of this world, in this thy virtuous indignation against the failings of God's servants; try, if only for a moment, to be reasonable, if not also moderate. Didst thou, then, really suppose that sinners, when they are redeemed, cease to be feeble men? and that those who have forsaken the broad road in which you walk, to tread this narrow one, cease to be pilgrims to the city of the Lord, whenever they have made their first false step? Cannot a man be righteous in the eyes of God, even though he may seem far from perfect? and

does he alone, in your esteem, deserve the Christian name to whom no single sin still cleaves? But we can easily perceive that you have no experience—not even a faint idea—of the struggle which so often and so intimately is associated with the life of faith. It is indeed deserving of remark, that the world is, in some instances, all toleration to her own. The youth who leads a dissipated life, of course, is ‘but a youth;’ the man who follows with the multitude in doing evil is a man who ‘understands full well the times in which he lives;’ the hoary-headed man who, with one foot already in the grave, still takes delight in sensual pleasures, is described as ‘an exceedingly agreeable man, even in old age:’ the world has never been afraid of any sinful deed, but merely for the name and the disgrace attached to it. But when a man who is not of the world but thinks about the hundredth part of what they do in all their shamelessness, then see how every finger is directed to that single spot on that one face; and mark how little tenderness is shown by those who, at all other times, allege, almost to weariness, that true religion but consists in charity and toleration. Is it not as if one slip, made by a Christian, gives the world a right to plunge into a thousand mad excesses, and to finish off by casting one more stone against the brother who has made the slip? Is it not as if Job were no longer to be looked on as the pattern of patience under suffering, because he, on one instance, cursed his day; as if Paul were now less at liberty to call himself a follower of Christ, because he once exclaimed in bitterness, ‘God shall smite thee, thou whited wall;’<sup>1</sup> as if Moses no more merited the admiration of the world, because this Meribah became the rock on which his faith and his obedience suffered shipwreck? Nay; God may condemn Moses, but Israel must stand

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxiii. 3.

dumb before him ; the Lord may punish those who are His own, but this the world may never do,—the world, which only sees the weakness and the stumblings, not the tears of repentance,—the world, that understands as little of the Christian as of Christ Himself ! And if, in spite of this, she still in arrogance assumes the place and functions of a judge, and sets down all who differ from her as mere hypocrites, simply because they have not yet attained perfection, we must bear up under it. But mark what we should answer : rather a ‘ hypocrite,’ like Moses, than a rebel, such as Israel ; rather a stumbler on the narrow way, than one who firmly treads the broad way ; rather despised by you, than idolized when, with yourselves, we bow before the vain god of this present world ! At every deviation from the path of rectitude we may, perhaps, fall deeply into guilt ; but you shall hear the prophet’s words again addressed to you, ‘ Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ! For, when I fall, I shall rise again ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him ; but He shall plead my cause, and execute judgment for me. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her.’<sup>1</sup>

‘ When I fall, I shall rise again.’ Here we have reached the confines of the third misapplication of the subject we have been considering. Hear now how, in its turn, *carnal security and sloth* lifts up its voice : ‘ Then, it would seem, from Moses’ case, perfection never can be reached on this side of the grave ; why should I seek it any longer here ? The unbelief to which even such an highly privileged one as Moses fell away shall certainly not be attributed to me ; neither need I disturb myself about a sin like that from which even David was

<sup>1</sup> Mic. vii. 8-10.

not free. If I have fallen like these men, surely I shall rise up again like them ; God's people, certainly, may fall, but they cannot fall away for ever ; the flesh, correctly speaking, does not sin, provided that the spirit is turned to God. It is even not a good thing to be speaking too much of sanctification,—some of the old leaven of self-righteousness so readily insinuates itself beneath all this ; and God alone, of course, must have the honour of preserving those who are His own, that what is written may hold true, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."<sup>1</sup> Enough ! If Satan, transformed into an angel of light, were himself this moment to appear before our eyes, could he address us with more power to deceive ? How much more sad becomes the slip which Moses made, when it not only costs himself incalculable evil, but, even after all these ages past, still offers any one fig-leaves with which to hide his wretched nakedness ! Well might Paul give unfeigned expression to his detestation of those persons, who declare they will go on in sin that grace may more abound, and who thus bring down Christ Himself to be the minister of sin ! The fiercest enemies of Jesus cannot do such damage to His cause as friends like these ; and no sevenfold woe is too great punishment for those who thus deceive themselves with false reflections, and would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. But is there not a voice which, from the streams at Meribah, proclaims to you that God is light in which there is no darkness at all ; that the soul which has sinned shall die ; that if even the righteous man forsakes his righteousness, it is impossible that he can live ? And if Israel was the apple of God's eye, and Moses like the white spot there— if, further, God designed to make that man a model of His own pure righteousness, do you imagine He will

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 16.

spare you, who appeal to that exemplar as a reason why you may defile a life of far less faithfulness with far greater guilt? It is, indeed, quite true that God's own people cannot know defection from the Covenant of Grace; but it is impossible that those who *dare* to turn aside can truly be God's own. We grant that Christians, no less than the unregenerate, still sin; but it by no means follows that the sins of both are viewed alike. There are some sins which it is morally impossible that the true servant of the Lord can do: could Moses utter hard words towards Israel without cursing the Lord Himself thereby? You are not yet a genuine disciple of the best of Masters, if—I will not say your transient wish,—but, your prevailing choice and heart's desire be not to live, not merely in accordance with some, but according to all the commandments of God. Although sin ever lives in you (but surely to your own deep grief?), the life in sin is not therefore a lawful course for you; and though the flesh lusts constantly against the spirit, if the spirit does not on the other hand, strive against the flesh, and ever gain more power over it, you certainly may have a name to live, but you are spiritually dead. The writ of pardon for the greatest sinner has been signed in Jesus' blood, and is presented in the gospel; but licence to commit the smallest sin is what the thrice Holy One can never give! And if, in spite of this, you still desire such licence, all unlawful though it be, and point even to a fallen Moses in support of your demand, not merely Moses will accuse you, but that Christ whose name, through you, has been blasphemed, and who, on that great day, shall say to you, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity!'

Oh, dreadful thought! Do you indeed wish to escape that sentence, so much heavier than that which fell on Moses? Then look once more into the mirror which

the text holds up to you. The proper application which we must make of this portion of God's word admits of being briefly pointed out.

First of all, we may well be *deeply humbled* on reviewing all that we have been considering. Here is a man, so great and so highly gifted that, even after many ages have elapsed, we still grow giddy when we look upon the picture of his greatness. A Moses!—never take that name into your mouth except with sacred reverence, nor, on the other hand, without deep, heartfelt pity; for he also slipped and fell! Oh, what is human virtue at the best, and what are the noblest intentions, even of a heart that has been sanctified from birth? Here is the fruit of nine and thirty years, all passed in toil and conflict, spent in one fatal hour; and the sentence passed at Sinai upon those who disobey the law of God, is unexpectedly incurred by the very man who has delivered it to Israel! To fall and rise again, as has been truly said, and anew to fall and rise once more, is but the sum of each day's entries in the record of our conduct here. And how the blush of shame spreads on our brow, when we compare the special case in which we find that he gave way, with our own attitude and disposition at such times! Truly, good Moses, they are few and far between that could be bold enough to measure out your guilt as long and broad as possible; for which of us could dare boast that our stumbling, like your own, would be comparatively slight and rare, and happen only late in life? We have been looking at his history; but when we now peruse the record of our own, are we the only ones who bear a multitude of traces of the same perversity which only once disfigured him? Ah, let the Lord but bring our faith and our obedience to one special test, and then see for yourselves how, in so many instances, we merit the reproof which brings

us shame: 'Ye believed me not, neither sanctified my name!' Even though the fruits and branches of the poison-plant of unbelief are all removed, how deeply are its roots still sunk within the consecrated heart; and how many days there are, in all our lives, on which the best of us, even as Belshazzar, well may have the sentence passed on us, 'The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified!' <sup>1</sup> Why are we so earnest in upholding our own honour, when we see how Moses was so easily enraged because the Israelites did not give honour to the Lord? And when we think we have been wronged, in some way, by our fellow-men, what one of us would not give utterance to far more harsh and bitter words than the most violent that are recorded here to the dishonour of this meek and gentle soul? Or if, like Aaron, we keep silence, how much passes through our heart that proves our guilt before the eye of the Omniscient! And how many points there are upon our path of faith where there may well be raised against us still more loud complaints than those here made against these two! Nay, more, what is a Moses, who on only one occasion hallows not the name of God, compared with a whole multitude of Christians, the best of whom must ever bow his head at the rebuke of One far greater than this prophet, 'O ye of little faith, why did ye doubt?' Truly, if any man has this day, in his heart, complained of Moses, much more reason have we to complain of you, if ye depart from Meribah without the prayer, uttered from the bottom of your heart, 'Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no living man be justified.' <sup>2</sup>

If your heart is disposed to utter such a prayer, you will be glad when, to the foregoing remarks upon humility,

<sup>1</sup> Dan. v. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxliii. 2.

we add some words of *earnest warning*. And whom should this more concern than you, who never yet have been in a position to commit a sin like that of Moses, just because you have not yet been in like circumstances? Of course, the stumbling about which we have been speaking presupposes that the stumbler has already turned to the good way; and we can speak of weak faith, such as we perceive in Moses, only in the case of those in whom the work of faith already has begun. Oh, sinner, sinner, that will be a dreadful moment, when the same Judge, whom you now see passing so severe a sentence for one perverse deed of His own friend, shall one day set forth all the secret sins committed by His enemies, before His face, and cast you from His presence, because ye have not believed, neither hallowed His name! 'If'—we may well repeat to-day with increased emphasis—'if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? And if judgment begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?'<sup>1</sup> Would that this question, in all its importance, roused you thoroughly, and the thought that you have naught with which you can appear before a holy God like this made you to feel the need of grace, and being reconciled to Him! For you, too, if you truly thirst for it, there has been opened in the gospel an abundance of refreshing streams; and deep though your unworthiness may be, the God who bore with Israel in their murmurings will also still spare you, refresh you, gladden you. When that strong rock, His word, has but been touched by the strong staff of faith, the living water comes to you in copious streams: 'Ho, all ye that thirst, come ye to the waters!' God has brought you here, into the wilderness of life, not that

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

you should die, but that you should live; the way of peace and rest lies — not behind, away towards the Egypt of your sins—but forward, towards the celestial Canaan, which has been opened up for you, as well as others, through God's grace. But if you wish to march along that way better than Israel did by Moses' side, and to be led by the great Guide of all, then harden not your heart against the voice that calls to you so loudly from this most pathetic incident found in his history. 'See that ye walk circumspectly;'<sup>1</sup> and again, 'Be not high-minded, but fear, for thou standest by faith.'<sup>2</sup> It is but once that we see Moses fail; oh, ye who know so well the weak side of that heart which is so easily misled, watch and pray earnestly, that this 'but once' may not be realized in your experience! We scarcely can forbear exclaiming here, 'How sad!' Oh, ye who have received much from your God, and have done something, or, perhaps, even much in your Lord's cause, watch carefully for your own souls, that there may never come a moment when it shall be said of you, 'How sad!' One dead fly can make the most precious ointment of the apothecary stink; one bosom-sin, that has not been resisted, may destroy all rest and peace within your heart, and thoroughly eradicate all virtue from your life! Say not that you are far too old and wise to fall into a snare; for even old age, no less than youth, has its peculiar dangers: you perceive how Moses failed in his old age, after enduring the severest tests. Still less say that you have as little power as he to keep yourself at all times under strict command: it would be sad indeed if this your weakness has become so terrible a power! But, least of all must you affirm that you shall venture but one step upon the path of unbelief and wilfulness: has Moses not yet shown to what a first, a single step may

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xi. 20.

lead? Christians! something more than an earthly Canaan is at stake; it is an eternal inheritance that may be lost, if we neglect to watch and pray. He that endureth to the end—he, and he only—may hope to be saved!

But, to conclude, if you require a few words of *direction*, to match with those of warning and humiliation given already, lay these well to heart. Go, when life's combat rises, to the place where you saw Moses and his brother Aaron go, the quiet house of prayer; but reckon not too much upon the frame of mind that may be wrought or strengthened in you there: it was a few steps only from that place where Moses slipped. Let his history especially impress on you the absolute necessity of cherishing and strengthening a life of faith; and never say, 'Lord, I believe,' without praying from the bottom of your heart, 'Help mine unbelief!' Strengthen your faith by constant meditation on the way in which the Lord, till now, has dealt with you: would Moses not have done far better than he did at Meribah, if he, at this time, had bethought himself of Rephidim? Let not your staff of faith remain too long unused, nor grumble when you find each morning that the combat is renewed; you see, in Moses' case, that too long rest rarely brings real benefit. Beware of the first rise of bitterness and passion in your heart, and ponder well the wise man's words, 'He that ruleth his spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city.'<sup>1</sup> But be not less careful to avoid provoking others unto wrath and sin. To-day we have been speaking but of Moses' sin; but do you think that Israel, who made him sin, can be considered innocent? 'Brethren,' we say to you, with Paul, 'if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xvi. 32.

tempted.' Although the world at once rejoices when it sees one single stain upon the Christian,—a single speck of rust upon the highly polished steel,—seek rather to be guided by a charitable spirit, which 'rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' And even though your love be as imperfect as the faith and piety of Moses, still, my fellow Christians, raise your heads aloft and view the heavenly Canaan, whose gates will not be shut against you for your daily stumbling, if you but confess your falls each day, before the Lord, in all sincerity of heart. Within God's heavenly city, stumbling is a thing unknown; and sin has been for ever banished from the living waters that stream out from the throne of the Lamb. Blest is the man who is admitted to that holy place, and on whose priestly robe no stain thereafter falls! 'Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Retrospect of Life.

#### A PRAYER OF MOSES, THE MAN OF GOD.

‘Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction ; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years are in Thy sight but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch by night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood ; they are as a sleep : in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up ; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. For we are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath ; we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten ; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow : for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of Thine anger ? even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Return, O Lord,—how long ? and let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O satisfy us early with Thy mercy ; that we may be glad and rejoice all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the days wherein we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us : and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it.’—Ps. xc.

IN the late evening of his life, the highly-privileged Jacob sees a brilliant distinction prepared for him. Leaning upon the arm of Joseph, his beloved son, he is admitted to the court of Egypt, and into Pharaoh’s presence. There, face to face, are found the two crowned heads,

each venerable in his way,—Jacob, on whose head rests the silver crown of hoary age, while Pharaoh wears the shining crown of royalty. Struck with the whole appearance of the aged patriarch, the king asks, in a kindly way, how many years he has already seen. Who would not think, that if, in answer to the question, Jacob were to state something besides the number asked, he would express his gratitude and his delight? His highest wish, as we all know, has been attained, his deepest sorrow healed: the past, with its disasters, is forgotten now; the present shines more clearly over him; the future throws on him her kindest smile. Cannot the patriarch speak of his sixscore years and ten, and yet refrain from adding these sad words, ‘Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage’?<sup>1</sup>

‘Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage.’ Surely you do not charge the man who spoke thus with exaggeration, or ascribe his gloominess to melancholy? Let it be observed that the confession of Jacob is the oldest of its kind mentioned in Scripture; why must we at once add, on the back of this, that it gives excellent expression to the sum and substance of by far the most, or rather the whole of our experience in life? We need not wonder that, in these sacred pages, there is ever the same view given, and the same estimate made, of human life; and it is precisely on the lips of the most prominent men that all this recurs. Think of Abraham, who, in presence of the children of Heth, calls himself a stranger in Canaan; in what sense he meant this has been explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> Think, too, of Job’s touching lamentation, so well known, ‘Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble; he

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xlvii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxiii. 4; cf. Heb. xi. 13-16.

cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down ; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not !'<sup>1</sup> Think of David also, who, when he was at the full height of his royal splendour, uttered this sorrowful testimony, 'We are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers ; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.'<sup>2</sup> But why need we cite any other names ? You have, ere this, been sometimes meditating upon Moses' prayer ; for what else is that prayer in the wilderness but an audible echo of the striking confession uttered by Jacob in Egypt ?

'A prayer of Moses, the man of God,' as the compilers of the sacred collection of Psalms have most appropriately called him, though he would never have assumed the title himself : no one, of course, will be surprised that we stand for a little at this point in the series of contemplations. You must already have observed, that everything which really deserves our notice in the history of this servant of the Lord, is confined to a very few years,—at most, five or six,—and these in different periods of his life. You know what happened in his first year, and his fortieth ; what took place in his eightieth year, and that immediately succeeding it ; and, lastly, what occurred when he had lived for six-score years, and in the last few months preceding that ; but all besides is almost quite unknown. There are two gaps, particularly large, found in this history,—the space of nearly forty years in Midian, and the eight and thirty years spent in the wilderness. Regarding both of these two periods, we know next to nothing ; but, from the last of them, there is at least one voice that reaches us. We mean, of course, the oldest Psalm, as it is rightly termed. We know, indeed, that not a few expositors feel hesitation in considering this poem as a genuine

<sup>1</sup> Job xiv. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

production of the famous man of God ; and we are far from saying their objections are but trivial. Nevertheless, on taking everything into consideration, we believe that the internal proofs of the credibility of the title, which mentions Moses as the author, are stronger and more conclusive than those in favour of any other opinion. It cannot appear strange to any one of us that Moses was a poet : all great minds have passed through their poetic period ; and his latest Psalm, Deut. xxxii., tends, we may say, even more than this, to prove how high his poetic faculty could soar, even at the close of life. In this poetic prayer it is as impossible to mistake the earnest spirit of the lawgiver as the faithful spirit of the mediator ; and though there are particular expressions here and there which would be quite as suitable for other lips, and equally appropriate to other circumstances, yet the whole poem, which is quite inimitable, and in which there is a touching interchange of complaint and questioning, could, we believe, have arisen only in a heart like that of Moses, and in such a period as has been named. Here, as it were, we breathe the atmosphere of the desert ; we feel, with the sinner, the still remaining bitterness found in the deadly fruits of sin ; but we feel, too, the foretaste of God's mercy, shown anew to Israel ; we feel the proofs in favour of the justice of the view here given, in that countless host of guilty ones, 'whose carcasses fell in the wilderness.' But enough ; this Psalm, which some one, not improperly, has called 'a Psalm for every age,' and of which another testified that it is 'a wonderful, a striking poem, dating from the oldest part of Israel's history, pervaded by a deep and startling earnestness, stately and slow, but free from everything that savours of despair,'<sup>1</sup>—this is a Psalm which well might bear the

<sup>1</sup> Herder.

name of Moses, and engage us to a special study of the whole.

Before we enter further into Moses' history during the last year of his life, he offers us an unexpected opportunity of going back a little, and of filling up, as much as possible, the blank already indicated in his history by means of such a retrospect. What lies before us here is nothing less than the expression of a good old man's experience,—one who was raised to an exalted station, and possesses high intelligence; who has both seen and been engaged in much; who has made large observations and thought deeply; who has suffered much, and has, especially, been much engaged in prayer: thus he is one to whom we well may give more heed than to many others, when he once more introduces, in the Psalm, the oft-repeated question, *What is life?* And though his words may well arouse our interest at any time, they do so more particularly now, when we have once more entered on the last month of the year, and may look on Nature's winter-sleep as emblematical of death.<sup>1</sup> Our Christmas and old year's festivities will certainly not bring us less of joy, when we allow ourselves to be pervaded by the spirit here expressed in this grand Psalm; and even for this prayer alone, Moses would well deserve to be called the teacher and the guide of even the latest generations. But you may think, perhaps, that such praise is extravagant, and deem—at least upon a first slight look—that this review of life is pretty common-place? If so, then you deceive yourself: the retrospect here taken, on the contrary, is most remarkable. Or, perhaps, you think it very one-sided? Here you are wrong once more, for the description is most true. But still, you urge again, it is disheartening and gloomy in its tone. Once more you are mistaken;

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was delivered Dec. 5, 1858.

for, when rightly viewed, it fully satisfies the cravings of the soul. Or, lastly, do you think it is of small importance, and scarce worth the pains bestowed on the development of thought in it? This fourth mistake is worse by far than all the other three; for it is evident that we have here a school, whose heavenly teachings cannot be neglected with impunity by any one of us. Come, listen to the voice that calls to you out from the rocks of Araby! We have already pointed out to you the course we shall pursue in this address. The retrospect which Moses takes of life we shall successively present to you as one that is *remarkable*, then *faithfully correct*, then *satisfactory*, and, lastly, *profitable* in the lessons it presents. Shall we accomplish this task also with complete success? Shall it be crowned with blessing? That lies in the power of Him in whose hands is the breath of him that speaks, and who can make a way into the hearers' hearts. Eternal Father, who dost still preserve us by Thy grace, grant that, when Thou dost speak to us in love, our hearts may not be hardened into unbelief! Amen.

## 1.

Does it not seem, at first, as if we would require to gather everything together if we wished to make the view of life, presented in this Psalm, as *remarkable* as possible in our esteem? Even the *occasion* which, most probably, called forth the poem, proves its right to such a designation. Nay; Moses never thought, when he beheld the spies return laden with Eshcol's grapes, that there would still be such a distance between the fruit and the lips. But Israel is pusillanimous enough to credit the report of the weak-hearted ten, than what is told them by the God of truth Himself. They wilfully

refuse to have the Promised Land, and now they feel the bitterness of what was threatened them. Through Moses' prayer, indeed, the sudden sentence threatening them all with death is turned aside. But the dread oath, that none above the age of twenty years, who had left Egypt, should enter and enjoy the promised rest, soon shows its fearful influence. Now falls the curtain on the scene of history, for there is a cessation, dissolution, destruction; in short, now comes a rest, but not a Sabbath rest; it is the rest found in the grave. The people scatter here and there through the wide wilderness, ever in search of some convenient place where they may rest and tend their flocks. God's government is not destroyed, but for a time suspended; for, to that generation, God has nothing more to say. The heavens are silent, and the earth is sad; the grave makes wide its mouth at every step: who knows the various forms in which death haunts the living, doomed to be its certain prey? But who, again, can fathom what passed through the mind of Moses in those years, so weary and monotonous? The sentence has not yet been passed upon himself; neither his name nor Aaron's has been singled out; yet, on whole families, sentence of death is being carried out under his eyes. Of all the elders whom he had convened on his return from Midian, that he might place on them his burden in the government of Israel,—of all the seventy who, with him and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, beheld the glory of the Lord,<sup>1</sup>—he sees the final traces disappear. The death-knell sounds for one here, and another there, throughout the wilderness; and every of death-gasp, drawn through tears, forms the prediction of another to succeed. How different is desert-life to Moses now from what it was, when, in oblivion, he tended Jethro's flocks! Here is material for quite another song

<sup>1</sup> Ex. iv. 29, xxiv. 9, 10.

than what he sang at the Red Sea.<sup>1</sup> Then, the Egyptians were swallowed up, and in a watery grave; now, Israel's sons find their graves in the wilderness: O Thou who art our fathers' God, why so much guilt and misery? But the great mass of Israelites display no such concern,—ask nothing at the Lord; rather, as Amos intimates, they worship idols and the hosts of heaven.<sup>2</sup> But Moses, God be praised, knows where to find a better refuge than his lonely tent could give. Morning and evening come and go each day for thirty years, and during that long period we scarcely hear his voice. He may not ask that the great sentence be annulled; he cannot hope that the allotted time of punishment may be cut short. But now (see at ver. 15) the years of wrath begin to hasten to a close; and as the borders of the Promised Land appear in view, so do the boundaries of Israel's misery; the pain, indeed, of the inflicted wounds is still felt in full force, but now the prospect of relief is brightening, while even the heart weighed down with years feels young again when it obtains a look of Canaan, now no longer closed. The prayer of Moses issues in poetic form; will ye not listen—nay, will ye not also pray?

But, doubtless, even when you were considering the remarkable occasion that called forth the Psalm, your attention was attracted by the elegance of *form* in which, as you perceive, Moses has cast the view he takes of human life. It well deserves remark, that what we meet with here is, life viewed by the hoary man of God *in prayerful frame*; for, if it be correct that we are never nearer to the truth than just when we view earthly in the light of heavenly things, this very fact affords us a presumption favouring the justice of the view he takes. We wish we could convey to you something approach-

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Amos v. 25, 26.

ing to an adequate conception of the force and beauty of his Psalm. You will at once perceive, that the spirit of the writer does not merely rise to the Invisible, but turns, as far as possible, back to the past. There comes before his fancy's eye the time—so finely portrayed in his own account of the Creation—when the mountains rose, and the valleys sank into the places marked for them by the Creator's word. He looks, in thought, on those colossal piles as they first reared their stately forms out from the bed of mist and cloud ; he sees the whole earth clothed in bridal dress on the first morning of primeval spring ; he looks upon the universe, existing long before, but now brought into full, clear view when there goes forth a single intimation from Omnipotence. But in the long eternity before that moment, when the morning stars sang cheerfully, and all God's children shouted loud for joy, he sees the throne of the Eternal, who had no beginning, and shall live when all that perishes has gone. Him he addresses as a 'refuge' (ver. 1)<sup>1</sup>—properly, a 'place of refuge'—'from generation to generation,' wherein God's own peculiar people see a sure, safe hiding-place prepared for them. And then, this Being, who knew no beginning, He contrasts with man in all his nothingness ; while, with a richness and a power found for the most part but in poets less advanced in years, he piles up a huge mass of striking images. The language he derives now from surrounding nature, now from the history of recent years. We can but give the merest hints ; attend, with book in hand, while we present a few of these. Mark what a striking contrast is at once set forth (ver. 3) between the bitter fate imposed by God on men,—to return to the dust,—and the tender but decided words placed on His lips. 'Return, ye children of men !' It is not the return of the spirit to God who

<sup>1</sup> Such is the rendering of the Dutch version.—TR.

gave it, nor yet is it the ceaseless change of human generations, but simply the return of the dust to the earth that is referred to here. He who sends forth the mandate is Himself supremely raised above the influence of time, so that the longest period is, in His eyes, of quite as little moment as the briefest interval. 'A thousand years are in Thy sight'—not 'like to-day,' which sometimes seems as if it would not end—but 'as yesterday when it is past,'—in which case it seems always short and fleeting,—'and as a watch in the night.' The watch referred to is the night-watch then kept in the desert, and extending over three or four hours. The life of a Methuselah is thus, in God's eyes, of as little moment in its length as that of any insect in our eyes, which enters life at morning-tide to die at even. The poet sees whole generations carried off, sometimes at once, 'as with a flood' (ver. 5): is he not thinking of the Deluge, or perhaps the scene at the Red Sea? And they who are thus carried off will scarcely notice it themselves; for, as he puts it touchingly, 'they are like a sleep.' A state of semi-consciousness, in which one scarcely marks the flight of time,—of which, too, on awakening, one scarcely can remember anything,—such seems their life. The sleeper, just awake, goes forth without his tent at early morn; he sees the grass around unfold its leaves; alas! its flowers, so fragrant and so blooming, but proclaim anew the fleeting character of everything! 'In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth' (ver. 6). It does not need the deadly simoom of the desert to blow over every herb; the sun at noonday scorches what the dew at morn had watered and refreshed; at even, no trace can be discovered of what shone with brilliance in the morning light. And all this is the just reward of stubbornness,—the punishment, not

merely of acknowledged sins, but also secret sins, which Moses mentions here with no less emphasis than David in another place.<sup>1</sup> The joyless days of the condemned pass on incessantly; God's judgment is unchangeable. 'We spend our years,' sighs Moses (ver. 9), 'as a thought'—a single breath. The breath itself that, sometimes visibly, at other times invisibly, escapes our lips, is not more fleeting than the life to which it is so indispensable. Already, Moses makes considerable shortening in human life. Though he himself and a few others seem to form exceptions to a rule which ever shows itself more general, the strongest see no more than seventy, or at the utmost eighty years; 'but yet the best of those years,' of which they boast and show themselves so vain, 'is trouble and sorrow.' Most people drag along a weary life, as if it were a heavy chain; nevertheless, the chain soon seems as frail and brittle as a thread; 'it is soon cut off, and we fly away' more swiftly than a bird. Surely a thought like this should influence even the most careless to repentance; and yet, how few there are that ever reach this end God has in view when He chastises us! 'Who knows,' the poet asks in deep complaint,—who has a right and lively apprehension of 'the greatness of Thine anger and Thy wrath when Thou art to be feared?' Therefore he prays the more earnestly for himself and all those of a better mind, that they may rightly learn at least to 'count the many days' already past, and the few which yet remain, 'that they may apply their heart to wisdom.' And Moses, in his latest Psalm, tells us himself what was for him true wisdom. After mentioning God's blessings and His judgments, he exclaims, 'Oh that they were wise, then would they understand this, and consider their end!'<sup>2</sup> May not he who has first asked for spiritual gifts have

<sup>1</sup> Ver. 8; cf. Ps. xix. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxii. 29, Dutch translation.—TR.

perfect liberty to ask also for temporal benefits? 'Return, O Lord,—how long? and let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants.' There is here a reference to the historic statement, 'Then the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto the people;' and to the prayer of Moses, 'Consider that this nation is Thy people!'<sup>1</sup> In the utterance of the request (ver. 14) to be 'satisfied' every morning with the favour of God, the allusion to the daily gift of manna is as unmistakable as it is beautiful. The wish for further joy (ver. 15) is seen to be especially appropriate, when we remember that the greater part of the appointed years had now gone by; the mention, too, of children (ver. 16) is the more striking, since the younger generation was to see the mighty works of God instead of the older generation, now almost destroyed. We scarcely can refer 'the beauty' or friendliness 'of the Lord our God' (ver. 17) to anything but the renewed experience of His gracious presence; and as to 'the work of our hands,' which the Psalmist desires to be 'established,' what else could have been intended than the conquest of Canaan, which Moses little knew, as yet, was to devolve on other hands than his?

And what, now, do you think, after all this, about the spirit which pervades this view of life, the occasion and the form of which we have been pointing out to you? It is, we repeat, a remarkable Psalm which we have read together. It is, indeed, quite true that, even in heathen poets, you find beautiful reflections made upon the transitory nature and the brevity of life; but where else do you meet with such close blending of complaint and prayer, and what psalm ever formed more really a portion of the poet's inmost life? How much more highly than the hero, who may possibly perform a single grand ex-

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxii. 14, xxxiii. 13.

plot under what plainly shows itself to be extraordinary effort, must we rank 'the man of God,' who, after passing eight and thirty tedious years of pain and disappointment, can still feel and speak as he does here? But is it not remarkable that you do not perceive a single murmur of complaint regarding the ingratitude of those who, as the younger generation, have by slow degrees grown strange to him, though as a nation they are always dear? Is it not strange, too, that you do not find a single trace of discontent with the divine appointment, which condemned this Moses, in his innocence, to wander through the wilderness with guilty Israel? And are you not astonished, when you see the greatest of the prophets place himself on the same level with the meanest of the Israelites, as a man, as a sinner, as a mortal? Well may that be called a truly humble and yet elevating view of life, in which the eye turns from the finite to the Infinite, and the spirit looks already on Canaan, while the foot must still tread on the desert's sand. O worthy Moses, we can think we see you all alone with God, in the stillness of the night, while Israel sleeps around, and the starry heaven is spread out overhead! The bosom, heavily oppressed, relieves itself with mournful sighs; but sighs change into songs, and these ascend on high, an evening sacrifice presented in the boundless sanctuary of creation overhead. When Moses uttered that first word, 'Jehovah,' did it possibly recall to him God's revelation at the bush, when, for the first time, he could realize the power of that all-glorious Name? Truly, not only there, but here also is holy ground. A Psalm like this may well be called a sanctuary of itself; even after such a lapse of ages, it is worthy to be taken up again into the lips of many later generations.

## 2.

‘But,’ some one will reply, ‘surely you do not mean that such a Psalm as this, composed under extraordinary circumstances, could still serve as a standard for attaining a just estimate of life?’ We are, indeed, quite of that mind; and what is more, we think we can establish this position. Nay, further, we are anxious to make our conviction yours. Come, and give heed once more, while we enable you to estimate the picture here presented in the text as a *true view of life*. But which of its three leading features could you honestly pronounce one-sided—overdrawn? Is it the first, viz. the *duration of life*, its brevity and its uncertainty? Or is it the second—the *burden of life*, as heavy and oppressive? Or the third—the *lesson of life*, how seldom it is understood and learned? Test the truth of Moses’ words by the experience of daily life, and judge between us and yourselves.

The *duration* of life,—how short and uncertain! Yes, it held fully and emphatically true of Israel; but do not we, too, find our picture briefly given in the words, ‘They are like a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up?’ There are some of those truths which the preacher is almost afraid of bringing to the pulpit, because he knows that no one disputes them. But when did it become unnecessary to remember the transitory nature of life because the fact is universally acknowledged? That life is truly brief, may possibly be recognised by one advanced in years, who sees the sun of life close on the western horizon. But the man, who, still in the full bloom of health and strength, perceives his earthly future constantly expand; the youth, who looks on months as an eternity, when these months intervene between his wishes and the object he desires; the

child, who looks in envy upon one who may be called full-grown :—do they quite understand the force of words like these,—a ‘watch in the night,’ ‘a flower of the field,’ ‘a vapour’? How good is it that God Himself comes in between, and, by the plainest facts, proclaims in most emphatic terms what we may understand in words, but scarcely seem inclined to comprehend! Then comes His angel, who invades a family, and carries off an aged one; or possibly he spares a feeble one, but seizes on a blooming youth, a strong man in the prime of life, and cuts him off within a few brief hours, while those who hear of it exclaim, ‘O God, how frail is man! Who would have thought this possible?’ But is this really what you did not expect? So much the worse for your own selves! Surely, if individual instances, which show how frail the life of others is, so much astonish you, it may be doubted whether you have yet thought earnestly upon the frailty of your own! For, if you see what he was who has been cut off so suddenly, you never would be anything but ‘vanity,’ though you were stronger than all else; and as regards the question we so often ask about our absent friends, ‘if he is still alive,’ as Joseph asked regarding Jacob, what else is it than the expression of our inmost consciousness that death is far more certain than even life itself? Such is the real state of matters; and I hardly know what point in Moses’ song should first be taken up, in order deeply to impress upon your minds the truth, that we on earth can properly count upon nothing than that we shall surely die. Shall I, with Moses, liken death to a destroying flood? It is immediately to add, that this stream carries off with it, not merely brittle reeds, but also deeply-rooted trunks of trees, in its destructive course. Or shall I liken life itself unto a sleep? It is in order to predict that, after a brief period, you will be able to exclaim, referring to your

deepest sorrow or your highest joy, no more than this, Why did I give myself so much annoyance? or, why did I think myself so happy as I did? Or shall I compare your days to grass, which flourishes, but withers speedily? It is that I may speak about the sentence passed on you, ye youthful flowers, perhaps still covered with the bloom of spring, but soon attacked by poison-worms, which prey on your best strength. Or shall we compare our years on earth to passing thoughts? It is but with the view of adding that our life not only is as fleeting, but as changeable, and speedily will disappear, becoming presently as imperceptible as any series of images that ever crowd upon our brain. Yea, as it is with every individual, so is it always with whole generations of mankind. They are as waves that break upon a vast sea-coast; but only to be driven back by other waves, which, in their turn, are no less destined to rise up in foam, and break. What does this grand prophetic Psalm proclaim, if not just this,—that all things change, and pass away? Yesterday, it was they; to-day, it may be we; to-morrow,—if we live till then,—sooner or later, *you!*

And now, would that this short, uncertain life were only one of unmixed joy! But I should be astonished at the boldness of the man who for an instant dared to doubt if Moses had good ground for his lament: *life's burden*,—how oppressive and severe it is! ‘Labour and sorrow,’ the abundant harvest of a seventieth or an eightieth year;—nay, we must not calumniate Thy love, Father of Lights, who in this wilderness dost give us more than manna for our food; nor must we say again, complainingly, ‘Our days are passed away in Thy wrath,’ till we have stammered out, ‘Praise Him, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies!’ But must we only in the deserts of Arabia seek for the shoulders that are bent, not to say broken, under the

intolerable weight of life's great burden? and must we not rather call the world deceitful, when it promises to give us roses without thorns, or thorns that do not wound? I know, indeed, that there are careless hearts and tearless eyes, that, in their inmost soul, call Moses, and all those of kindred mind, gloomy, austere. But surely, hearts that know not care, and eyes that shed no tears, are far from competent to give right explanation of the problems of this life? Ye who are inexperienced, come not to speak with us of life, until your head, anointed with the oil of joy, shall have received its baptism of suffering, and your stout heart, now strongly harnessed, shall have felt the sword-thrust made in it. And meanwhile, ye—I shall not say, unfortunates, but—ye among us who are fortune's greatest favourites, when ye regard life earnestly, but only in the light of right experience, say whether your account, when it is closed, shall show more profit than appeared when Moses' reckoning was closed. But do not, in your folly, think of urging, as a counter-argument with him, the pleasure of your youthful days, which you now look at through a magnifying glass, but then shall have enjoyed only in the desires which you have secretly been cherishing. Rather review the past, and think, with strict impartiality, of all you hoped for, and—what you have really experienced; think, too, of what you have attempted, and—with what a small result; consider, too, what you have sowed, and honestly confess how little you have reaped. What an amount of trouble spent on nothing but in bringing grief upon ourselves; how much of grief have we experienced through trouble caused by others! What a multitude of opportunities have been presented us! But as regards the future, grief may possibly await us where we hoped to find our highest joy; and with the suffering, well known to all, regarding which our friends express

their sympathy, there may come presently a deeper, keener, secret sorrow, torturing the soul. How many lives, like those of Israel in the wilderness, are poisoned by the curse of sins confessed or unconfessed! Here, one in his maturity limps on through life, maimed through the secret sins of younger days; there, one has lost, through injured pride, the peace he felt before; yonder, another feels a deep, sharp sting within his soul, when conscience whispers in his ear, 'You are yourself to blame, and it is now too late;' and there, again, another waits in fear and trembling for the great decisive hour, when God shall openly reveal our secret sins, and judge, and recompense. Thus conscience adds a new and crushing burden to the mighty load already on our heart; and when we have deducted from the seventy or eighty years,—first, those in which we knew not what was joy and happiness; then, those years when we hoped for and pursued a something yet to come; and, finally, those years in which we wept and sorrowed for departed joys, what then remains with which to challenge Moses' words? At last there comes, perhaps, a time when we imagine that no trouble shall attend us any more, and sorrows shall depart. Then welcome, sunny days! Blest be ye, plenteous years!—But what is this that comes? Death knocks at the rich fool's door the very night when his last barn is filled. The life departs from that with which it seemed eternally combined; and the disappointed heart receives a shock, from which it never will recover while it does not cease to beat. Enough! But is it then so difficult to tell why a late poet<sup>1</sup> has declared, that, of all things in this world, 'life is itself the hardest?' and that one of the greatest men belonging to last century<sup>2</sup> could never think upon the frailty and the vanity of life without finding his eyes suffused with bitter tears?

<sup>1</sup> Bilderdijk.

<sup>2</sup> Herder.

This disposition, I am well aware, is far from being that of the majority ; and I will add at once, neither is it by any means the most exalted frame in which our minds can be. But now consider, on the other side, the darkest feature in the picture here presented us by Moses: the *lesson of life*,—how seldom it is understood and learned. When man is all uncertain whether he shall live to see another moment ; when the sinner, laden with such heavy burdens, finds himself upon his way to stand before the Judge, into whose hands it shall indeed be a most fearful thing to fall,—would you not at least expect that such an one would give God and himself no rest, even for a moment, till he had attained the object of this life, and were assured of hope hereafter too? ‘Surely I see one, threatened by the all-destroying flood, betake himself to the strong rock ; I see another, bowed beneath the dreadful load, embrace the feet of his great Judge:’—vain dream of multitudes, vain as the dream of life itself! ‘Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath.’ Nay, venerable Moses, truly thou wouldest have no reason to retract these words didst thou appear among us now. ‘God’s wrath,’—but surely the very word sounds unmelodious and harsh; ‘God’s anger,’—but does not the thought belong exclusively to the Old Testament? Indeed, if, after all that has been said, there still was something that could bring us to a sadder frame of mind, would it not be a glance at the excessive readiness with which this brief, uncertain life, so full of toil, is dreamed away and wantonly mispent by turns? Must not even such an one as Moses still seek to be circumspect, that he may wisely count his days and hours, and find he is not even a single second short? And where are they among you, wise hearts, that are also truly praying hearts? How many pupils are there in the school of life that leave it without

learning the most necessary of the lessons taught us here, —to die? Yes, when the Great Pursuer, Death, that never rests, and never lags more than a single step behind us men, has made a precious life near us his prey, we shudder when we hear his steps. But scarcely have his footprints disappeared, ere terror for his arrows vanishes, though we are still within an easy reach, and the necessity for some relief from terror that has come on us induces us to seek new sleeping-draughts through which we may dispel anxiety. 'It was an accident,—quite unforeseen; a most peculiar accident; a fatal omission; an unexpected circumstance;'—always something that we should have taken care in time to guard against. The ranks of those still living open up but for an instant, that the dead, whose end roused consternation for the time, may be removed; but presently the ranks close up again, as if no change had ever been; the morrow finds his place filled up, and next day sees remembrance of the man effaced; insensibility soon sports upon the lonely grave, but lately hollowed by the hand of love. Is there anything of which we have more positive assurance, and of which, nevertheless, we are less mindful, than these soul-disturbing words:—'To die, to die once, to be condemned'? Does not experience continually show, that those who are most accustomed to see others die frequently think least about the dreadful certainty and meaning of their own mortality? Yea, we ourselves, who speak of your death-sentence and our own, are we sufficiently imbued with this dread thought,—that, in this very hour, we may be summoned hence? Alas, the youngest of us here has had more than sufficient time to learn true wisdom; and the oldest is, perhaps, upon this very point, as hard of hearing and as foolish as the rest! At every turn called lustily to break our slumbers, most of us are like the sleepers who, half-dozing, say, 'I did not know it was so late,' and then

turn round to sleep once more. Bowed down sometimes beneath the load of our old sins, sometimes beneath the weight of our old cares, we often miss, for years on end, the highest object of our life ; and ere we are aware of it, the boundary is reached before we take the great, decisive step. 'They are as a sleep : ' unto how many, even of us, may these words be most suitably applied in quite another sense ! The vapour passes by, and men scarce heed it as it goes ; the stream speeds on, and we regard it dreamily ; school-time draws to a close, yet the dull pupil still remains the same. The flower of the grass holds up its fragile head, as free from care as if it wished to say, ' See, I am far too beautiful to break ; ' and the night-watch is spent as if it would endure eternally. Oh, Life, Life !—is there anything more fleeting, dismal, restless, and monotonous, or of less intrinsic worth than thou ?

### 3.

' Anything of less intrinsic worth than life ? ' Thanks be to God, we have something to bring forward as a counterpoise to this ; for, observe, we have been hitherto regarding life almost solely in the light of experience ; but now we turn the other side, and view it in the light of faith. May we not, think you, venture to affirm that it is a satisfactory view of life which this writer has already taken before us ? Only look once more at his words, his example, and especially at the gospel of grace. In view of and in contrast with what we have mentioned, let us consider faith as an *eternal source of life, a joy of life, a hope of life.*

It was, indeed, a gloomy picture on which we have been looking to-day. But why art thou cast down, O my soul ? And why art thou disquieted in me ? Knowest

thou not the everlasting fountain of life, to which Moses points us, even at the very commencement of his prayer? 'Lord, Thou hast been our refuge, from generation to generation!' Truly, it would require Moses himself to tell what he felt in his heart when uttering these words; but it requires a Christian to understand why we also address the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with this honourable name. It is a touching thought, that, reckoning three generations to each century, a hundred generations now have gone down to the grave since the servant of the Lord sang these words; but, whatever else has changed upon this changing world, the refuge has been standing open, from generation to generation, for all living and dying ones. Nay, child of Adam, do not say that everything which you behold within and round you is but transient! High over all the clouds of heaven, there stands the royal throne of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting God. When the last sepulchral mound shall have received the last of its own dust from man, He shall not be a single night-watch older than He was when the first mountain was brought forth; and He, the Everlasting One, is, and remains for all His own, a God of perfect blessedness. Nay, it is not through any accident that He has marked so many trees, so fair and promising, to be cut down throughout the forest of our race, while the unfruitful knotted trunk but laughs at winter's storms; it is His voice that speaks, 'Return unto the dust;' and though that voice is quite supreme in its commands, wisdom and love at all times guide its exercise. Nay, it is not mere 'Nature' that requires man's latest breath; it is the living God, who carries in His hand the worlds, yes, and the breath of lives. Nay, it is not the mower of our race, who comes in arbitrary mood, and cuts the fairest flowers; it is the heavenly Husbandman, who now removes a beauteous

plant from earthly soil to heaven's garden of delight, and roots out what have proved abortions, or still lets them grow for some wise end as yet known only to Himself. We pass away, but He remains; we are but clouds on heaven's expanse, reflecting sunlight thrown on us,—He is the everlasting Sun, that may hide sometimes, but can never set; beneath, the grave awaits our feet,—above, God is our Refuge high! Does not that ray of light from heaven already make death's shadows flee; and does not the stream of death awake less fear within your soul as it foams towards you, when you behold the Infinite enthroned as King, above the flood? If He but lives, and I may live in Him, then, even although what is most dear to me should be removed, I may lose much, but cannot be deprived of everything. If life be but a vapour, then what matters it, provided that life-vapour rises, as an incense-offering, to heaven? and if we soon fly hence, beyond the reach of human eye,—again we ask, what matters that, provided His eye reaches us, and we soon find a resting-place for ever in His heart? If there has once been formed, by faith, a personal connection between Him and us, it will not, cannot perish, like the grass that withereth. And if the hour of life is soon to pass away, as if it were a single thought, the closing thought will be, 'This God is our God; He will be our guide even unto death.'<sup>1</sup>

But is the praise of faith too loudly trumpeted? and would there rather be far greater reason for prolonged complaint, if we were but to look once more upon the heavy burden of this life? Not one iota we retract of all that has been said as to the griefs and sorrows of this life; but now, we may present to you the other side of the matter,—the obverse of the coin. In midst of all life's burdens, true faith knows a *life of joy*. Surely you

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xlvi. 14.

do not ask me, what is that? You have already been regarding Moses, who, all through that series of years, so burdensome and sad, might well be called the most severely tried of men, and yet he was the happiest. Yea, verily, the happiest; for know you not in whom he placed his faith,—from whom that trouble and that sorrow came,—and to whom these could not but lead him? And is there not at least one pleasure, of which all the wickedness of men cannot deprive him, and which becomes more dear to him the more life's struggle deepens,—namely, the enjoyment of secret intercourse with God? Ah, child of this world! if you do not yet know that joy, I understand how you feel sometimes that the world is too confined; and how you would seek to escape from life, as an accursed thing, if there were no eternity! It is hard to bear a heavy burden on the back, and have no hand on which you may with safety lean! And it is hard to look around in vain for light, and find besides that there is only darkness overhead! But if the God of Moses be your God, then you, too, drink of a spiritual rock that ever follows you through life; and when the world inquires how you can eat the bread of tears so cheerfully, you can give answer in your Saviour's words, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.'<sup>1</sup> You look no longer merely to the trouble you endure, but above all to the hand that laid it on; no longer do you specially regard the weight of sorrow, but rather the object of the chastisement. Like Moses in the wilderness, you bear submissively what is imposed on you because of sin; because you see, more clearly than he saw, that it is no longer an avenger who repays you for your sin, but a Father who chastises you in love. And it is well for you, when you depart, to see that refuge open wide for you; a blessed thing it is, besides, to know that you

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 32.

have nothing more to fear, when you, too, hear the great command addressed to you, 'Return to dust!' But—as we well may modify the question asked by Moses—who fully knows the power of God's grace, and His love to sinful men in Christ? Behold, what Moses' law concealed, the gospel now proclaims. He, who could easily destroy us in His wrath, finds not His pleasure in the sinner's death; and our unrighteousnesses, which He could place in the light of His countenance, He casts behind Him into the depths of the sea. In Christ, He takes from off our shoulders what is far the greatest burden that we bear,—the load of guilt; and every other ill He sends on us, while we traverse this vale of tears, He makes work for our good. Nay, now we are no longer troubled by His wrath, but we rejoice in His great love; we bless Him for the troubles and the sorrows under which so many others groan; for the cords of love, by which God draws us to Himself, are closely twined around His chastening rod. Ye followers of Christ who feel God's chastening hand, may you not well discard Moses' complaint for Paul's triumphal tones, 'In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'?<sup>1</sup>

But, once more, does your heart fail when you see the vanity of life,—that lesson which so few have learned? Again, rejoice in the Lord, ye who have learned at first to view life in the light of faith; for you, like Moses,—yea, even more than he,—may speak of a grand *hope of life*. But do you think it difficult to find out, in this prayer of his, traces that he expected more than what this present life affords? Surely, it scarce would be worth while engaging in such earnest prayer for wisdom, had the poet known no higher destiny than death, and after that the grave. No; he who knows such fellowship with the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 37.

Eternal as is here desired and felt, must carry, deep within his heart, a strong presentiment of the eternal life. When such an one as Moses seeks to count the days that swiftly pass, it is because he knows that time stands in direct connection with eternity; and when he prays that he may find satisfaction in the mercy of God, it is impossible that he can rest content with this mean earth. But, God be thanked, what was quite sure to Moses we can now see far more clearly than even he; the eye of faith, besides, descries a better country than the promised land of earth, looming beyond that Jordan we must cross at death. Apart from a direct connection with that life, we grant that there is nothing less important than existence here; but, viewed in the light of things to come, can you point out what is of more importance, or what more demands the wise employment of our time? Eternities depend upon the hours we often waste so thoughtlessly; and earnest effort, which we now expend to learn life's lesson, will then be repaid with interest. Nay, Adam's children return again unto the dust of earth, not to experience annihilation, but to continue elsewhere what was here begun. Life seemed a sleep, but the morning of awaking dawns; with rapid flight we hasten hence, but, just like birds of passage, to a milder clime! What are the seventy or eighty fleeting years (and few reach even that boundary,—years spent on earth in toil and trouble, too) when we compare them with the glory of the sons of God, which then shall be revealed? Then, in the morning of eternity, He satisfies His people with the full enjoyment of His goodness; He makes them glad according to the days of evil they have seen on earth. Then all His work appears unto His servants' eyes; and it is shown to heaven and earth that there was absolute necessity for even that weary warfare in this life, to fit them for the

wearing of the everlasting crown. Then comes—what higher blessedness can faith conceive?—then comes the beauty of the Lord our God, in its entirety, on all who loved Him in sincerity; and the work of their hands, begun in weakness to His praise, is perfected in power. Once more He overwhelms them, but with streams of everlasting bliss; the brief—yea, and the longest—life of pain has now passed by, as if it were a watch by night; and God's eternity, God's blessedness, God's glory now are theirs, as far as creatures can receive. They mount up hence,—always, like eagles, straight towards the sun. . . . Christians! do you still look upon this vain and fleeting life from such a lofty eminence? Nay, for it now lies far beneath your feet, and quite behind your back, like a grey cloud which has disappeared from sight: now is it nothing, and yet, in this *nothing* lay the germ and essence of that *everything*. The burden borne on earth is now laid down, but the wisdom learned on earth remains; and the struggle to attain that wisdom has been followed by enjoyment that shall know no end. Christians! if the psalm of life, even here, gives such encouragement to faith, what shall it be when, up in heaven, the song of all eternity ascends?

#### 4.

But who will be so bold as raise his voice to join the angels in their heavenly song? Here you will see that our discourse bears more directly on your heart and conscience than your understanding, your feelings, and your faith. Only when it is not merely understood and assented to as true, but earnestly laid to heart, does Moses' view of life become for you and me a truly *profitable view of life*.

To what does it more urgently arouse us than to ask

this practical question,—Have I, too, learned as yet to view things with the eye of Moses ; and have I yet obtained the wise and understanding heart for which, as we have seen, he prayed so earnestly ? Nay, do not be too ready to solace yourselves with the consideration that you quite assent to all that has been said, and even at the present moment feel, to some extent, its force. It is not so difficult a matter to feel saddened when a mournful song is sung,—to speak with visible emotion on the frailty of our life,—or even to affirm, with some degree of unction, that death is always near. But when we look for the right kind of fruit from this lightly-won conviction, and when we attentively regard the lives of many who declare that death is ever near, once more we ask, where shall we find a heart in which true wisdom dwells ? Surely not in you, O thoughtless youth, who walk according to your own desires, forgetting that the slightest sign which God may give can stop the joyous course of your life's blood, now bounding through your veins ? Nor yet in you, O man of business, skilful in your reckoning of every chance, excepting this, which you least reckon on,—that the King of Terrors may wipe out one cipher of the well-made reckoning ? Nor yet, again, in you, old man of earthly mind, who always say, in comfort to yourself, that others have lived longer still than you ; or who may certainly complain like Moses, but yet never pray like him ? Nor yet in you, O worldly-minded woman, who turn pale with terror when you only hear the name of an infectious disease, and yet at once plunge deep into the whirlpool of all kinds of dissipation, just as if you could not there drink of the stream of death ? Oh, what sad folly, and what blindness, too ! Ye dream of years, yet cannot count upon a day ; ye reckon up your treasures, while your hours, which gold can't buy, are let slip through

your fingers like the sand ! And we, who must condemn, detest, oppose all this, are we indeed far better than our fellows ? and have we already profited by Moses' view of life ? What is our leading principle of action, our highest aim, and our most sacred joy ? And if, this night, our life, and everything the world sees to admire and to desire in us, were wholly lost, what would remain in us ripe for eternity ? Oh that this question, put to you as in the invisible presence of the angel of death, might sink deep into your soul, and lead you to a proper frame of mind ! It is indeed no trifling matter to be liable, at any moment, to be called before a heavenly Judge, who—mark those words—'sets our secret sins in the light of His countenance,' and then to 'fly hence' into everlasting destruction. And that everlasting destruction—we say it with the fear of death in our own heart—is, as truly as God lives, and as you may die this day, your portion, if you have been seeking your highest good in this present life ; and it shall be more tolerable for Israel, that suffered in the wilderness the punishment of their unrighteousness, than for you, who will not hear the loudest calls, but kick against the pricks ! If God be faithful, then He also will make good His threatenings ; if God be infinite, His wrath against men's sin will never end ; and if God's holiness be feared, even by a Moses, then what mountain, or what hill, would shield the unrepenting sinner from the fierce fire of His wrath ? Oh, fellow sinner, would that such a voice as this might rise within your heart ere death shall break it,—'What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?'

If this be what you ask, then Moses earnestly directs you to the *first great want of life*. And what else could this be, than that the Lord should be as really your God as He was his ; and that you should soon learn to seek true life, which only can be found in fellowship with

God? Here is the reason why Moses could speak so earnestly, and yet so calmly, too, about that death which made the most courageous in Israel quake. To look with calmness on the King of Terrors, we must first, in faith, have looked upon the God of life; the grave affords no peace to us, if Moses' heavenly refuge be not first sought and attained. It cannot be too frequently repeated, that this does not mean the philosophic faith in a Supreme Being, without whose will not a sparrow falls to the ground; but that childlike, personal faith in a Father, who, in Christ, has also made an everlasting covenant of grace with us, which gives us strength in presence of life's troubles, and sustains our courage in the hour of death. If God does not become our God on earth, then neither shall His heaven be ours. How shall we worthily give thanks to Him, who still, in kindness, says to us this day, 'Return, backsliding ones,' before the last 'Return' arrests us suddenly, and brings us to the dust? For what shall we more earnestly make our request on your behalf, than that the love of God, more than the terrors of eternity, may lead you to repent; and that your stubborn heart may here be broken, so that you may no more tremble for the breaking down of this your earthly house? A thousand years are, in God's sight, as yesterday when it is past; but though you had a thousand years to live, one hour of the repentance which is not to be repented of would be to you the most decisive, the most blessed in your life! And wherefore should you say, 'To-morrow,' when death constantly may say, 'To-day'? Nay, come without delay to Christ, through whom alone the Father will receive lost sinners, and let Him preserve you from the wrath to come! Depending on the power given by the Holy Ghost, break loose from all connection with a world that gives so little and so quickly vanishes; and when you estimate the things of time, employ no

other standard than the one which, in your dying hour, you will desire to have employed. Still is it day, but even now the days are few; see that you carefully improve the hours, and let not even the minutes be misspent or lost.

Of all that we have heard to-day, this is the sum: each one of us is urged to lay to heart the great, *important task of life*. By this we mean the careful counting of our days,—a task which is, for us, more difficult, but of as much importance as for Israel, who could, in some degree, while they were in the desert, reckon up the probable duration of their lives. It is quite natural that there should be a reckoning, in which regard is had not only to mere number, but intrinsic worth,—not only the amount of principal, but specially the interest drawn from the treasure of this life. Oh, how much farther we might have advanced in the art of making this brief life—I do not say longer—but really more profitable, both for ourselves and others, if we did not remain so backward in the practice of this heavenly arithmetic! But, alas! ‘time is money:’ such is the motto of your daily life; but why not also of your higher, never-ending life? Your gold you keep behind strong bolts and bars, but you give up your time quite willingly to any robber that may come: do you put pence to usury, and let hours lie without return? Oh that I could inscribe upon your souls the legend round the clock, through which a famous preacher rose to eminence: ‘They pass away, but they are laid to our account!’<sup>1</sup> Count up the many days already gone, the few that still remain. Count up your opportunities already lost through sheer neglect, and learn to live in such a way that, when you come to die, you may obtain eternal

<sup>1</sup> *Transcunt et imputantur* were the words inscribed around the clock placed in the school in which Bossuet was taught.

life. Make up your reckoning before it can be said of you, 'Counted and weighed, but found too light!' From Moses, learn, in all humility, not to be hasty in imagining that you are perfect in this art; and be not slower, but more faithful in your work, according as the night draws on. And further, if, like him, you are but sure you have the grace of God, you may, with him, look calmly on when now and then there falls away what never was intended to remain; and you may quietly advance to meet the evil day, as one who knows that his best days of life lie not behind, but all before, and there in infinite variety. Thank God that you have found the only true reply to the great question, 'What is life?' and urge this, in your turn, on other men. 'Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation;' but, above all, like Moses, 'continue instant in prayer.' A short time longer, and then your death, too, shall confirm the truth of Moses' view of life; and one who has but known you in your conflicts and your strife may sigh, as he takes your cold hand in his, 'What, then, is life? what has even this life been?' But he who has observed your faith, and your departure from this world, will point the sighing one aloft as he replies, 'His true life has begun!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Cursing Prophet.

‘Balaam the son of Beor saith.’—NUM. xxiv. 3.

THE history of God’s special revelations, particularly those of the Old Testament, while exhibiting a remarkable variety, presents the whole to us under three great aspects. We find a great number of brilliant pictures, which form memorials of God’s mighty deeds, and which we can never look at again without feeling stirred up to adoration and thanksgiving. In contrast with these we find, all too frequently, soiled pictures, exhibiting the saddest traces of weakness and wickedness, and filling us anew with deep shame every time we look at them. And, lastly, interspersed among those of the two preceding classes, there claim our attention many pictures most mysterious and obscure,—at least such as have hitherto received only partial explanation,—views which elicit from us the most pressing questions, but afford no more than partial replies, and which are of themselves sufficient to remind us of the words of the apostle: ‘We know in part, and we prophesy in part.’<sup>1</sup> Even in the course of these contemplations we have already had many specimens of the first and second kinds. Would you like now to see one of the most remarkable examples of the third series? Then let it be the picture upon which, in large although rough outlines,

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

you may perceive the figure of Balaam the son of Beor.

Balaam the son of Beor is certainly not one of those ancient prophets who can boast that they often direct their words to a Christian assembly ; let us at once add to this, that he is by no means one of the leading figures in sacred history on which the eye especially desires to rest. His name, which is distinctly mentioned with abhorrence in the writings of the New Testament, comes sounding in our ears as if still burdened with the curse of more than thirty centuries. His whole spirit and disposition exhibit a remarkable combination of faith and unbelief, of pride and meanness, of cunning and double-dealing. And his whole history is, on many points, so enveloped in clouds and darkness, that, even after repeated attempts, one might almost despair of attaining clear views regarding him. What those possessed of devils, and the swine in the neighbourhood of Gadara, are in the New Testament Scriptures, such is Balaam and his ass in the Old,—an absurdity to many, an offence to not a few others. Perhaps the number of fruitless attempts made to explain this episode has been as great as that of the endeavours to cast ridicule on it. We need not wonder, therefore, that preachers in general studiously avoid a rock on which so many have already suffered shipwreck, and that very few of their hearers have ever cast more than a passing glance at this much-bedimmed mirror. Yea, we also have doubted whether we ought not rather to have quite passed by this incident in the history of Moses and Israel, that we might direct your attention instead to pictures more familiar, and possibly also more attractive. The history of Balaam, however, even with all its obscurity, we consider as sufficiently important to claim your special attention, at least for once. Just as of old, in the days of Isaac, various wells were to

be found which had been filled up and rendered unfit for use by stranger hands, but which only needed to be opened up again to give a fresh spring of living water, so is it with many portions of the Sacred Scriptures, which have scarce been touched upon. Unbelief regards them with contempt, and superficial minds but pass them lightly by; yet any one who looks more carefully, and searches more than the majority of men, will find, even here, a stream at once refreshing, strengthening, and comforting. Such Scripture passages, so enigmatical in character, are not by any means on that account reserved, just like the temple shewbread, for the use of priests alone; they constitute a portion of the spiritual manna, which the Lord is constantly bestowing for the quickening and strengthening of those He loves. And—as we must at once declare by way of warning—though we may find it is impossible to give a satisfactory reply to every question prompted by our curiosity, we shall once more be taught that even those members of the living body of the Word which we esteem the least, bring it the more abundant honour. When not only Moses himself, but also Joshua, Nehemiah, and Micah, have expressly reminded Israel of the events recorded in this and the two preceding chapters; when we find that these events led to a deep fall and to a fearful visitation on some thousands of the Israelites, upon which occasion Moses' strength of mind and courage were most beautifully shown; when, in short, this may be called one of the most notable incidents in the last year of Moses' life, surely we should at least attempt to throw some small degree of light upon a portion of history which is, in many ways, obscure, but at the same time of the highest importance. The God of truth has spoken even through the man who, in many respects, deserves the name of a false and lying prophet. He that hath ears let him

hear what the Spirit saith unto the Church through this mouth, which was indeed unclean, but opened by the Lord Himself!

Surely it will not be necessary to say much by way of reminding you of the peculiar position occupied by Balaam in the history of Israel? That we may, however, aid the memory of even the weakest in this age, when Scripture knowledge is so neglected and in such a backward state, we merely mention that, in the fortieth year of the wandering, he was sent for by Balak, king of the Moabites, that he might pronounce over Israel, who then threatened the Moabite territory, a solemn prophetic curse. Regarding the person and the character of this Balaam, opinions have always been very much divided. According to some, he was a false prophet, properly so called, who lived in fatal league with the Prince of Darkness; according to others, he was a true messenger of Jehovah, but one who, through pride and avarice, brought about his own destruction. It scarcely need be said that, till at least we gain more definite information, we can neither side with the one nor other of these two opinions. Balaam no doubt knew the only true God: in Mesopotamia, his own residence and Abraham's native land, this knowledge, through the influence of Abraham's family, does not seem to have been wholly lost; and he must have heard enough of what occurred in the wilderness and in Egypt to regard Jehovah at least as a mighty, perhaps as the supreme Deity. But with this knowledge there was also combined the most Pagan superstition,—almost in the same way, perhaps, as we find, for example, in Laban the Syrian a mixture of true religion and idolatry. Hence also he is not called a prophet in Scripture, but a soothsayer, and as such he was accustomed to practise his sorceries on a large scale, and had, throughout a wide

extent of country, a reputation proportionate to the greatness of his abilities and the skill with which he maintained the deception. Endowed with much poetic eloquence, he showed a rare capacity of being raised to the ecstatic state, and in such condition the eye of his soul seems to have been opened by a higher Hand. Regarding the value of his other utterances, we have no means of determining; but that at least on one occasion, and that the one now before us, the Spirit of God was indeed present with him, is attested not merely by himself, but by Moses (chap. xxiv. 2), in the most express terms. Do not be surprised that God could make use of such a deceiver or fanatic—choose whichever name you please—to make him the herald of the coming salvation; we must remind you how frequently, under a special dispensation of God, the treasure of great value is carried in most impure earthen vessels,—how a disobedient Jonah became the preacher of repentance in Nineveh; how, as John tells us, a profane Caiaphas uttered prophecy; and how some even successfully cast out devils in Jesus' name, without, however, being recognised as His own people. In God's hands, Balaam was nothing more than an instrument, that was cast aside as useless whenever he had fulfilled his destiny; like his ass, he gives witness to the truth, though this did not become power and life to himself.

This naturally leads us to inquire what conclusion we must come to regarding the miracle, which, in the estimation of many, is the most astounding of all miracles. To assume that we have here the account of a dream, is certainly as arbitrary as to assert that this is a cleverly concocted fable. That Moses meant to narrate an actual occurrence is absolutely beyond a doubt; and as little is there need for proof that we have here the account of a miracle. The question can only be, whether we are

to place the miracle in the animal itself, or rather in Balaam ; in other words, whether we must say that the ass actually spoke, or that the speaking was only in the consciousness of the seer. Both of these opinions have by turns been upheld and impugned by learned and pious expositors. Those who maintain the first, very properly remind us that it is as possible for God to make an audible voice issue from an animal as from a luminous cloud ;<sup>1</sup> that, in the Second Epistle of Peter, we read of the ass 'speaking with man's voice ;'<sup>2</sup> that such speaking was, as we might expect in this case, performed merely in a mechanical way, but that this sign was the very thing necessary for putting Balaam to shame. The others, again, appeal to what is stated elsewhere as well as here regarding his highly excited, ecstatic condition ; they find, in the statement that the soothsayer answered his ass, an indication that he was now—perhaps through the influence of the angel's presence—more out of the body than in it ; and they ask why there is no intimation that those who were conducting him perceived this miracle as well as himself. You see that there are grounds for the one opinion as well as for the other ; choose yourselves whatever seems the most probable. If you only bear in mind that Balaam had not the least doubt himself that the irrational animal really stopped to speak with him, while you perceive in this the effect of God's own miraculous interposition, this will, on the whole, be sufficient. Rightly considered, the greatest wonder in this case is, not that an animal should have spoken, but rather that a man who but runs away, like an irrational animal, to utter words of cursing, is led, plainly against his will, to bless like an angel of peace.

And now, too, we find an answer to the question, *why* this occurrence has been left on record in these sacred

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 16.

pages for all generations. A man who was called to curse feels himself irresistibly impelled by the power of the Spirit from on high to bless the people of the Lord : what was such a man, if not a powerful witness to the greatness and the honour of Israel? It was necessary that his history should remain as a permanent demonstration, to all succeeding ages, of the supremacy of Jehovah and the nullity of all false gods. To use his own words, it was necessary to show that ‘no enchantment availed against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel;’<sup>1</sup> and that the people of the Lord had nothing to fear in any case from heathen superstition and sorcery. Thus they were encouraged against approaching days of darkness, and assured of the protection of an almighty Power, which, if need were, could change even the curse into a blessing. And that the history and utterances of Balaam were not merely of the deepest significance for that time, but remain such for all succeeding ages, we do not ask you to believe on our word only, but to substantiate for yourselves. Let us, as it were, take you by the hand, to place you on one of those heights upon which Balaam tarried in succession; and though, alas! so many faithful witnesses have all too frequently addressed their words to you in vain, now let even an unfaithful one bring you the message in the Sender’s name, and give him no less heed than what a heathen king once paid to him. Balaam the son of Beor speaks; will you give ear to what he has to say to our, to every age? What you now hear from him, and read, gives you a deep insight into (1) *the seductive influence of the world*; (2) *the bondage of sin*; (3) *the glory of God*; (4) *the bliss of the redeemed*; (5) *the splendour of the future*.

Does this surprise you, and can you not comprehend

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxiii. 23.

at once how such a singular history shows you things of such vast importance? Then follow us with undivided, with increasing attention. And do Thou, O Lord, teach us Thy way, even through these words, and we shall walk in Thy truth; unite our heart, that we may fear Thy name. Amen.

## 1.

The Israelites have, as on the wings of the wind, removed their camp from the midst of the desert, and pitched on the borders of Midian and Moab. The barrier which kept them from the Promised Land has been removed; a most important portion of the trans-Jordanic country has already been subdued; and mighty kings, together with their capitals, have yielded to the conquerors. Then terror strikes the heart of Balak, son of Zippor, ruler of the Moabites. In fancy he perceives his wide, luxuriant pastures eaten up, like verdure by the ox; what must he do in order to avert the ruin which now threatens him? Craft may perhaps procure what cannot be obtained by force, and a Divinity may be entreated to effect what human power fails to attain. From Pethor, on the banks of the Euphrates, even though the journey there takes twenty days, there must be brought the famous sorcerer, whose word was, far and near, regarded as a heavenly oracle. Already, you perceive the elders both of Moab and of Midian are setting out, to pray the son of Beor to return with them, and, in the name of Israel's God, pronounce the curse on Israel! In Balak's mind there was no shadow of a doubt whether such power indeed belonged to this great soothsayer. His heathen superstition leads him to believe, not that the seer shall declare what God reveals to him, but rather, that Jehovah shall accomplish what His servant says,—

if need be, when the necessary incantations have been gone about. The first attempt to gain Balaam fails, but Balak is not one to be put off at once ; still more illustrious messengers, and larger gifts, he thinks, must be enough to bring the man of God into a better frame of mind. He perseveres, until, at last, the man he so much wished appears ; he goes to meet him at the frontier, showing all courtesy and complaisance, and asks if men do not believe that he can highly honour any one in whom he takes delight. Even when Balaam hesitates, Balak does not, even for an instant, stop. Now he conducts him first to one, and then another height, in order that the prophet may look out upon the widespread camp of Israel, in whole or part, and from that eminence send down his curse, like poisoned night-dews, on the myriads below. The king is most exact in his observance of religious rites ; he does not think it is too much to build seven altars, three times over, as required. But the weightier matters of the law, inscribed upon the rudest heathen consciences,—mercy, and faith, and love,—are utterly unknown to him. The ruling passion in the man is selfishness and self-will ; and he will have his own way, though it cost him much. If Balaam be unable to accomplish all that he desires, he will be satisfied with something less ; if need be, he will rest content provided that Balaam at least refrains from blessing Israel. Only when it appears that each attempt and each proposal is in vain, and that the prophet's words come forth each moment much more fully and more fervently in Israel's praise, does Balak's patience reach an end. Love is transformed to hate, and courtliness to coarseness ; no excuse will now avail ; and he who had been honoured as more God than man, is soon driven forth as if he were a vagabond, while there are flung at him the railing words, 'I thought to promote thee to great honour ; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from

honour.'<sup>1</sup> Need we add anything to these words of the Moabitish king, to show how clearly they exemplify the seductive, wicked spirit of the world? Surely, though every other proof were wanting, Balaam now has found, in serving Balak, what the world really is; and the world itself fully deserves to bear the name borne by that king,—Balak, *destroyer*. At any rate, the relative position of the world to the kingdom of God is substantially the same as that of Moab and Midian to Israel, now drawing near. The same enmity still remains in the world, in manifold forms; and it is the instinct of self-preservation which incites the world and its followers to do their utmost against the coming of God's kingdom among them. When force would do no good, then they resort to cunning, or to caution, that they may oppose the progress of God's cause among them in so far as it is possible; and natural enemies, such as Midian and Moab, frequently become sworn friends for a time, whenever it appears expedient to combine against the one whom both oppose. On every hand, the world looks out for allies, servants, friends; as Balak did to Balaam, she promises to bestow on you her favours and her wealth, if you but follow her behests, and make her will your own. If you refuse, as he did at the first, the world will not believe that you act but from principle,—rather, she thinks that you regard self-interest; but she will give you large rewards when you but sell yourself to her. 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me:' so spake the Prince of this world to Jesus; and at every turn he modifies his voice, but still to say the same thing, in the softest tone, to all Christ's followers,—nay, even to every one of His redeemed. What is it that you seek, insatiable heart,—honour, or luxury, or gold? All these, if need be, may be had for

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxiv. 11.

almost nothing by the man whose conscience is not over scrupulous. This Balak also, like a true destroyer, rests not for an instant till he brings you where he will ; and if the first attempt does not succeed, he makes a second, and a third. The world knows very well, like Balak, how to suit herself to circumstances when they change, and to attract some friends from every side. Nay, she can even, in her own time and way, be quite religious—that is, from mere policy, and ill-concealed self-interest ; and if you like, she shows all possible respect for—forms. But, for your very life, ye who are striving for her praise and her reward, venture not to show that you really will obey God rather than any man ! The world, if need be, will forgive you everything ; but this it cannot possibly forgive,—that you most earnestly believe God's word, and give obedience to what He requires. Scarce can you show, like Balaam, that you hesitate, because the truth is much too strong for you, ere favour from the world is quite withdrawn ; your name appears no longer on the list of friends, but is consigned to deep oblivion ; and all the more dishonour falls on you, the greater was the honour meant for you at first. You are a most unpleasant, useless man, and quite intractable ; like Balaam, you are roughly pushed aside, and told, ' The Lord hath kept thee back from honour ; ' and then the world, instead of her intended laurel-wreath, presents you with a crown of thorns. Her love, it now appears, was nothing but fine show,—her flattery, deceit. To such a world—so selfish, false, malicious, just like Balak—should you make your heart a slave ? And you especially, young men, should you not rather have in readiness, for her seductive tones, the proud reply which Balaam first gave Balak : ' If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or

more' ?<sup>1</sup> Oh, had he but kept firm to that reply, how much less tarnished would have been his name, how much more calm his conscience ! Ye who, like him, are much exposed to snares, see that ye profit by his loss ! Hear what Balaam the son of Beor says : ' All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.'<sup>2</sup>

Beloved, surely the world has not the first place in your heart ?

## 2.

How sad, if it were so ! But, as you see, Balaam's history gives, secondly, a deep insight into the *slavery of sin*. ' Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.'<sup>3</sup> If ever the truth of these words was confirmed in a touching manner, it is in the man whose history now lies before us. He is, indeed, far from a monster specimen of immorality, such as is sometimes, though but rarely found. According to the light of these old times, he certainly knows God in some degree ; he has some reverence, too, for God,—some fear, even, of displeasing God. At least, he quite declines to go to Balak when the first request was sent, until he has asked counsel at the Lord ; and when the Lord decidedly forbade his going, then the messengers return, their mission unfulfilled. ' A promising beginning,' you would say : alas, we soon perceive in Balaam what virtue is in the natural man ! Strong selfishness is seen to be the motive principle of even his life, both inwardly and outwardly ; a selfishness which showed itself, on one side, in a childish vanity, and on the other, in insatiable avarice. There is, in the whole character of Balaam,

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John ii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> John viii. 34.

even looked at in most favourable moments, an element of insincerity, duplicity, false policy, that calls less for compassion than contempt. Even at the first, when Balak sent the messengers, he tells the truth, indeed, but only half the truth; he says, indeed, that God has quite forbidden him to go, but not that God has utterly forbidden him to curse. Thus he himself holds out encouragement for a second invitation; and when it actually comes, it is accepted with the secret fear that he shall not be able to accomplish everything that is desired, but specially with the earnest wish that he may earn the proffered reward, which glitters now before his eyes. You see he is under the dominion of sin, and at the same time so blinded and hardened, that he remains insensible to the most powerful appeals. Think for a moment of the mysterious meeting that took place on his journey: opinions vary on the point, but this is plain enough,—that the Lord Himself meets him upon the way, to make him feel the terror of His wrath. It speedily appears, that the permission given to gratify his evil wish was not unbounded liberty, but rather was a test, a judgment, and a punishment. He hears himself upbraided by an irrational animal for stubbornness of heart; and when God opens his eyes, he sees the Angel of the Lord with drawn sword in his hand, as if to bar the way against him in his fatal, foolish course; just as upon the narrow mountain-path which he descends, he finds himself impeded in this course, upon the right and left, so that he scarce can turn in any way. Will not Balaam now, think you, alarmed by such disturbing signs, consider for a moment longer, ere he enters on a struggle with the Lord and His own people? Ah, the sleep of sin will not be broken even by a miracle, when once the stubborn will is fixedly directed to its evil end! Balaam's head, indeed, bows down in presence of the angel who

appears, but his heart of stone remains unbroken still. His mouth in stammering tones says, 'I have sinned,' and he declares himself quite ready to return; but still his heart's desire is ever to what was forbidden him before. And while the beast that carried him winced under every angry blow, the man himself remains inflexible under the chastisement of God. He is so blind as not even to perceive that the permission given him to go still farther is not any benefit, but rather a judicial sentence passed on him; and that he ever cherishes the secret hope of influencing the Unchangeable, so that He shall concede his heart's wish,—that the people shall be cursed. And finally, although he turns no longer to his sorceries (chap. xxiv. 1), this is simply because he sees these are without effect; his heart remains as far as ever from the Lord. If he does not fulfil what Balak wished, it is not that his own desires are contrary, but that he has no power to do anything at all. And to crown all, after he himself has suffered the most shameful defeat, and proclaimed the triumph of Israel, he is so little changed by all that has occurred, that he secretly gives an abominable advice for leading Israel astray, and lives and dies an enemy of God and His people. When, shortly afterwards, you see him lying slain upon the battle-field, do you not think upon the words of truth, 'The wages of sin is death'? Yes; Balaam cries to you, 'Know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.'<sup>1</sup> Oh, how unutterably wretched does sin make her slaves,—body and soul, for time and for eternity! He who permits himself for once to be allured by her seductive tones, soon finds, like Balaam, that it is indeed no feeble influence, but rather a most dreadful potency, which makes a man, first, her close ally, then her instru-

<sup>1</sup> Jer. ii. 19.

ment, and finally her sacrifice. The world still sets herself to find the weak points in our hearts, as Balak sounded Balaam, and endeavoured to make use of him in carrying his point ; and even when there is not wanting much that is both good and praiseworthy, one bosom sin is quite enough, just as in Balaam's case, to ruin us. At first, the conscience warns, as God forbade Balaam to accept of Balak's invitation ; but woe unto the man who learns from him the fatal secret how to sear that conscience as with a hot iron ! The warning voice within is silent soon, and we become the helpless prey of every one who but attracts us with the wages of unrighteousness. We hear the admonitions given, but we understand them not,—appeals, but we believe them not,—faint thunder-sounds, presaging the approach of threatened storms, but little do we, in our folly, pay regard to these. Say not that it is quite incomprehensible how, after such a terrible experience of the displeasure of a holy God, Balaam could for a moment think of going on. For such is every man who has once set aside the word of God ; even though an angel should appear, or one should rise up from the dead, he would refuse to hear what was addressed to him. Sometimes, indeed, the false confession will be uttered, 'I have sinned ;' but true contrition, an immediate turning from the path of error which each one has chosen for himself, would, we need hardly say, require us to forsake the honour, and the gain, and friendship of the world ; but it is here especially that Balaam's nature shows itself ! Approach, indeed, is made to God by lip, but properly by lip alone. For sake of gain, people would be and would do everything,—would even be religious ; but unconditionally to present one's real self upon God's altar, is too hard for flesh and blood. The one bosom sin, be it that of Balaam or any other, speaks louder far than any higher voice ; and very

gladly would most men make a compromise when a decided choice has to be made. To do the will of God, but yet in such a way as not to spoil one's interest with men like Balak, is the plan pursued by the servant of sin. And even when, as here, the understanding thoroughly perceives the hopelessness of any struggle which man may commence with God, the heart will still refuse to make surrender of itself to God. How very much of the eternal truth we may, just like Balaam, perceive, bear witness to, believe, while, inwardly, we have had no experience of the emancipation by the truth! And what a multitude there is of peaceful dying-hours, which yet are quite as void of real peace and hope as that of this great sorcerer in Midian's camp! It is quite possible to know God's will, and yet not do that will: how frequently do men give ear to messages from heaven, and yet pursue the road to hell! Listen to what Balaam the son of Beor says. 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!'

Beloved, are you still the slaves of sin, or are you now the freedmen of the Lord?

### 3.

If you are still, in secret, slaves to sin, well may this give you deep concern. Balaam appears before us, thirdly, as a *witness of God's glory*. In one of the Psalms, there occurs a passage which is confirmed and explained in the most striking manner by this very history. 'With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, God often puts Himself in the same attitude towards men as that in which men place themselves to Him. If you are true, the true God comes towards you as a friend; if you are false and faithless,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xviii. 26.

He but hides His face from you, even while you seem to seek Him earnestly; and in just judgment He but gives you up to your own folly and unrighteousness. So was it with Balaam here; so was it both before and afterwards with many who, like him, preferred men's honour to the praise of God. When Balaam honestly begins to ask, God simply answers, 'Do not go; and specially, do not curse Israel, for they are blessed.' But when Balaam shows that, notwithstanding this, he burns with an unholy desire to gratify the wish of Balak, God modifies, to some extent, the strong restraint He had imposed upon this wicked man, and says, 'Depart.' Not that the Lord has changed His mind, for Balaam may not go to *curse*, though this was the sole aim he had in view; he may speak nothing but what God puts on his lips; he certainly can go, but only to find out, in this way, that he has no power against the Lord. God in his anger grants him his request, as when a father lets incorrigible children have their way, though less in favour than in wrath; but when the sorcerer begins to do according to his heart's desire, mark that he can do nothing but what God's hand and His counsel have before determined to be done. He still retains his liberty, responsibility, and guilt; he cannot say that he goes down into perdition without warning, but only that he was unwilling to be saved. God even intervenes by miracle to bring him to regard his sins; the inward monitor no longer speaks,—one of the lower animals assumes its place; Balaam's pride is deeply humbled on discovering that the great gift, on which he plumed himself so much, can be bestowed on even a brute,—nay, more, that this same beast which carries him, for once has seen much more than he. But while the Lord thus shows His mighty power, and His unceasing efforts to prevent the sinner in his downward course, He likewise shows Himself longsuffering!

Balaam is not slain by the angel's sword, though he is shown that he has forfeited his life ; God lengthens out His time of grace, and still prepares new revelations of His glory, hoping that these may be of more effect than former ones. On those unholy lips He puts the language of true prophecy ; and, even before these eyes, He shows His glory as the Covenant-God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Balaam is not let go till it is shown that he has chosen for himself no blessing, but the curse which he could not bring down on Israel, and that he is determined to remain an enemy of that true God who but employs him as His instrument. But whatever fiendish pleasure this black wretch may now derive, when, through the counsel he had given, the Israelites bring on themselves the curse of God, at least he shall not have the satisfaction of frustrating God's design. God rather shows Himself, all through this wondrous history, the only and the ever Faithful One,—faithful not only in His promises, but in His threatenings,—faithful in all that has been laid down in His counsels of eternity ; and what else could these counsels be but the salvation of His chosen Israel? Do not your thoughts anticipate my words in noticing that, in the main, God still pursues the selfsame plan with many here, who love and follow sin, as He did with Balaam? Never did He permit you to remain groping in darkness, when you truly sought to understand His will. The voice of conscience, calls of Providence, and words of Scripture have, by turns, striven, as it were, to call to you more loudly than the others, in God's name, 'This is the way ; walk ye in it!' But have you not had quite as little inclination as Balaam to forsake your sinful lusts? And thus the Holy One, to whom you showed so little gratitude, has gradually given you up to the perversity of your own heart. Yet it is not as if God thus gave up all further efforts in the way of warning you :

these He continues to put forth far longer than you ever could expect,—yea, longer than you are yourself disposed to grant. No longer are there miracles performed to intimate to the ungodly man that it shall not fare well with him, and that he shall but eat the fruit of what he sowed. But heaven and earth, the dead and those who live, nature and grace, appear as if they now and then combined in earnest supplication to exclaim, ‘Stop, sinner, stop!’ Who has not sometime, like Balaam, come face to face with God, upon the path of sin, when He made known His terrors and His threatenings? And what man dares affirm that there has been too little effort made to lead him from the broad way to the narrow path of life? Nay, more; Balaam’s brief experience is, in a certain sense, as nothing when compared with that long labour of love which God in Christ has most unweariedly bestowed upon us, that we might be saved. Nay, God has no delight in any sinner’s death, but spares when He could smite; nor does He ever suffer us to hold on in the way to death, without affording us a last, loud warning, that not seldom comes on us as if it were an angel’s sword piercing our very bones. Blessed, thrice blessed he who, with a more unfeigned humility than that of Balaam, can acknowledge, ‘I have sinned,’ and who does not grow hard in sin, but lets himself be led. Soon shall he learn, with deep astonishment, that God’s good angels round encircle him in all his ways; and that far more is to be gained in serving Him, than the disgraceful pittance offered by the Balak-hand of a vain world. But if, like Balaam, you still kick against the pricks, the time is drawing nigh when you, like him, shall be cast from the presence of the God of everlasting righteousness, and given over to that death which you so obstinately choose before the life now offered you. Yet think not, O vain man, that thou shalt have more

success than Balaam in attempting to frustrate God's purpose, and make evil triumph over good. This is the curse of every evil deed,—and Balaam's history confirms the truth,—that it must ever be productive of fresh ills; and no less is it true, that wicked men have no power to prevent the God of boundless goodness in the execution of His plan; and either now or afterwards, it will appear that there has been but one link wanting in the chain of plans sketched out by Him whom we opposed. God's word and truth are glorified in the destruction of the impenitent, as well as in the saving of the penitent. And like this history, the gospel, men's experience, and our own life, all represent Him as long-suffering, even to the greatest sinners, but inexorably rigorous, and strictly faithful to His word! But is it possible for any sinner to grow hardened towards such a God, and yet have lasting peace? Hear what Balaam the son of Beor saith: 'God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?'<sup>1</sup>

Beloved, is this God even now your rock, your portion for eternity?

#### 4.

A most important question, and well calculated to rouse any one to earnest thoughtfulness! We scarce need say that it depends on this alone whether we also may apply to our own case the comfort brought from God, through Balaam, to the true servants of the Lord. The fourth point here presented to our minds is, *the happiness of the redeemed*. The Israelites are set before you here as the redeemed of God, threatened, although they did not

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxiii. 19.

know it, with the danger of a prophet's curse. Imagine what a sight that camp must have presented at this juncture in the nation's history! There lies the chosen nation, at the foot of Pisgah and of Peor, like a vast flock covering a wide extent of wilderness, but ever under the Good Shepherd's care. The camp forms an immense square; each corner is occupied by three tribes, every one of which may be distinguished by the banner flying over it, though, chief among the whole, the lion of the tribe of Judah meets the eye. In midst of all there stands the Tabernacle of witness, and over it the cloudy pillar rests in stately majesty: thousands rejoice in hope that soon their feet shall tread the Promised Land. Who are they standing on yon lonely rock, with evil eye, and looking down upon that host, like some fierce birds of prey viewing their victims in unconscious sleep? 'Tis Balak, who expects far more from cursing than from mighty hosts; it is Balaam, who, for the sake of gold, is ready to do anything, even what may bring destruction upon Israel. The children of Moab and Midian be upon you, Israel!—but nay, He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Already there ascends the flame of sacrifice, and, near at hand, the prophet who was brought to curse beseeches God to hear his prayer; his mouth he opens to give utterance to what would quite please Balak,—but, O son of Beor, what is this? The stream of prophecy flows forth, indeed, but all that he can utter is pure blessing for this Israel. In spite of his own wish, in the most glorious words of prophecy he celebrates the fame, the origin, the multitude, the blessedness of Israel. Now he exclaims (chap. xxiii. 8, 9): 'How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?' And then (ver. 20): 'Behold, I have received command-

ment to bless ; and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel ; the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.' And finally (chap. xxiv. 5) : 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!'—But why should we deprive you of the pleasure to be gained in reading this yourself? Take up his God-given words before you, like so many diamonds of brightest lustre joined together in a string, and mark how he—not willingly, but just because he must—pronounces blessing after blessing upon Israel ; say, too, whether his prophecy has not been gloriously fulfilled? Well might a better prophet than Balaam declare of God's own Israel, 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.'<sup>1</sup> And again, another prophet says : 'I will be as the dew unto Israel ; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.'<sup>2</sup> If the son of Beor could rise from the grave, do you not think that he would be beyond measure astonished at finding this same posterity of Abraham still scattered through the world, more numerous now than in his days, in spite of centuries of persecutions quite unparalleled, and with regard to whom a monarch of last century,<sup>3</sup> even though an unbeliever, was constrained to say, 'History has taught me that this nation can never be oppressed, without the oppression returning sooner or later on the oppressor.' Yea, 'Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?'<sup>4</sup> But do not these words apply also to you and me, if we by faith belong to God's peculiar people? Surely this is self-evident : what Balaam says of Israel applies most fully to the company of the redeemed, whom God's own Son has purchased for Himself by His own blood.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liv. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Hos. xiv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick the Great.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 29.

If you have let this Lord conduct you from the deep, hard slavery of sin, you are entitled to receive more benefits than even Balaam praised ; you have a right to God's spiritual and eternal blessings in the Son of His love. The people of the Lord still dwell, like Israel, in a certain sense, alone, though scattered everywhere throughout the world ; nor do they mingle with a single family besides. But still the words hold true regarding them (Num. xxiv. 6), 'As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side.' Yea, verily ; life, joy, and fruitfulness become the share of all who are in truth the children of the Lord ; and as the cedar, mentioned also by Balaam, still flourishes even in the driest season, while its wood is not exposed to ravages from the devouring worm, so does the Christian carry in himself the principle of a far higher, an undying life. No marvel, for he is accepted as God's son and heir ; and now it may be said of him too, as of Israel, that God 'does not regard his sins.' Ye friends of God, say whether there is not with you, too, 'heard the shout of your king,' as soon as the sweet gospel sound brings God's consoling words ; say, too, if, though but weak yourselves, you cannot frequently exult in God's great might, 'as a unicorn, as a young lion.' And ye, the world of unbelief, say not, for your own sakes, how frequently you have unwittingly betrayed yourself, like Balaam, when you sighed and wished you were as happy as the Lord's redeemed ! Who shall count the multitudes, more numerous than Israel, that, scattered everywhere throughout the world, stand up to testify that verily there is prosperity within the dwellings of the righteous ? And who shall tell in what a multiplicity of ways Israel's experience has shown that God has not allowed our enemies to curse,—or if they did, the curse became a blessing from the Lord ? This is assuredly

one of the most astonishing and yet most gladdening experiences of every spiritual life,—that God continually makes even an evil purpose, formed against us by our fellow-men, work for our good. David may count, among the men who did him good, not merely such as kind Barzillai, but also Shimei with all the curses he pronounced ; and many servants of the Lord have greater cause to thank their enemies for their reproach, than friends who gave them flattery. And when our spiritual enemies make us give heed to some weak point in our defence ; when they inflict, again, upon the soul, a wound whose pain makes us more loose to earth and ripens us for heaven ; and when, once more, by their own wickedness, they bring us to self-knowledge, to humility, to greater watchfulness,—what else are they than Balaams, come to curse, but through whom God designs to bless ? It would be endless work did we but seek to show you even the leading instances in which the evil plans of enemies and their attacks have been transformed to blessings for the Church by her great Lord. And something we may leave for your own thoughts ; but we must specially entreat you to fill up, as much as possible, what has been said by instances connected with your own experience. Well may we now leave you yourselves to say, whether you know of any happiness to be compared with that of the true Israel, to which each follower of Christ belongs ; well may we ask, too, if you are astonished that a subject of God's kingdom will not sell his rights for even a hundred royal crowns. Give ear ! Balaam the son of Beor speaks : ' Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance ! ' <sup>1</sup>

Beloved, do you envy or commiserate the man who is a subject of this King ?

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxiii. 12.

## 5.

But Balaam has not yet directed his last words to us. Four times has he addressed himself to Balak, but the fifth time to a gathering of Christians. How could we turn away from him, without at least attending to his words about the *glory of the latter days*? It is another glance he gives us at the close of history. In mute astonishment, Balak must listen while the mercenary prophet first extols the brilliant past of Israel, and then their present blessed state: is there no single word, not even a syllable of imprecation to be heard? At last, when all advice has no effect, when Balak's patience finds its end, he sends the sorcerer away—of course with empty hands. But 'Come now,' says Balaam, still plainly guided by a power which he feels irresistible (chap. xxiv. 14), 'and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days.' And now an unseen hand lifts up the curtain of the distant future for that bloated countenance. 'I shall see Him,'—he exclaims (ver. 17), as if with outstretched finger, and with head bent forward to behold,—'I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and' (as we must render it) 'destroy all the children of tumult!' I shall say nothing of what he has further uttered with regard to the Amalekites and the Assyrians, the Kenites and the Kittites; and of what, in the opinion of the chief expositors, concerns the history of ages then remote. With you, I look upon the charming lustre which he sees thrown round the house of Israel; and I but ask,—Does that to which the Spirit of prophecy now specially directs your thoughts appear to be an enigma? The Star and Sceptre, as you know, are, in symbolic Scripture language,

signs of royalty ; and this prediction has been strikingly fulfilled by the Davidic monarchy ; for then, more than at any other time, the power of Moab was restrained. But should we rest content with viewing this, and not rise higher to that one and only King, through whom the royal crown of David has obtained the lustre of eternity ? We do not here decide whether and in how far Balaam, in his ecstatic state, foresaw the advent of that Great Deliverer Himself. But does it not deserve remark, that when the wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, it was a star that guided them to Christ, then newly born ; that, in the second century, a false Messiah took the name ' Bar-Cochba,' *i.e.* *Son of the Star* ; that most renowned expositors, Jewish as well as Christian, have both found, in these words, more or less direct reference to Him who calls Himself ' the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star ' ?<sup>1</sup> Nay, verily, son of Beor, thou art by no means least among the heralds of the New Economy who lived while yet the Old prevailed ! Thou, too, hast, in thy way, borne witness to this King of Heaven, who, raised to sit at God's right hand, extends the sceptre of His power over the world, and will not rest till He has utterly deprived ' the sons of tumult ' of the weapons which they bear. But how, then, shall our lips declare, in measure adequate, the glory of a King concerning whom even this unholy mouth speaks with such evident regard, although his thoughts are both obscure and intricate ? Balaam's prophecy becomes an intimation of Christ's advent to this earth,<sup>2</sup> and the annunciation rises to the joyful strains, ' Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; for behold, thy King cometh unto thee ! ' Blessed are we, who see the day of great deliverance, long looked for by the prophets and the kings of old ; and who have much more

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> This sermon was preached Dec. 12, 1858.

cause than they for boasting of the spiritual influences of the mercy of our God, with which 'the day-spring from on high hath visited us!' We do bless Him who came to show Himself to those who 'sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'<sup>1</sup> No princely sceptre ever has been stretched out half so tenderly as this great sceptre out of Israel. No star in morning or in evening sky has ever beamed so softly upon men as does the Star that rose out of Jacob. To him who wanders in the darkest night, that Star fails not to show the safest path; even towards weeping eyes, it shines with comforting and friendly light; over the dust of our departed ones, it still sheds its own unclouded brilliancy. What a Balaam then scarce saw from afar, is now beheld by millions in the clearest light; and with the tones of praise and joyfulness, 'God's kingdom comes,' there is combined the prayer of hope, 'Come quickly, Lord.' But these prophetic words as yet are but in part fulfilled, and multitudes of wandering stars distract the eyes from God's fair heavenly light. For, are there not full many eyes that never yet have looked upon this Star of Jacob? are there not many children of sedition, who refuse to kneel before the Sceptre out of Israel? This age, indeed, in which we live, is bringing the fulfilment of these prophecies; but this, too, is the later advent-time,—the time of preparation for the Lord's return. That dark presentiment of ruin close at hand, which then stirred Midian and Moab to spasmodic efforts against Israel, is rising by degrees again within the world still out of Christ; and on the mountain-tops of faith, all Christians may once more behold the vision of this seer with its enigmas. Yes; 'I behold Him,—but not now; I see Him,—but not nigh; a Star, arising out of Jacob, shall in brightness far surpass all other princely

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 79.

stars ; and the Sceptre out of Israel shall compel all the rebellious ones to yield !' Give ear and hear ! Balaam the son of Beor speaks : ' Behold, He cometh quickly, and His reward is with Him, to give to every man according as his work shall be !'<sup>1</sup>

Beloved, shall that day be for you a day of glory, or a day of fear ?

The mercenary prophet has reminded us of many precious truths ; but all the questions that have been suggested by what we have been considering may be reduced to this one,—What have you to say about yourself ? Nay, do not be so proud as to refuse comparison with Beor's son. It is remarkable, how even in the New Testament, believers have been warned against the ways and doctrines of Balaam ; and he who is acquainted with the little world within himself, knows that, though names are changed, there is no change of principles. Again, Balaam seems to me to be the type of those who speak the truth, yet are not of the truth,—who know about the Lord, yet do not know Him in the proper sense,—in whom most brilliant talents are combined with glaring sins,—whose understanding was enlightened at the first, but who remain still unrenewed in heart. And does not every Balak on this earth find his Balaam ? does not his great ambition, too, and thirst for gold, hold an important place within your social and domestic life,—yes, and your hidden life with God ? Nay, are not many who profess their faith in Christ still far behind the man who showed himself, at least at first, disposed to understand and to obey the will of God ? Do not the flesh and the spirit stand as irreconcilably opposed, each to the other, even in the Christian, as Balak did to Israel ? and is there not a multitude of features still remaining on the face of the new man, which involuntarily remind us of the old

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 12.

Balaam? Whoever you may be, do not descend from yonder height, ere you have solemnly considered with yourself how near God's kingdom we may seem to be, and yet be truly far away; how much we may do for the Lord, and yet not serve Him in sincerity; and specially, how great a power of grace is needed to regenerate our hearts, with their deceitfulness and their unfaithfulness! Awake, ye sleepers! And ye who are now awake, pray that ye may be taught to know yourselves, not merely superficially, but in the full light of God's holiness. And follow Balaam in this one respect at least,—that his desire and prayer may be truly yours: 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'

Does your heart also say 'Amen' to such a prayer as this? Well shall it be for you when He, who desireth truth in the inward parts, hears it arise within your soul. But let not any one forget these things: that we may die with righteous men, we must have lived as righteous men; that we may live as righteous ones, we must have first approached the Lord with the unfeigned confession of unrighteousness and guilt. Oh, come, come all to Him, who willingly took on Himself the greatest curse, that He might bring His blessing upon you; and let His Spirit henceforth lead you on the path of truth and righteousness! Why should you listen to the world, which vainly promises to honour you, but shows that it will rather send disgrace? Give ear! Balaam the son of Beor speaks:—But no! His must not be the last words we shall hear to-day. Thus saith the First and the Last, the faithful and true Witness: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER X.

### The Expectation of Salvation.

‘The Lord thy God shall raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me : unto Him shall ye hearken.’—  
DEUT. xviii. 15.

‘*What is truth?*’ Is there a single question that has been so long, and with such frequency, reiterated on all sides, by men of the most different opinions, than that well-known question asked by Pilate? But you know full well yourselves, that wheresoever we direct our ears, we find the question is re-echoed constantly from minds the most diverse in all respects. ‘What is truth?’ asks the light-headed youth in his frivolity, with heart devoid of sympathy for aught but pleasures of the sense; and, borne along himself by mere deceptive, outward show, he scarce can understand how any man still tries to get at the reality. ‘What is truth?’ asks the philosopher again, as he unfolds, to their full breadth, the wings of reason, so that he may rise above the clouds of error, while he thankfully receives the rays of light that let him see the path of safety which he must pursue. ‘What is truth?’ the sceptic silently sighs forth: he calls in question the reality of truth,—at least deems its attainment quite impossible for man; the search for this great treasure he regards almost as vain and foolish as the fruitless efforts to discover the philosopher’s stone. ‘What is truth?’ the Christian in his return repeats,

seeking, amid the conflict of opinions, to attain firm anchor-ground ; and, not content with simple repetition of what others have affirmed before, he seeks to give an independent reason for his holy faith. And will it really be needful to maintain the right to ask a question having for its object nothing less than this,—the satisfaction of the primary requirements of our minds ? I am indeed aware that the question frequently betrays a sad disinclination to receive the word which God Himself has given us men ; and that it is not he who blindly gropes about in deep uncertainty, but he who thankfully can say he has both seen and found, that is the true disciple of the Christ. Nevertheless, this very Christ has well declared, ‘Every one who is of the truth heareth my voice ;’<sup>1</sup> and there is no more profitable business to engage in than that which Solomon has recommended in his well-known words, ‘Buy the truth and sell it not.’<sup>2</sup> He who refuses to expend a single farthing that he may obtain this treasure, forfeits every right and title to receive the name of man ; for man can only seek for, or dispute the truth,—he cannot live deprived of it. Doubt as regards the truth from God brings darkness on our souls, distraction to our minds, and takes all comfort from our life and death. A firm conviction, on the other hand, though frequently the issue of an inward strife, produces in its turn a comforting tranquillity ; and even the heavenly King could not give promise to His subjects of a higher bliss than what is pointed out in His sententious words, ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’<sup>3</sup> But where shall we discover this fair child of heaven ? and how shall we be kept from foolishly imagining that our own castle-in-the-air is really the temple of the truth ? Oh that we all sought this,—sought it with all the earnestness and deep

<sup>1</sup> John xviii. 37.<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxiii. 23.<sup>3</sup> John viii. 32.

concern of those who prize the truth above all else besides! Then would it be to you a joyful message which we now proclaim as God's ambassador: the promise comes to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off,—even this, 'The Lord thy God shall raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him shall ye hearken.'

We have already set before you, under various lights, the remarkable man to whom we owe these remarkable words. But the more we look at him, so much more naturally does the question force itself on every thoughtful mind: in what relation stood the greatest man of God, under the Old Economy, to what is now found in the New? Had Moses less of privilege than the patriarchs preceding him, and the whole host of God's ambassadors succeeding him, who were permitted to behold, in clearer light, the day of our salvation, now begun? Has he himself not given his contribution to that glad expectancy, continued through so many centuries, of a Messiah, the Deliverer,—this Prophet with regard to whom the Lord declared to unbelieving Jews, that even Moses would accuse them to the Father, inasmuch as he, too, wrote of Him?<sup>1</sup> Has he done no more than preserve for us the first links of that chain, not even adding to its length a single link himself? and is it true that, while, in many ways, he shadows forth the Christ, he cannot properly be called a witness and a herald of the King? If we were forced to be content without an answer to such inquiries, our knowledge of the highly-privileged man of God would be deficient on a most essential point. But, if we mistake not, the words of the text supply the want; and gladly do we seize the opportunity of bringing to the light of truth this side of one who is so worthy of our reverence.

<sup>1</sup> John v. 45, 46.

Eight days ago, Balaam led our thoughts far past Mosaic times,—to-day, we are concerned with Moses' own ideas of the great deliverance to which he still looked forward: then, we were pointed by Balaam to the Star that would arise from Jacob,—now, the mouth of Moses will describe the Prophet to arise among His brethren.<sup>1</sup>

Were it still necessary to make some considerable effort by way of arousing your attention, there would now be less need than ever to search for suitable inducements. The words of the text are of importance for the right understanding of Moses himself; because, as will soon appear, they point us to a remarkable incident in the history of his secret intercourse with God. Still more important are they in reference to this day of rest, when we are summoned in a special manner to renew our common confession, before we celebrate the approaching sacrament of the Lord's Supper,—a confession of which the great centre is here pointed out to us in a manner as natural as it is appropriate. But most important are the words in view of the approaching Christmas-tide, which soon will call us joyfully to hail the saving grace of God in Christ, that hath appeared unto all men.<sup>2</sup> What better can we do, on the last Sunday in Advent, than once more place ourselves, in thought, back in those ever memorable times, when, though the dawn of prophecy already was beginning to light up the darkened heavens, the Sun of Righteousness Himself still lingered far below the great horizon of the spiritual world? Let Moses, then, even more distinctly now than ever previously, fulfil his high and sacred calling in conducting us to Christ! And when, to-day, we speak together of his looking forward to redemption times, we shall, at once, pay due regard to Moses himself,

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached Dec. 19, 1858.

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

to the confession proper to the present time, and to our preparation for the Christmas-tide. The threefold task to which we now address ourselves is,—to point out to you the grandeur of this expectation; to show that these high expectations have now been fulfilled; to show what is required of those who cherish hopes like these. To state the matter more succinctly and with more precision, in the text we find abundance of material to speak about (1) *the grandest hope of all antiquity*; (2) *the greatest Witness to the truth*; (3) *the holy calling of our Christianity*.

O holy Father! sanctify us through Thy truth; Thy word is truth. Lord of the Church! reveal Thyself to us also, as the way, the truth, and the life. Spirit of grace! open our ear and our heart, that we may hear the voice of him who cries, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His path straight!' Amen.

## 1.

The grandest hope of antiquity! Could the sublime *object* of that hope have ever been proclaimed by more venerable lips, and before a more numerous audience, than in the words of the text? No; certainly there never has been so impressive a farewell address delivered, as that which is contained in the greater part of Deuteronomy. The speaker is an aged man, whose venerable head is covered with the snowy white of nearly sixscore years, but whose voice is still both loud and clear enough to make itself be heard far off. The audience is a people now redeemed: rulers, heads and members of families, in thousands and ten thousands, crowd around the spot from which the prophet of the Lord addresses them. The sanctuary where they are assembled is creation's mighty temple, bounded on the

one side by the wilderness which they quitted only recently, and on the other by the stream which they were soon to cross. And the address itself is nothing less than the last lessons, reminders of past events, exhortations, and promises, uttered by lips which, ere a few months shall have passed, will be silent in the dust. We can well understand that an address like this, delivered under circumstances such as these, must have had an immense effect, even on the hardest hearts ; and that Moses made a special effort to inscribe the words of the Lord, not on stone tables as before, but on the fleshly tables of many hearts. In the context, he shows himself most earnest in giving express warning against the seductions of false prophets. The people were forbidden, under any circumstances, to betake themselves to sorcerers (see ver. 10 ff.), as heathen nations did ; nor was there any need of this to those who had received the light of special revelation from above. The Lord Himself would never let them want His counsel and His aid ; for, 'a Prophet shall the Lord thy God raise up unto thee of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto Him shall ye hearken.'

We are not inclined to deny that Moses here promises, in time to come, a continuous revelation by prophecy ; and that the whole series of prophets who appeared and spake, one after the other, in the name of Jehovah, may thus be regarded as an initial fulfilment of this prediction. So also (vers. 20-22) there is a general reference to the false prophet who should speak in his own name, and to the well-merited punishment which awaited him. But, making allowance for all this, it is absolutely impossible to miss seeing Christ Himself in these words ; nay, we consider that this more general explanation, which is comparatively true, leads to a decided untruth, when we fail to regard Him who is no less than the glorious and indispensable Leader of the venerable com-

pany of the prophets. Though these words have already received partial fulfilment in the messengers of God who followed Moses, and concerning whom, moreover, one of the sacred writers<sup>1</sup> declares that it was the Spirit of Christ which bare witness in them before He appeared, we have no hesitation in advancing a step farther. For who is so worthy of being called *the* Prophet, in the fullest extent of the word, as He who has fully made known to us the Father's will and counsel for our salvation? Does not the sacred writer expressly declare, at the end of this same book, that 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face'?<sup>2</sup> And do not the greatest of the prophets, as if they wished to refuse honour which they did not deserve, most constantly and emphatically speak of one perfect Servant of the Lord, for whose doctrine the islands were to wait, and to whose voice the nations were to listen? It is in this sense that the words of the text have been understood by the best Jewish and Christian expositors of all ages, and doubtless also by the contemporaries of the Lord. Witness the Samaritan woman, who held only to the books of Moses, and yet could say, 'I know that when the Christ cometh, He shall (as Prophet) tell us all things.' Witness a Philip, who declared he had found Him of whom Moses had written in the law; and the multitudes who repeatedly hailed the Lord as the Prophet who was to come into the world. In like manner is this divine utterance explained by His first apostles,—notably by Stephen and Peter; and He Himself repeatedly appeals to Moses as a witness to His Messianic destiny. Nay, the Father Himself, as if desirous of putting an end to all controversy, caused the words to be heard from the excellent glory, as a distinct echo to these promises, 'This is my

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 10.

beloved Son ; hear ye Him !' If any one, in the face of such testimonies, still denies all reference in this prediction to the person of the Lord, verily, we have as little desire of having a spirit like his as inclination to tread in his uncertain footsteps.

You see how clearly He is set before us in these words. 'A prophet,'—a favourite and confidant of God, who stands higher, sees farther, and can speak more positively than all other men ; and who, being initiated into God's adorable designs regarding this world, reveals the secrets of the future when it pleases Him who has commissioned him ! 'A prophet out of the midst of his brethren,'—bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, and thus connected with the house of Jacob by the most sacred ties ! A prophet 'like Moses,'—that is, not one who should in no respect surpass Moses, but one who, like Moses, should occupy a position peculiarly his own,—who should stand far above all prophets, and be thus, no less than he, thoroughly fitted for the grand and noble task awaiting Him ! Yet, anything higher than Moses, the Israelite of those days could not conceive possible on earth ; Moses was, and remained for Him, no less than the visible interpreter and representative of the invisible Deity. Had not Jehovah Himself assigned to Moses such an exceptional rank above all other prophets ? Just hear His own words, addressed to Aaron and his sister Miriam on that memorable occasion when they showed themselves so contentious : 'If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to 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.'<sup>1</sup> And now, do you ask on what ground

<sup>1</sup> Num. xii. 6-8.

this man of God could promise to the children of his people, with such positive certainty, such a Prophet,—no less than Moses, a benefactor, protector, and intercessor of the people,—for all that is contained, directly or indirectly, in this title, in this connection? The immediately succeeding context affords a reply to that question, as astonishing as it is sufficient, and informs us of the origin of this his grandest hope. Nay, the servant of God here speaks less than ever of himself; he merely repeats what had been announced to him, on an ever-memorable occasion, by the God who sent him. Well-nigh forty years have passed since the nation, trembling, stood near Horeb with its summit wrapped in smoke, and there entreated that the Lord might no more speak to them out of that flaming fire. Moses had felt some hesitation in presenting that request; but he had been received with deepest condescension, and obtained, in answer, promise of new grace. As if in thorough confidence, the Lord had said to this man whom He favoured (vers. 17, 18), ‘They have well spoken that which they have spoken: I will raise them up a Prophet, from among their brethren, like unto thee.’ All this time has Moses carried with him, in his faithful heart, that blessed secret; and it has proved a hidden source of strength for work, for calm endurance, and for special efforts he must make. But now, before he leaves the scene of earthly toil, he must reveal this secret in his heart; the ray of heavenly light, that has refreshed and cheered himself, must also be allowed to shine before his brethren’s eyes. The Israelites must be informed that their approaching loss, his death, shall yet receive full compensation in the person of his substitute. Then, let even this Prime Minister depart: the King remains among His people still, showing His favour and His grace, and shall yet gloriously complete the work He has begun.

And now, to some extent at least, you are in a position where you well may estimate the value of a hope, whose origin and object are sufficiently well known. We do not here seek to determine the precise amount of clearness with which one like Moses looked on the fulfilment of this glorious prospect, nor to what time he referred the whole. It is enough that, in addition to so many promises of salvation given long before, and doubtless well known both to him and Israel, there is communicated now, as if in God Himself, a new and precious promise, that shall prove a preparation for some others yet to come. Did it not seem a strange idea, we should be inclined to compare the Messianic prophecies to one of those gigantic piles, the Pyramids of Egypt, that for ages have astonished every traveller. Just as the base of such monuments is of gigantic breadth, while every other layer, as you rise, is narrower than that on which it rests, until at last the summit tapers off to a thin point,—so is it with the gradual discoveries God makes to us regarding the way of salvation. First comes the promise to mankind in general ; then, to but one of their three heads,—to Shem ; next, to a single one of his descendants,—Abraham, and his chosen family ; then, among all the sons of Jacob, to but Judah ; and at last, of all the families in Judah, to the house of David. Jacob, as he lay dying, had beheld the hope of the fathers as the Prince of Peace ; now Moses, in his turn, adds to men's thoughts of Christ the element of his prophetic dignity, while indications of His sacerdotal work are left for later times. What we read here is still comparatively little, when we think of the abundance and the fulness of the later prophecies regarding Christ ; but who does not at once perceive what even this little was for Moses and for Israel ? Nay, verily, the man of God need not be so solicitous, even though he should at

once lay down the staff with which he wrought his miracles, lest his great work remain undone. Though this Old Covenant, which he has founded, still leaves many enigmas unsolved, yet, in the distance, he sees, glimmering, the light of new and ever higher revelations to be made. Even though the Israelites shall still continue to corrupt their way, and the task of those who follow Moses thus must prove more difficult instead of easier, it is enough that there comes One—the only One—who can be fully reckoned on as fit to do that work, and who, like him, will be superior to all,—yea, even surpass himself. Depart in peace, thou worthy Moses ; He that watches Israel still tends the people of His own inheritance, even when you sleep the sleep of death ! Though ages quickly roll over your place of rest, the Lord does not delay the promise He Himself made in your ears. A brilliant series of prophets shall repeat, promulgate, and maintain the witness first held forth by you ; and each one, in his way, as he is taught of God, shall, with the law, set forth the gospel to his fellow-men. And, lastly, there appears the Prophet, who Himself fulfils the hopes of every one, confirms the words of all ; but how much higher does He stand than you described Him unto Israel ! Oh that these Israelites had known the day of their visitation, and had not trampled under foot the great command, ‘ Unto Him shall ye hearken ! ’ Let us each breathe a prayer for the Israelites, who, once the first-fruits of the nations, have become despised of all, since they rejected this Great Prophet sent to them ! And let us render thanks to Him who has ingrafted us, by nature the wild olive-tree, upon the root of the old stock ; and who has shown, before the heathen world, the Prophet whom His own peculiar people have despised ! Well may we call aloud this day to you in fullest confidence, ‘ To-day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears ! ’

## 2.

It is with great reluctance that I enter on the task awaiting me in the second part of my address,—to sketch before you, in the light afforded by the text, the spotless image of *the greatest Witness to the truth*. If even Moses spake of Him with such apparent predilection, how much more may a holy ardour fill our hearts! Yet we must gird ourselves like men, though conscious we are stammering like children; and we must set before you Christ as the greatest Prophet of the New Covenant. But possibly that title sounds too humble in your ears, and you are ready to inquire if this be all the honour we now give our Lord,—that we regard Him as a Teacher of the highest eminence, a perfect pattern of morality, the greatest Son of nature, and *the* Man of men? O Lord our hope, Thou knowest well that Thou art more to us,—yea, infinitely more! Well is it for each one of us that we this day acknowledge Thee, with all who show Thee faith and love, as our alone High Priest, as our eternal King, as sharer of the nature and the majesty of God,—Thyself divine, to be adored supremely through eternity, well worthy of the homage of each knee and the confession of each tongue! But the unsearchable riches of Christ, that we are privileged to proclaim, are far too vast to be examined by a single glance; and even that special aspect in which we regard Him now is both sublime and glorious enough. If it appear that we have really, in Christ, the highest revelation which the Lord has made to men, the gospel then shall be to us a power of God through faith unto salvation; and there will also be abundant ground to justify the exhortation to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. Judge for yourselves, then, what we say; we speak as unto men who understand; and answer this,—

whether you can conceive of any higher revelation, both of truth and grace, than God has made to you in Christ?

That we may aid you, in a way, to give an answer to the question asked, let us direct your thoughts especially to the position occupied by Jesus Christ. As you well know, among the men of God under the Old Economy, Moses stands most pre-eminent. While holy stillness reigns throughout the tent of witness, Jehovah speaks with Moses face to face; and when the prophet presently unseals his mouth, and then begins: 'Thus saith the Lord,' ye listening Israelites may well believe it is not he alone that speaks, but God's own Spirit through the man. Nevertheless, what is even Moses' place among the prophets, when compared with that which faith beholds Christ occupy? I mention Moses' name; but when I do, I merely name the servant who, when it pleased the Master of the house, received what He revealed, and what He ordered to be done, but still continued a subordinate. I mention Christ; and when I do, I name the Son who, in the house, has in Himself the right of ownership, 'whose house are we,' a sacred writer adds, 'if we but hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.'<sup>1</sup> The prophet of the Old Covenant is of the earth, earthy; the Prophet of the New is the Lord from heaven! But know you not such things as these? have you not learned them from the mouth of His trustworthy witnesses? 'God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.'<sup>2</sup> He who here speaks to us is no less than that eternal Word, who was with God and was God, by whom all things have been made, and who, in the fulness of time,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. i. 1, 2.

appeared in human flesh. 'A prophet out of the midst of his brethren,'—yes, that He is ; for in His veins there flows true princely blood, and she who bare Him traces her descent direct from David's family. But He is, furthermore, the Son of God in a peculiar sense of the word ; and what the Baptist once bare witness to, 'He that is of the earth speaketh of the earth ; he that is from heaven is above all,'<sup>1</sup> applies without restriction to the Lord, when we compare Him with the men of God under the Old Economy. They testify what was delivered unto them at sacred moments by the Spirit of revelation ; Jesus speaks what He has seen and heard when with the Father in past ages, long before His incarnation ; and even as man, He still maintains constant communion with the Father, so that it can equally be said He is on earth and in the heavens. Nothing becomes the servant better than, 'Thus saith the Lord ;' the Son can testify, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you ;' and every form of contradiction and of opposition must give way before that 'Verily.' The prophets humbly point to Him as the greatest Prophet of all ; He points to none except the Father, and Himself as the one way unto the Father. He points also to the Spirit, but in this (be it observed) as unto one who shall not witness anything against His word, but who shall take of what is His and show it to His own. We need not wonder, certainly, that even the greatest of the prophets yields to Him, and utters words of reverence like these, 'I have need to be baptized of Thee ;'<sup>2</sup> for, in like manner, all the host of stars, and not they only, but the moon besides, withdraw their feeble light when the great prince of day, in all his splendour, rears his head out from the clouds. In short, whoever listens to the prophets as they speak, feels constantly that he is under gloom. The word of

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. iii. 14.

the Lord, grand though it be, is but the germ and presage of a something grander, higher far ; he who hears Jesus speak may well believe that His words are the last, the highest, and substantially the only words that God now has for sinful men—that all besides, even those in heaven, can but serve to explain and to confirm these last words uttered on this earth. But what more wouldst thou have, O thou uneasy, discontented mortal ? That the Infinite Himself might rend the heavens, and so come down to answer every question you may ask ? That happened when the Son, who is the same in essence with the Father, dwelt and conversed with us men ; and now, to every other question, it is but the Father who replies, pointing in silence to the gospel, and to that alone. How fortunate are we—beyond description fortunate ! Now, it is not another servant whom the Master of the vineyard has sent forth to the ungrateful husbandmen ; it is not even an angel whom He has commissioned to give peace to troubled hearts ; but His own Son, His second Self, His highest gift, with whom He has given everything, with whom He has blessed everything ! Oh, who can meditate upon the fact and realize its truth, that the sinful heart can have no rest so long as it has not received a special intimation from the God of truth Himself, without exclaiming, from the bottom of a heart filled with emotion, while he lays his folded hands upon the open gospel, ‘ Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift !’

Yea, verily, a gift unspeakable ; but must you not repeat these words, too, when you see the light diffused by Jesus Christ ? Far be it from us to cast disparagement upon or to despise the revelation made through Moses to the Israelites. The absolute unity of God, His perfect holiness, and matchless mercy, to all of which He has been ever pointing men—these were but

rays of that full light which we could only estimate if we were able to conceive how great the heathen darkness was. Correctly speaking, later prophets had but to develop the germs of the desires and views expressed before by Moses, or implicitly contained in what he wrote. But what is all that kindly twilight, when compared with the full light afforded by the day of grace? And what is that old revelation, made to one chosen nation, when compared with what is given us in Him who, in the fullest sense, could call Himself 'the Light of the world'? The Apostle John, who witnessed the burial of the Old Dispensation and the birth of the New, has placed in brief and striking contrast the nature and the relative value of each: 'The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'<sup>1</sup> Do not these words, 'grace and truth,' sound like a discord in your ears, when you turn away from that great mountain where the law was given, to that whereon the blessings were pronounced, and hear, like the soft dew that falls on fields quite parched and languishing, the words, 'Blessed, blessed, blessed,' dropping from His lips upon the heads of those assembled multitudes? Well might this Prophet, on His entrance into Nazareth, proclaim He was anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, to bring glad tidings to the meek, and heal those broken in their hearts. If Moses was a prophet for the obdurate, Jesus is one for contrite hearts; and the first miracle that each performed was a prognostic of what each should say, and do, and found; for Moses changes water into blood,—Christ changes water into wine! With Moses, God's unspotted holiness is made most prominent,—with Jesus Christ, His matchless love; in one case, offerings of penitence are brought,—but in the other, gifts of grace are readily bestowed; on one side,

<sup>1</sup> John i. 17.

there is mostly heard stern threatening,—upon the other, joyful promises. Moses speaks about the Judge, and even the boldest bow their heads towards the earth ; Jesus bears witness of the Father, and the most timid look above in confidence, that in the Son's eye they may read the Father's love. Cheered by the sight, they further look around, to see the lilies of the field and hear the birds of heaven as they proclaim the pity of the Lord. Moses demands repentance, but he cannot give the strength for it ; Jesus both promises and gives the Spirit that makes the dead to live. Moses makes promises and threats, but the rod of his command extends no farther than the narrow limits of this present life ; Jesus draws aside the veil that hides the future from our gaze, and shows His faithful ones the crown that cannot fade, awaiting them in heaven at their journey's end. What need for more ? To note the points of contrast would be endless work, even though we were content to specify no more than leading features, that have gained our Lord the honourable designation of the greatest Prophet, 'mighty in word and work before God and all the people.' Just think,—and it will be a worthy renewal of your Christian profession, as well as an appropriate extension of your Christmas rejoicings,—think what great wealth of precious truths, scarce known before, or once forgotten, have been brought into the foreground by the gospel ; think how they have been here deposited in such a form as to be quite accessible by even the simplest minds, and yet attractive for the most profound ; remember specially that Moses' words were meant and suited for one nation only, while the words of Jesus are for all the earth. When, therefore, in the flood of light, your eyes are dazzled by its brilliancy, judge for yourselves whether the gospel may not well be called the highest revelation of the Deity ?

But especially do not forget, in the third place, to take into account, and test by a comparison, the *faithfulness which Jesus showed*. 'Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.'<sup>1</sup> These apostolic words hold also of the prophets of the Lord; and Moses could obtain no higher honour than what is contained in the comprehensive tribute of praise, 'Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant.'<sup>2</sup> But yet, what else was the faithfulness of even the most eminent ambassador of God, than the obedience of a feeble man, who always must conclude by humbly asking pardon for his shortcomings? How much of prophet-life in Israel is spotted by the saddest stains! Jonah goes forth to preach obedience, yet he wilfully withdraws from the performance of the heavenly task. Elijah must come forward as a leader in the strife, but once, at least, he falls dispirited. John is expressly called to serve the King of Heaven when He descends to earth; and yet he stops Him in His progress with the question from the prison-house, that testifies of doubt and discontent. Yea, did not Moses himself fail in his faith and patience? And do you know one prophet who can say, without reserve, 'I do always those things that please the Father'?<sup>3</sup> Yes, we know Him; for we look upon the Pure and Perfect One, who faithfully devoted every breath to the glory of the Father. Was there ever an ambassador of heaven exposed on earth to more severe temptation than surrounded Him on every side? It comes before Him, in the desert, in the form of an allurements; on the cross, as something terrible, to frighten Him; and in the space that intervened between the wilderness and Calvary, a countless multitude of arms were constantly stretched out, to take Him forcibly and set Him on a throne.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 2.<sup>2</sup> Heb. iii. 5.<sup>3</sup> John viii. 29.

But, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God : ' such are the words He used on coming down from heaven ; and when that will directs Him to a cross of shame, the Son will not refuse to drink the cup mixed for Him by the Father's hand. Perhaps, at some time or another, you may have observed how the first words attributed to Jesus in His early years, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' may also be regarded as the constant motto of His earthly life. He is about His Father's business in the temple and in the synagogue, in the wilderness and by the shore, at the social board and in the peaceful solitude, when friends exclaimed 'Hosannah' and when enemies cried 'Crucify him ; ' not only in the little boat where He laid down His weary limbs to rest, but also on the cursed tree where He exposed Himself to death. And does it not appear to you that 'sinlessness'—that word so often used—is, properly, too weak for adequate expression of the matchless greatness seen in God's incarnate Son? Here, there is more than sinlessness : here, there is holiness, perfection, majesty, such as might dazzle even angelic minds. A Moses we admire, but Christ we must adore ; and what would but sound blasphemous proceeding from the lips of even the greatest prophet, sounds in His mouth with all the grand simplicity of truth,—'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' But who will give us thoughts, ideas, wherewith we may extol the glory of the matchless revelation now afforded us through Jesus Christ? Not only does He bring, but, what is infinitely more, He Himself shows us the revelation of the Father. Moses can say, 'I speak the truth ; ' Jesus, not merely in what He declares, but in His whole personality, can say, 'I am the Truth.' He traverses the land, blessing and doing good,—the living, speaking, acting Image of the Father ; and not a single spot is seen upon the sun of

His glory, from where it takes its rise, to where it sets. And at the close of life, He can present a summary of all He did in these few words, 'I have manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou hast given me;' <sup>1</sup> yea, even now, when He has gone to heaven, the Son knows of no better meat than the performance of His Father's will. Show me more faithfulness than that which Jesus has displayed, and I will let you look for a still higher revelation than He brought.

But why do I speak of a higher revelation, as if anything higher could be imagined than the *fellowship with God begun through Jesus Christ*,—which we now mention as the fourth point claiming our regard? You see to what the Lord Himself directs His servant's thoughts; to Israel He predicts a time when He shall no more speak to them through flaming fire, but through a human voice,—when He shall send His highest Messenger. And ye who, in the gospel, hear the voice of God,—not as the hurricane, the earthquake, and the fire, but as the still, small voice,—say, does not the Christ of God appear to you in glory quite peculiar to Himself, because, like Moses, He is not a Prophet only, but, besides, the Mediator in God's Covenant with men? But what a difference between the Covenant established through the agency of Moses, and the better one now made through Christ! 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them:' such was the truth announced upon the morning when the law was given, and all the people said, 'Amen,' and bowed their guilty heads to have the burden of that curse laid on their backs. Hundreds of rams could not remove the load of sins; thousands of streams of oil could not bring calmness on the sea of fear; and though the pious Israelite knew that

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 6.

Jehovah, for His own name's sake, forgave men's sins, yet day by day he stood in the presence of the Lord, as if before the mountain in Arabia that might be touched; there still remained, between him and his God, strong separating lines; and though the voice of anguish was entirely hushed, the spirit of the bondman still remained in him. But is it not remarkable, that almost at the very point when it attained its full development, the seeds of dissolution in the Old Economy begin to show themselves? The prophet gives the promise of another Covenant; thereby the first one is declared now to be growing old, and soon about to disappear. 'I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sins no more,'—so runs the promise in the Covenant,—'for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.'<sup>1</sup> Thou morning of a brighter day, how long thou dost delay beneath the rim of earth! Lo, heaven opens for the sweet angelic song, 'Good-will to men!' Another revelation is beginning now. But there is being instituted, too, a new kind of communion between heaven and earth; and while Moses dedicated the Old Covenant by blood of bulls and goats, Christ dedicates the New one in His own, and by His offering fills up the chasm that separates a holy God from an unholy world. Yea, the propitiation which could but be dimly shadowed forth by Moses in those sacrificial rites,—prophetic, though mysterious,—that grand atoning work, Christ shows in its reality; and just as Aaron once, with the censer in his hand, planted himself between the living and the dead, so does He now appear before the holy Father's face, that, as High Priest of heaven, He may thus hide His people's sins. In the first Covenant, God comes before the sinner as a creditor; while, in the second, the sinner comes before the Lord as one who is forgiven. The former Covenant

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxxi. 34; cf. Heb. viii. 11, 12.

included Israel, but excluded every other race; the latter was established everywhere on earth. The first was destined to endure no more nor less than fifteen centuries; the second, to endure throughout eternity, and to unite both heaven and earth in one great spiritual kingdom that shall not be moved. What are even all the love and faithfulness which Moses showed, as mediator of his Covenant, when we compare these with the riches of that Mediator's love whose heart was broken on the cross for us,—a heart that still beats on His universal throne? And do you know what, even when compared with all these great and glorious things, remains most glorious of all? As Moses was not only a prophet and a mediator, but, besides, the guide of Israel to the land of their inheritance, so is it, too, with Him whose form is now before our mind. He does not merely make a revelation of the truth,—externally by His own person and His word, internally by the power of the Holy Ghost. He does not merely open up the way, and break down the partition-wall that separates all men from God, and each man from his brother-man. Like Moses, He remains the trusty Guide of all His own,—both Way and Guide in one; so far is it, besides, from being possible that life or death can come between Himself and any one of them, that He abides with us continually. He does not rest until those sharing in the Covenant have first been justified, then sanctified, and, lastly, glorified; and that same offering, by which He frees them from the curse of sin, becomes the means by which the righteousness demanded by the law is not merely fulfilled *for* them, but *in* them too. Enlightenment, redemption, salvation,—name any greater benefits than these, which He not merely promised, but procured, bestows, and still reserves for His own people, without price. Lord Jesus, how can any one have but a little

understanding of Thy preciousness, without devoting all he is and has to Thee?

But does this seem excessive praise which we bestow on that 'true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'? God has not waited till men should decide upon the value of His greatest gift; for He Himself has given witness to the Son of His eternal love, as the last and fullest revelation He has made. The *testimony which Jesus has received* will be the last point we shall set before your thoughts. One statement in the former declaration made by God remained unnoticed; this we are now so much the less inclined to pass, because the present is the first occasion when a special threat is introduced in close connection with a Messianic promise. These are the words of ver. 19: 'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not hearken unto my words which He shall speak in my name, I will require it of him;' or, as it is elsewhere expressed, 'he shall be destroyed from among the people' (Acts iii. 23). Does it require much proof to show that Christ, no less than Moses, has been recognised in quite a special way, and is maintained in His prophetic authority, by God Himself? You know that there was no more dreadful sin which could have been committed in the wilderness, than that Moses should aspire to wear the crown. His daily business was emphatically God's; and it was but his intercession that could save those guilty ones who crowded round the standard of rebellion. But what are all those judgments sent by God on Israel, while wandering through the wilderness, when we compare them with the signs, and wonders, and the divers mighty deeds by which the Lord Himself gave witness to the Prophet of the New Covenant? As Peter excellently says, if God was not with this man, then—let us say it with all reverence—God has Him-

self, in some way quite incomprehensible to us, concurred in cheating all the world by means of a deceitful show. As every one well knows, and as we find it stated in a history whose truth has frequently been questioned, but never yet disproved, God sent His angels down from heaven to watch beside the Saviour's cradle and His grave. Three times, a voice from heaven was heard that witnessed to His majesty; He raises Him up from the grave, and sets Him on His universal throne; and then, at His request, He distributes those spiritual gifts through which the earliest foundations of His kingdom have been laid. Plainly He manifests His favour for the Nazarenes, and pours upon His enemies the fear of death, while He gives courage to His friends; nay, more,—and surely God keeps it designedly before our eyes,—He visits with dread punishment the man who will not hear this Servant in the same way as Himself. If what God has made known in Christ be *not* the most complete and highest revelation He has made, and further, meant and suited for all men, I ask what more God could have done, if any higher revelation came; and can you possibly conceive of any tokens that could prove more unmistakeably His approbation and interposition in the case, than those by which His well-beloved Son was pointed out before the eyes of heaven and earth? Nay, we are not surprised that leading infidels have striven in vain to cut out from this gospel all the miracles which it contains. But what would it avail even though—what we deem quite impossible—success attended the presumptuous attempt to strip the sacred history of its supernatural character? Then they would be obliged to go still further, and make out the entire history of the kingdom of God to be a cunningly devised fable, which certainly may be pronounced wholly inexplicable, if the Lord were less

than He has declared Himself to be. Then they would be obliged to show us how it comes about that the most furious attacks of unbelief, like waves against a rock, have dashed against this gospel in their impotence, only to earn, through time, deep ridicule and merited oblivion. Then would they need to show us higher truth, wisdom more fully tested, and more blessed comfort, than have here for ages been deposited. Then must they needs be able to refute the witness of the Holy Ghost, that makes these words resound in every Christian heart, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'<sup>1</sup> Yea, verily, that is the highest seal, impressed, as if by God's own signet, on the words of Him who is the greatest Prophet, and the King of truth. The heart and conscience of all those who, seeking for salvation, hear and follow Him, bear witness to His words; experience proves that He is the Amen, the Faithful and the True; and that which time has not yet shown, eternity will hear proclaimed as if with trumpet-sound,—that in Him, and in Him alone, there are combined the highest truth and highest blessedness, for both are one and indivisible.

In the kingdom of nature, there is no higher light than the meridian sun: in the kingdom of grace, there is no higher revelation than the Christ!

### 3.

What we have just expressed is but the sum and the conclusion of an argument, the special points in which we will again present at once, for clearness' sake. We have been looking in succession at the rank which Jesus occupied, the light which He diffused, the faithfulness which He displayed, the fellowship begun through Him,

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 68.

the witness He received. In all these, as it were, we read the plain credentials of the Prophet out of the midst of His brethren, to whom Moses bare witness; and thus, too, we renewed our own confession of our Lord, as the highest Witness to the truth. And now, do you not feel what is the highest and most sacred call of Christianity, addressed to us through all that we have been considering? What we have still to say admits of being summarized into three words: inscribe them in your memory through life!

And what, then, could become us more than humble *thankfulness*? Is it a small thing that the voice of this, the very greatest Prophet, whom even Moses saw but at a distance, sounds so close beside our ears, and that the most unlearned knows far more of Him than did the highest then in Israel? Is it a small thing that God still continues to shed down the light of saving truth, not merely upon those who rendered due obedience at the first, but also upon the rebellious ones; and that we who—just say yourselves how long it has been so—perhaps may have refused the greatest blessing, now are called anew to go to Bethlehem, and hear the words that have been uttered there regarding this great Prophet? And, once more, is it but a small thing that so many of His utterances as a Prophet have already been fulfilled to you and me; and that we all can learn, from an infallible authority, what is the truth that saves? How very touching is the thought that such great multitudes have longed to see the revelation made, but not obtained the promises! How much more touching is the thought—and of its truth we are assured—that, at this very moment, there are multitudes who do not yet feel anything of what they owe unto that Saviour of the world,—perhaps they are even somewhat wearied of the goodness they experience; while others fall upon their knees

to praise the Lord! What sad insensibility, fearful indifference! When we inquire into their reasons, what is it that we must mention first? Is it deep ignorance that makes so many, even with the name and the profession of a Christian, still live substantially without the Christ, and thus, too, without God and without hope? Or is it a deep-rooted worldly-mindedness, that sets a higher value upon everything except the satisfaction of the soul's great need? Is it the force of habit, that constrains us to regard the most astounding wonder of God's grace as if it were a matter of indifference? Or possibly it is a secret scepticism, that ever asks the question, 'Art Thou He that should come?' Whatever it may be, see whether conscience does not tell you that your heart is still too cold towards your Lord; and learn especially to pray in secret, that you may, ere long, give thanks in honesty of heart at this our Christmas feast. Pray that the eyes of your understanding may be opened to acknowledge that you need the world's great Light. Let Moses tell you what your sin deserves, that you may call on Christ, who saves from sin; and let the preacher of repentance that exists within, prepare the way for the great Gospel-preacher in the plains of Bethlehem. Go forth to meet your Lord with joy, not simply as the people of Jerusalem did, who, with their glad hosannas only called Him 'the Prophet of Nazareth,' to cast Him off again, and that, too, very soon; but let your gratitude be humble and sincere, and such as truly glorifies the Lord. And ye especially, who know the 'Prophet out of Israel' experimentally as your great Light, and your sole comfort in the world, see that ye be not silent now! Sing gladly in the Lord, ye righteous ones, not only at the coming feast, but at all times; rejoice all ye that are upright in heart!

But further, let our second word be,—*listen* to what

this mouth announces in the Father's name! Listen, we scarce need say, not with the ear of one who acts the spy, and seeks to catch the Master in His words; or of a judge, who seeks to judge the Lord instead of being judged by Him; or one with strong æsthetic tendencies, who is quite satisfied provided that his feelings are but pleasantly touched and wrought upon. But listen with the ear of an obedient child, who knows but little, and receives in silence what is told him of his Father's will; of one against whom accusation has been made, and watches anxiously, with bated breath, to see if there be still some hope of liberty and life; of an obedient servant, who but asks, What does my Master wish that I should do? And what should keep you from thus giving ear to Him through whom the Lord has made His highest and—do not forget—His final revelation to us men? Surely, not the obscurities and unsolved problems that remain connected with the gospel, even after the most careful investigation has been made? Does not the large amount that you already comprehend awake within your heart the strong presentiment that, in what you do not understand as yet, a deep and glorious meaning lies concealed? And can you wonder that God's highest revelation should have depths which your arm cannot sound? And you who always stop when you have left the sphere of sense-perception and experience, how can you hesitate, when in the supersensual sphere, to grasp the hand of an unerring Guide, simply because He tells you what you never would have known yourself, and what, even yet, you cannot fully comprehend? What wretched folly! When the God of heaven stoops condescendingly to His vain creature, seeking to impart His secret thoughts concerning the salvation of mankind, shall man, who does not comprehend himself, take deep offence because he cannot find

out God? And when the stream of living water flows towards him, shall he say that all the water which he cannot gather in these hands of his is quite superfluous, and thoroughly unfit to drink? We cannot, certainly, be too exact and thorough in inquiring if the gospel really contains God's highest revelation to mankind; it is not real science, but mere superficiality and imperfect knowledge that have done the greatest damage to the cause of truth. But when it has sufficiently appeared who is the real Speaker in the words of prophecy, then let the child of earth bow reverently; then let the proud philosopher remember he is but of yesterday; then let the Christian wait until the future, with its light, shall give the explanation sought for now. Or—tell us candidly—do the requirements of this Prophet seem too high? and does your understanding seek for pleasure in its doubt, because your heart has no delight in rendering obedience to the Lord? But is it not an easy yoke that this great Master lays on us,—is not the burden of this Leader light? and may not His most strict requirements well be called His greatest benefits to us? 'Your ear is so deaf, and your heart is so slow to believe!' But is He, who calls you to obedience, a hard Master, who will not subdue the stubborn heart? and will the God, who made the ear, not listen to the prayer for wisdom? Surely there shall be no escape, if ye refuse to pay regard to such a great salvation; and if they who rejected Moses did not escape, of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall they be thought worthy who turn away from Him who comes from heaven? Oh that, when we point earnestly to Him, we could keep back the words of John, 'Many false prophets are gone out into the world!'<sup>1</sup> But is there no lying spirit that shamelessly withstands the King of truth? Are there

<sup>1</sup> I John iv. 1.

not those who, in their arrogance and pride, imagine they have now outgrown His high authority as the great Prophet of the world, and bow, instead, before the mere assumed authority of human guides, who are too often but blind leaders of the blind? Is not the warning given by Moses against a wretched superstition quite as needful in our days, when people seek, by every kind of means, to wring out secrets from the spirit-world; and even go the length, too frequently, of showing greater faith in lifeless wood, which they consult, than in the true and living word of God? We, too, may well address you in the Lord's name, 'Little children, let no man deceive you;' 'Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God;' and, 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'<sup>1</sup> *Give ear to Him!*—the words are both for old and young, for rich and poor, for learned and unlearned, for you and me! This Prophet's eyes see deeply down into the darkest corners of your heart. Shall it be well if He will search you? and have you as yet obeyed His voice?

If it indeed be so, then our last word is *testify*; bear witness in the spirit of faith, and in the line of Moses' zeal. Are we not living in the blessed times when this grand prayer of his has been fulfilled, 'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them?''<sup>2</sup> It is not we alone—we ministers who preach the gospel—that are called to prophesy (and oh that we fulfilled this task in something of the spirit and the power of Moses, of Elijah, of John, of Jesus), but all on whom has shined the wondrous light of God must go forth and proclaim His mighty deeds. Israel's prophets but prepared the way for the highest Witness of the truth; Christian prophets, in their turn, must follow in the footsteps He has trod;

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 10, iv. 1; Heb. xii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Num. xi. 29.

they have been born again and sent into the world that they may give their testimony to the truth. That world,—so deeply sunk, and in such unexampled misery,—how shall it once more and for ever be recovered to its lawful King? Arise, ye Christian prophets, to begin the holy war with the sword of the Spirit! Spirit of grace! Thou who alone canst teach us to speak with new tongues, descend in larger measure on us all! Children of light! go daily forth into the world, led by the Spirit, and with all your power of love, to bring that world unto the light of life! Church of the Lord! send out your gospel-messengers, that all ends of the earth may see the great salvation of our God! (These words are specially appropriate to such a day as this, which witnessed the foundation of our own Missionary Society.<sup>1</sup>) We may predict, in His great name, that soon the hour will come when the command, ‘Hear Him,’ shall cease on every side, and all the earth shall know the Lord. Now, we still ‘know in part, and prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away;’ and those who here on earth confess the Lord before their fellow-men, shall be acknowledged in the presence of the Father and the angels up in heaven. For thus saith the greatest Prophet, whom God hath anointed King: ‘If any man serve me, let him follow me;’ and again: ‘Where I am, there also will my servant be!’

AMEN.

<sup>1</sup> Dec. 19, 1797, the date of the foundation of the (old) Dutch Missionary Society.

## CHAPTER XI.

### The Refusal.

‘ Let it suffice thee ; speak to me no more of this matter.’<sup>1</sup>—DEUT. iii. 26.

*Disappointment*—the very word has an unpleasant ring ; but who is able fully to describe the painfulness of the reality which this word indicates ? Just picture to yourself a traveller, making his preparations, in another portion of the world, to visit and embrace his dearest friends once more before he dies. For years he has been making his arrangements with the utmost carefulness ; at the appointed time he has embarked with all his property, and he has safely managed through the greater portion of his journey, though most dangerous. From day to day, as we might well expect, desire and hope increase ; away on the horizon he already can descry his native shores ; a few hours more, and then the joyful ‘ welcome home ’ will greet his ears. But suddenly there rises up a violent storm, that makes the masts and tackling crack ; the frail craft, though in view of the desired haven, sinks to the bottom, and the wanderer, who came expecting rest within the circle of his friends, finds but a grave down in the gloomy depths. ‘ How sad a picture ! ’ you exclaim : it is no sadder, we reply, than the reality of many lives on earth. Disappointment :—if such a word is scarcely to be found in the vocabulary of the child and youth, it is that it may stand, with lines so

<sup>1</sup> Preached Jan. 16, 1859.

much the darker, in the lists of grey-haired men. What one of us has not had reason, in his way, to testify with Job, 'When I looked for good, then evil came; and when I waited for the light, then darkness came;'<sup>1</sup> or if there has been any one who has, as if by miracle, escaped till now, who can be sure of what will happen any single moment ere to-morrow ends? What no one looked for may occur the very first; and what seemed yesterday to have been brought within our reach has now, as if by magic touch, quite vanished from our sight. Thus the complaint we make when hope proves vain is quite as old as man himself; and as for prayers unanswered, who has not, sooner or later, buried them deep down in a distressed and anxious mind? And were these merely inconsiderate desires which thus met disappointment, we could certainly scarce feel at liberty, after due thought, to raise complaint. When mothers like Salome show themselves so foolish as, in unrestrained ambition, to desire a place for her two sons on either side of Jesus' kingly throne, then it is well in all respects that the great Master, wiser far than they, should give the stern reply, 'Ye know not what ye ask.' But there arise, too, in our minds, from time to time, desires for which we have as little reason to feel shame before God as before ourselves. There hover frequently, before our minds, plans whose fulfilment we expect will bear abundant fruit for good to men, and glory to the Lord. Not seldom there are uttered in our solitude, prayers of a nature such that we might almost say with confidence regarding them, 'God saw that it was good.' But even those desires remain ungratified, those plans are thwarted, and those prayers so little answered, that at last we even forget to ask; how bitter an experience, —all the more bitter in proportion as our fancy was

<sup>1</sup> Job xxx. 26.

inflamed, feeling excited, and our faith supposed to have been placed upon sure ground ! How must the Christian view so painful an awakening from the most pleasant dreams ? how must the friend of God conduct himself on the complete rejection of his pious prayers ?

If such a question have, in your esteem, as much attraction as it has importance in our own, then we rejoice that, in addition to so many other Scripture passages, the history of Moses also offers an important contribution in the way of a reply. The public life of Moses, as Israel's lawgiver and guide, is, as it were, a picture set within a frame of two great disappointments he experienced. The first is the occasion when, on slaying the Egyptian, he fancies that his brethren should acknowledge him as their deliverer, and finds himself most cruelly betrayed ; the second, when he sees he is refused an entrance to the Promised Land. The pains arising from the former wound he felt throughout more years than months of pain felt from the latter wound ; yet are we wrong in thinking that the second was by far the deepest and the most severe ? We almost would even hesitate to fathom its full depth, if he had not himself removed the cover which concealed it, so that Israel, and so far others too, might see. But, in the narrative connected with the text, we hear him, with a touching simplicity, relate an incident which we might almost call a page extracted from the journal of his private history, inserted in the story of the wanderings which he was writing down in this and the two chapters which precede. The old man is engaged, about two months before his death, in looking back, together with his people, on a portion of the way by which the Lord had hitherto been leading them. He bids them bear in mind how Og the king of Bashan had been overcome, his land distributed among the Israelites, and how there has been opened up

to Joshua the joyful prospect of still further victories. But though there had thus been such joyful days for Israel, '*at that same time*' (see ver. 22) he saw himself compelled to offer a most painful sacrifice. In vain,—so says the humble-minded man, as if to show himself quite willing to do penance publicly,—in vain had he entreated for remission of the sentence passed on him ; the Lord had given him a stern reply. We must, with this, compare especially what is recorded Num. xxvii. 12-14, where the Lord repeats the judgment passed on Moses ; while the latter prays that Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, will, in his stead, appoint a man as leader of the congregation. There seems good reason to suppose that what is here declared took place between the Lord and him on that occasion, or but shortly afterwards. However this may be, we hear, from the whole tone of his account, how hard he felt the struggle and how painful the defeat. It almost seems to us as if tears marred his utterance, while saying to the younger generations, for their instruction, though to their astonishment, 'But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes ;' that is, your unbecoming conduct, shown at Kadesh, was the cause why I then sinned against the Lord, and thus must feel His wrath ; He would not hear me, but replied, 'Let it suffice thee,—speak no more unto me of this matter !'

Moses rejected in his prayer : how shall we best set forth this touching incident in such a light, that, in accordance with the twofold object of these meditations, God's way of dealing with him may be better understood, and our own Christian life intensified ? Perhaps we can do nothing better than simply attempt to trace the course of thoughts that rise within us in such fulness, when we place ourselves before this piece of history. When we bring up the matter by itself before the bar of

our own feeling, we exclaim, *How dark God's dealings were!* But when we further listen to the witness of preceding history, then we acknowledge that this was a *righteous judgment of the Lord*. When we regard God's mode of dealing in this case with reference to Israel, we find it is a *wise arrangement* He has made. When, by degrees, we have ascended to the point where faith looks out, we find it is, for Moses himself, *a blessing in disguise*. When we permit the light, that shines out from the world to come, to fall upon this enigma which meets us here, then we find *grounds for everlasting gratitude*. And finally, when we return from that height to ourselves, we cannot leave this man engaged in prayer without a glance into a *training school* here opened to our view. Such is the line of thought we purpose to traverse this hour; give us your company, and do not fail, especially, to glance continually from Moses to yourself, and back once more to him. And Thou, O Lord, who sayest to our hearts, 'Seek ye my face,'—lo, we are here; we seek Thy face! Oh, hide it not from us; and for Thine own name's sake, teach us Thy way! Amen.

## 1.

There kneels in prayer a godly man, to whom, as we can see at once, such intercourse with God is not a duty merely, or a habit, but a pleasure and delight. Must we now picture Moses in the stillness of the tent of witness, or in the boundless temple of creation, or in the solitude of waking night? It is enough for us that he now ventures, all alone with God, to place upon his lips the prayer that had been already lying heavily upon his heart for days and weeks; and he receives the answer which you know so well, but which produced, upon a heart like this, such an amount of grief as I need not

attempt to tell. Well may we, first of all, speak of *dark dealing* in God's providence. For who is he whom we now see driven from the throne of grace with such inexorable severity? Is it a wicked man, to whom the wise king's words apply in all their force, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination'?<sup>1</sup> Nay, but it is the special favourite of God, who often could succeed, by powerful intercession, in averting from a hundred thousand guilty heads the sword of justice, when it had been raised to smite. What does he ask, that he thus stirs the wrath of Him to whom he speaks? Some special recompense, perhaps, for years of toil and trouble; or, possibly, release from that most arduous post which he approached with such reluctance, uttering the prayer, 'Send, Lord, I pray Thee, by some other one than me;' or did he ask a throne, which he and his descendants might possess in that good land of promise? Nay; he merely asked for a free entrance, a short stay, and calm enjoyment in the evening of his life, in that inheritance which God had promised to the fathers. How was that prayer expressed? Was it with an excessive urgency, unsteady faith, in an uncourteous tone? Nay; he himself is not afraid to own that he but asked a favour as a guilty one; and it is quite impossible to listen to his prayer itself, without perceiving there the spirit of profound humility and the most hearty gratitude. 'Lord God,' he supplicates, 'Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand; for what god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to Thy works, and according to Thy might? I pray Thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain,'—such is the name given to Canaan in its totality, as being mountainous,—'and Lebanon.' Is

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxviii. 9.

not this prayer a faultless one—nay, more, one of the highest excellence, and well deserving praise? But possibly you may already have remarked yourselves, that there does not occur in it a word to palliate the evil done ; he does not even allude to what he did for Israel and for Jehovah ; there is but humble acknowledgment of what the Lord already has begun to do unto His servant, with the earnest prayer that He will now complete His work. It is not a reward that he desires, but something as a special favour ; and even that earnest prayer is wholly free from every shade of selfishness, because he intercedes for Israel, while praying, too, in faith, that God, in His great majesty and mercy, may be glorified. And finally, when was that prayer refused ? Now there is but one step—yes, between him and death—but also between him and Canaan ; and the mountain-tops of the Promised Land already glitter in the sun, before his eyes. ‘Canaan,’—that was the name which, even in childhood, he could lisp with feelings of deep reverence and love ; that was the spot to which his eye had now been turned, in holy eagerness, for longer than a century,—in youth, in manhood, and in age ; this was the sole reward he sought for all his life of toil and conflict,—such a life as God alone could estimate, as to its efforts and results. For this he watched, and worked, and lived ; and if you ask what was it that enabled him, without a murmur, to wander eight and thirty years with a rebellious nation, and to bear upon his shoulders such a burden as might almost seem beyond the strength of man, you may be sure that nothing but the thought of entering Canaan could, for a man like Moses, make it seem that he enjoyed a heaven on earth. And now, there he is standing, as it were, upon the threshold of the dwelling that is to make up for everything : ‘Back,’ cries a voice which no one ever dares to contradict. Alas !

some years ago it had been left to him alone to say if he would let himself be made the father of a mighty nation, and the heir of all God's promises instead of the rejected Israel : this, in his magnanimity, he had refused, but even from this sacrifice he will not get the great reward he seeks ! But surely (you will say) the Lord is ever gracious ; He has never yet rejected Moses, when, as mediator, he made intercession for his Israel ; the Lord did not give absolute refusal even to that bold request he once made for himself, ' Show me Thy glory ; ' shall this matter, then, so small comparatively, be refused ? In vain was supplication made in humblest tones before the All-compassionate. The termination of the wanderings shall form the boundary of Moses' hopes ; within thy gates, thou lovely City of the Palms, he shall not pass, but he must enter in within the gates of death. Thus it would seem that Moses fails to reach his earthly destiny, and Israel suffers an irreparable loss ; for where on earth is there a second Moses to be found ? Mystery of mysteries ! here, truly, all seems mystery !

But has the like not frequently occurred ?—does it not happen still ? Though overwhelmed with sorrow, Jeremiah, it is vain for you to intercede for Judah ; God has said : ' I will not hear. ' In spite of all your penitence, your pleadings, David, for the sparing of Bathsheba's child are vain ; not all your prayers can dull the edge of that dread sword, suspended by a slender thread above the tender head, and which but waits the signal of the Sovereign God to fall. With all your zeal and earnestness, it is in vain, Paul, that you have for years now been endeavouring to visit Rome ; the Lord continually turns your path towards the east, when you would turn towards the west. And now, ye friends of God, are there not many of your number who have had such an experience as Moses underwent ? A lovely prospect

smiled on you, a pilgrim on life's path ; it seemed to you a very Canaan of terrestrial luxury ; then you put forth your strongest efforts to attain that height, and call the treasure yours. Alas ! you see the palm trees of Canaan, but it is not permitted you to rest beneath their shade ; what you most earnestly desired is merely shown to you, but not bestowed ; your path at once takes a direction quite the opposite from that in which you wish to go ; instead of milk and honey, bitter waters flow to you. I see you kneeling there, an anxious wife, beside the sick-bed of the husband whom you love ; you call aloud to Heaven with strong cryings and tears, beseeching that He may take something else,—if need be, everything besides,—but spare you such a sacrifice as this. It is in vain ; death knows no sympathy, and even the Prince of life does not appear to know. Yonder—but nay ; where would I stop, even if, out of the book of each man's life, I wished to do no more than indicate the chief among the sealed-up pages, bearing the superscription, 'Unanswered prayers' ? Verily, the Lord did not without good reason say of old that He would dwell in the thick darkness.

## 2.

But is it really He, the Only Wise, the Gracious One, the God unchangeable in righteousness, who dwells in this darkness ? Before you hesitate to answer this in the affirmative, look back a moment from the valley opposite Bethpeor, where the conclusion of this chapter places you, to Kadesh, which you know so well. Such a refusal, which, viewed in itself, seems almost quite inexplicable, arbitrary, harsh, at once appears in quite another light, when you have heard not merely what the heart of Moses says, but also what his conscience

tells. However much of pain it causes us, we can no longer speak of a dark dispensation, without adding, in the second place, that this was a *just judgment*. We shall not here remind you of what it was through which Moses had forfeited his special privileges. We merely add to what has been already said, that though the heinousness of Moses' sin, after some days or weeks, perhaps diminished in his own or Israel's eyes, it could not possibly have seemed the less to Israel's God. The sentence passed on Moses was not, certainly, the consequence of sudden and unholy wrath, but the expression of strict equity, wisdom, and love; and if the Lord had shown Himself relenting here, it would have seemed as if He formerly had gone too far, when He condemned Moses and Aaron equally with those who had transgressed so much. That sentence, certainly, was hard, yet just, and one which there was need to pass: Moses himself, too, is so little disposed to call it arbitrary, that, instead, he acquiesces silently; and even in his latest song he cannot keep from praising God's great righteousness,—yes, but His mercy too. Nay, least of all can the upholder of the law be spared the application of the threatening, 'The soul that sinneth shall die!' Then, Moses, bow thy head when now you pray, and bear the burden laid on you; for surely you, too, are not free from guilt before the Lord?

But we must not incautiously exalt a special case into a universal principle. We must not think that every rejection of a natural and suitable request is, for a pious mind, the punishment inflicted for a special sin. But more especially would we exhort you earnestly not to imagine, when a disappointment such as this befalls you, that the cause is always to be sought for in yourself, or to remain dissatisfied till you have found at least one cause. Had not those sisters in distress at Bethany,

when the Lord delayed His coming to their brother who was sick, refrained from seeking to discover why they could have merited such a delay on His part, they would have been needlessly increasing sorrow for themselves. But while we thus deny that there must ever be a peculiar connection between rejection and guilt, we must even still more strenuously resist the allegation that such connection is but rare and casual, and in most cases utterly inscrutable. We know full well there is a thread—often, indeed, invisible, yet natural and such as none can break—which forms a bond between our conduct and our destiny; and if the history connected with each one of you were accurately known to us, it would be far from difficult to prove that God has really good reason for the choice He makes of such steep paths for some. At one time, weak in body, you pray vainly for recovery of health and strength, and you exclaim, ‘How dark my path!’ But did you not, in younger days, employ your powers, when they were fresh, as instruments of sin? May not your present suffering, besides, be a sharp thorn that must remind you, through the flesh, how deeply you once fell? Sometimes, again, in bitter grief, you vainly seek deliverance; and though you sorrow loudly, yet the Lord at present gives you no reply. But is there nothing that you seek to hide? do not your feet now tread the path of danger, where you cannot look for peace? have you not sinned against past mercies, and, after plain experience of great deliverance, forgotten your invisible Deliverer? Or yet again, some wretched father may be now beseeching God to bring his lost son back unto his arms and to the home of God,—but all in vain; the blinded one holds on in the broad path that leads to death. But have you ever thought upon the time when your own mother vainly urged you to forsake the sinful path? and have you also said within yourself,

'I am but punished now, in my own family, for sins committed in my youth'? So plain and palpable is the connection that exists between the Canaan which we forfeit and the Kadesh where we sinned against the Lord; and it is not Adonibezeks merely, of most cruel memory, who feel constrained at times to make confession of past sins in words like these, 'As I have done, so God hath requited me.'<sup>1</sup> I know, indeed, that when we show sincerity of faith in Christ, and have begun to turn to God, we need no longer fear the revelation of His wrath, but rather should rejoice in His great exhibition of free grace. But the natural effects of sin are often not removed, in spite of even the most earnest prayer: not seldom, too, the Father deems it right to make His children feel the bitterness of their temptation, even long after they have drunk the stupefying draught, that they may be more thoroughly convinced of the abominable nature of their sin, and of the holiness of His law. In the comparatively small amount that He withholds from His own people, He permits them, as it were, to see and feel how much He might withhold from them, did He—as certainly He could—but feel inclined to set their secret sins before His face. How very sad, then, the presumption that reveals itself in him who, even for a moment, still would dare to think of striving with his Maker! But surely it is not a girdle, but a penitential dress that most becomes us, every time we pass through such experience as Moses did! Before the suit is opened, conscience in each sinner will bear witness that the right lies wholly on the side of Him in whom is found unspotted righteousness.

<sup>1</sup> Judg. i. 7.

## 3.

But our sphere of contemplation tends to widen out on every side. It is not merely to the previous history of Moses, but also to the needs of Israel that we must look, to find the true solution of the enigma connected with the firm refusal to accede to his request. If we mistake not, the providence of God becomes apparent here after His righteousness; and when we take a step still farther in advance, we find that we can readily and heartily extol Him for a *wise arrangement* in His providence. Is there much need for proof to show that Israel, in this case now before us, really loses less and gains much more than can appear from a mere surface-glance? Forbid that we should raise a question as to even a single pearl in Moses' well-earned crown; as legislator and as leader of the people, he has never found his match. Nevertheless, Moses was but a man; it is impossible that one man should do everything: it must, too, be acknowledged that he was more fitted to guide Israel through the wilderness than lead them into Canaan. The trembling hands which, even nine and thirty years before, Aaron and Hur had been obliged to lay hold on and sustain, so that the staff of God might be held up aloft for all the camp,—these hands are now less fitted than before to wield with dignity the marshal's staff. The conquest of Canaan—a most colossal work—demands fresh, youthful powers. And to entrust the task into another's hands, while Moses was alive, would have conflicted with the dignity of Moses' character. To find that the attack failed of success through his deficiency in vigour and activity would have been still more galling to his soul. Then, leave in time your scene of action, worthy old man; for even Moses may be well enough dispensed with on the earth, but Moses' God alone

is indispensable! Lo, even now, not far from you, there rises up the youthful head of one, a warrior, who, trained in your own school, shall twine the palms of Jericho into a victor's garland for his brow! He shall continue on the path which you have opened up, maintain your law with unabated zeal, display like faith, and far surpass yourself in martial ardour. Do you not think that Israel would have good ground for saying, ere a few years had elapsed, that though the Lord removed from them a benefit, He gave them something better, and arranged all for the best? And how much more does Israel gain, through God's refusal to hear Moses' prayer, than merely a brave leader in the fight? What an instructive lesson there was set before the people in this incident! And certainly the Lord had an important end in view when He thus makes it known. A hundred words, presented in the form of law, and calculated to impress them with a sense of God's unspotted holiness, cannot exert so great an influence upon their minds as this one fact, which almost seems incredible,—that even Moses, for his sins, must die, no less than Korah or Dathan, outside of Canaan. And what a cause of shame to those who had made Moses sin, and thus to forfeit, in one fatal hour, the fruit which he had earned so well through years of toil! And what a warning, too! Surely it must have cried, though not in these same words, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;' and again, 'If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?'<sup>1</sup> Moses, because his death took place while he was yet on this side Jordan, must surely have become, to an extent beyond what we can calculate, a grain of wheat that, for this very reason, has produced much fruit; and if there was anything more fitted than another to make Moses reconciled with the refusal of his

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 3; 1 Pet. iv. 18.

prayer, it was the thought that, in due time, this other prayer, already mentioned, had been heard, 'that the God of the spirits of all flesh should appoint a man in his stead over the congregation.' For so God deals with us: wisely for us, with one hand He withholds, but with the other gives abundantly; and much that we are ready to regard as an irreparable injury to us, is just what turns out for the profit of the brethren. When we so rashly raise a loud complaint because our prayers remain unanswered, do we not far too frequently forget that we are here not for ourselves, but with and for each other; and that He who makes provision for the wants of all, without respect of persons, frequently must quite withhold something from one, that the fulfilment of his wishes may not turn out for another's injury? So readily are we inclined to look upon ourselves as if we formed an all-important portion of the universe, rather than beings of but small importance at the best,—or as a chain, not as mere links connected with some other links,—as persons of great consequence, before whom much, nay, everything must yield, and not as those placed in subordinate positions, and put there, too, for the sake of multitudes besides. How much more lightly would our disappointments press on us, had selfishness less influence; and what a multitude of instances does history afford, in which God often, in His wisdom, gave no answer to men's prayers, at least, delayed His answer, so that, in what saddens us, there might be found a germ of what would work for others' good! In vain does David long, for months and years, while he remained a fugitive from Saul, to find enjoyment at the altars of the Lord; but must not Saul have first filled up to him the measure of God's mercy and longsuffering ere David can ascend the throne? Jairus becomes uneasy when the Master is detained in coming to his house; but is

the disappointed one aware that, in that crowd, there is concealed a woman who had been a sufferer for twelve long years, to whom that precious moment opened up the prospect of a cure for body and for soul? Paul scarce can cease from his desire to work among the Jews, while, as we know, the Lord designs him specially to labour in the heathen world ; but, even now, the great apostle is considering how much the Gentile world will profit by his disappointment ; and does he not appear all the more noble in your eyes, when, later, he declares that for his own sake he would wish to be released, but yet considers it to be more needful for the good of his beloved Church that he should still remain on earth ? It is quite possible that some of your own worldly prosperity is owing to the disappointment of the wishes of some others ; and it is no more than just that a dear wish of yours be sacrificed, on your part, in their interest. The One who guides the destiny of both, of all, in such a way that, in the end, none can set forth well-grounded reasons of complaint, is He who has reserved, as His peculiarly, the honourable name of the 'Only Wise ;' and He desires that you especially shall show, by your example, how a child that is chastised can render due submission to the Father of our spirits, and yet live under the chastisement. Our tears may be a seed of joy for others, and the loss felt by a portion of the universe may be the gain of all besides. Christians, does not that thought apply to your own case ; and does it not begin to show itself more clearly to your mind ?

#### 4.

But some one may reply, It surely must have saddened Moses' heart to think that he had been incited to the sacrifice of his own personal, legitimate desire, for Israel's

benefit? Such an objection might be called a fair one, if the man of God, through what he was deprived of, had been really too great a loser in the case. But just as many a hard, uncomely shell often conceals a kernel of the sweetest fruit, so is it with God's chastisements; the very rods employed in smiting drop with blessing from the Lord. But do you think that we are scarcely warranted in speaking, fourthly, of *a blessing in disguise*? Then take the scales yourselves, and see what properly it is that Moses is deprived of, what he obtains instead, and what, in various ways, he gains. He is deprived of—yes, Canaan; and that word means—does it mean everything? No, in the eye of faith it is not everything; it merely seems so to the mind of Moses now. Canaan is—and how could it be otherwise?—his earthly ideal; but ideals seldom gain by being realized, and even the Land of Promise offers no exception to the melancholy rule that there is far more pleasure in desire than even in the actual enjoyment of prosperity. But will it be impossible to forfeit Paradise even in Canaan? Shall sin be unknown there? Shall death have no dominion there? Does it make such a mighty difference to one like Moses, whether death takes place on Nebo, or, a few months later, upon Zion hill; for surely, to such minds and hearts, the whole earth is a land of sojourning, where all is strange? Has he been thinking of the daily cross he must expect, because, within the first few weeks, he only looks upon sad scenes of blood and tears, and afterwards finds out that Israel has certainly changed for the better as regards their dwelling-place, but not in heart? Ah, Moses, Moses! little do you know what pain of soul God spares you, when He gives the stern reply, 'Speak no more to me of this.' You have already had enough of sorrow in your day, old man; this last and greatest grief may break your heart!

Nay, better far to die on this side Jordan, than endure a hundred deaths upon the other side ; and surely, too, you know that, in this instance also, God still shows that He is merciful ? Observe the tender care shown in preparing Moses for this disappointment, which was at once the last and greatest he endured. For eight and thirty years he had had time to meditate upon the question why the names of Joshua and Caleb, but not his or Aaron's, were omitted from the common sentence passed on Israel. The separation made by death from all that he had loved before, had gradually made his heart more loose to worldly things. At last, his brother Aaron was the only one that still was spared to him ; but it was not long before he also fell asleep, predicting, in his turn, that Moses' death was near. Considering all this, it scarce can seem astonishing that now this last request too is refused ; but with what tender mercy it is done ! When God will not allow him to speak further of this matter, He Himself begins to speak about another, grander theme. Moses receives permission to ascend the heights of Pisgah, and behold of Canaan not merely what is naturally given to the eye of sense, but what the Lord shall set before his supernaturally enlightened eyes. And presently, in sacred ecstasy, he sees the land in all its wide extent, inhabited, enjoying all the blessings of prosperity—as he would never have an opportunity of seeing it in the reality, as it may never wholly have appeared, as he may have imagined it to be in those clear moments when the eagle spirit spread its rapid wings in flight. How advantageous an exchange to make, the visible Canaan given for the true ; and while the foot alone feels loss, and that but to a small extent, the eye and heart have gained ! Yes ; what is it the man of God gains through that which the Lord his God chooses in wrath for him, but which is nothing else than

blessing in disguise? It is not but an hour of pure, unmixed enjoyment, such as earth could scarcely have afforded him, but far more, infinitely more! For has it never yet occurred to you, that here we have the final touch given to Moses' preparation for a higher, heavenly sphere? He who believes there is a definite connection that exists between the earth and heaven, can never doubt that Moses certainly was destined for such an important place before the throne of God as he had filled on earth. But high positions, both in earth and heaven, are only reached by steep ascents; ere Moses can attain his full maturity, the hidden man of his heart must needs pass through a final cleansing. Far more, probably, than he himself yet knew, his heart is still attached to this Canaan; and it is natural, and right, and good, so far; but not even a Canaan may occupy too much of any heart, for which God should be all in all. Till now, it was Canaan *and* God that had been glorified, or, if you will (for we do not believe the heart can be divided), God *in* Canaan; now, it is God alone, God wholly, God eternally, the Giver of all good—if need be, even *without* His highest earthly gift besides! If, after this, in the account of Moses' last farewell and death, you can discover nothing sinful, and scarcely anything that you can say is of the earth, this, too, comes of the present trial; now, not even a Canaan can he regard as his reward; what now can be his portion, his reward, his highest good, but God? Observe the end to which the Lord's ways lead, and lay it well to your own heart. We have already said, that patient waiting is the special training which He gives to all whom He marks out for something great; but when we have passed through that school, then the instruction given in the higher class (forgive us the expression) before we die is often some great disappointment we experience: a disappointment

such as this, which we had scarcely reckoned on at all, in which the aim of life seems to be missed, in which all earthly things escape our grasp, but one in which, nevertheless, we find the last dividing-wall that stood between our heart and God sinks down into the dust, so that at last, in answer to the question whether we still have a wish for anything on earth, we can but answer, in Melancthon's dying words, 'Nothing but heaven!' Oh, lovely light, that rises from the land of Jordan on the enigmas of lives spent by so many friends of God! But is it only Moses who has, to the full, experienced that our greatest disappointments are God's greatest benefits? How eagerly do we, too, pray in our shortsightedness for some form or another of mere earthly happiness, which, like Canaan in Moses' eyes, is far beyond comparison with gold, and yet is little more than tinsel! How much more wretched would be the most miserable man on earth, if God had heard and answered all the prayers with which he ever ventured to approach the throne of grace! How often has God given you and me something far better than what we so vainly asked, something less brilliant but more beneficial; and how He purifies our heart for heaven, by weaning it on earth from that which it so earnestly desires! Nay, even the most acute does not perceive how much of the peaceable fruit of righteousness he owes just to those days on which the Lord said, as to Moses, 'Speak to me no more of this matter.' And who can tell what good there is for man, even in this life, in days which he spends here like a vain shadow? Many an earnest prayer for longer life is utterly refused, that so the eye, closed ere the day of evil comes, may not perceive the misery to follow us! The supplications made by pious parents, for the life of some dear child, often return unanswered, just because God saw, in His omniscience, that the child of hope

would afterwards become one of despair! And God refuses us a heaven *on earth*, that, when the separation follows, it may fall more lightly on our souls; that the heaven *in heaven* may prove the more attractive, and not any creature, though most dear—that God Himself may be our all in all.—Does not the light begin to break through with increasing clearness, to shine in all directions, and to triumph over every cloud?

## 5.

When we have gradually and constantly been rising, is there any reason why we should not now take one step more? We place ourselves upon the stand-point of the world to come, and then the blessing in disguise appears to us as *an eternal ground of gratitude*. But do you not yet feel convinced, with us, that Moses has received the punishment of his offence wholly within this present life, and that the temporary loss has been abundantly made up by God in heaven? We shall say nothing, for the present, of his death viewed in itself; but when we follow him, in thought, somewhat above the height of Nebo, is it not as if the darkness, which by slow degrees gave way before the twilight and the dawn, had now quite disappeared before the splendour of the noonday sun? Isaiah, in a certain passage, puts into the mouth of Israel, when they had been redeemed, this joyful song, 'I will praise Thee, O Lord; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me!'<sup>1</sup> If we mistake not, it is in the same tone that the psalm of thanksgiving must have been sung by Moses, raised to glory. Yes, now he is finding out the reasons why his heavenly Friend afflicted him; now, endless thanksgiving assumes the place of

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xii. 1.

fruitless prayer! Who now would still desire the earthly Canaan, if exclusion from that land were just what hastened his enjoyment of some greater good? If Moses had been living there, and been a witness of the sin and constant strife in which his nation was involved, I fancy there is little that could form a greater ground of thankfulness than what seemed his untimely death on Nebo's lonely top. How widely different the way in which he viewed the Promised Land, looking from heaven, from that in which he spied it from that mountain-top! How clear an insight must he have obtained into the destiny of Israel, and all the way in which the Lord conducted them! What blessedness he must have then enjoyed, in the immediate presence of that God who no more spake to him out from a cloud that none could penetrate! I fancy, had an angel asked him, 'Moses, do you still wish that you had crossed the Jordan?' that he could have answered, 'Speak to me no more of this matter!' But now that blessed soil he has in very deed not merely seen, but trodden, in a glorified humanity. After the lapse of fifteen centuries, he tarried, with Elias, in Christ's presence upon Tabor's top; and one hour spent upon that mountain of Canaan, in such companionship, is better than a thousand elsewhere, in the finest valley of the land. Now, there was neither sin nor death to come between him and the Promised Land; now, he no longer need conjecture, for he knows what God has done to him. Oh, why do we still speak, in childishness, of dark and stormy moments, when we know full well that, in eternity, there shall be ample opportunity for solving all the enigmas of time? Well may we rest assured, that all the friends of God will have much cause for gratitude in heaven, but more especially for this,—that He has said so often, in this world, through His strong love, 'No more of this!'

But do we not begin to find this out even on this side the grave? Many of you, in silent admiration, must acknowledge that the principle of everlasting joy would never have been drawn out in your hearts, had not the Lord been pleased to lead you, through this world, by paths where pains and crosses are familiar things. But the poor heart, that has been cured of lusting by the sorrow it has felt, finds constantly, in overwhelming measure, how the All-sufficient One, in a most wondrous way, makes up for what He has withheld, by giving us Himself. And never has the eye, beclouded by its tears, been pointed towards heaven, but there has been complete fulfilment of the words, 'The Lord has more than this to give you!' But is it more than even the most that we request,—more than the dearest we have lost,—more than what we have been accustomed to regard as indispensable? 'Yes,' faith replies; and 'Amen,' shouts the morning of eternity, as it beholds the last broad strip that forms part of the veil of mystery drawn from before our eyes. What shall it be, when the Eternal shall at last deign to reply to all the 'whys' asked by the child of earth? Lord, why that great, irreparable loss? 'Without that loss, you never would have gained the treasure in the heavens.' Lord, wherefore have I not been placed where I had always thought I should be? 'Because thou never wouldst have elsewhere learned, as thou hast now, to thirst for me; and thou wouldst have been satisfied.' Lord, why has not my prayer been heard, that this thorn now may be extracted from my flesh? 'Without that thorn fixed in your flesh, you never would have plucked a rose of Paradise; nor would you, by experience, have understood the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness."' You may have stared yourself half blind beneath the

cloud ; but do you not now feel your eyes beginning to be dazzled by the flood of light that comes in streams to you out from the open heaven ? and does not your complaint cease when you hear the prelude of the song, 'Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty' ? Blessed, thrice blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall then, as now to Moses, 'show His greatness and His mighty hand !' Then, when the darkness shall be changed to light, and time into eternity, the promise made to Moses shall have been fulfilled,—the promise, made by Him who far surpasses Moses, to His dearest friends, when all was gloom : 'Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God ?'<sup>1</sup>

## 6.

'If thou wouldest believe.' These words now bring us to the close of our address. For, lastly, as we said, this incident in Moses' life shows us a *training school* that has been opened ; but is it not a school especially for learning faith ? If you feel like myself, after considerations such as these, with which we have been occupied this hour, you will be wholly at a loss for words in which to give due praise, for His great love, to God, who, in His word, makes a refreshing light arise over our darkest ways, and seeks to reconcile us with everything except our sins. But dare we, even this once, fail to remind you that this priceless comfort is quite lost to all who do not yet, by faith, stand towards God as we see Moses here ? Poor man ! your heart and conscience must condemn you when you seek to place yourself before His face ; for you are not like Moses yet, 'His servant,' but a miserable slave of sin ; you are still

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 14.

wholly unacquainted with the blessedness peculiar to that hidden intercourse with Him, in which you here saw Moses, in his troubles, finding sweetest joy! Great is your loss, ye who know not this joy, the only compensation for so much of earthly grief; and every disappointment must fall far more heavily on you than on the Christian, since you can, at most, behold a Judge in Him who takes and keeps from you what you desire; you cannot possibly regard Him as a Father yet. And after that which is, in many ways, a joyless present, what is it that you can look for in a future still more dark? From time to time, perhaps, some greater disappointment of your dearest wishes, but with no ground whatsoever for expecting anything that shall make up for this! Yes, 'no ground whatsoever;' for in this case also do the Saviour's words, to some extent, apply, 'If this is done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?'<sup>1</sup> Ah, even Moses' disappointment must sink into insignificance, when we compare it with the fearful prospect of the sinner, who awakes beyond the grave, and hears the sentence uttered in his ears, 'Thou shalt behold the heavenly Canaan with thine eyes, but thou shalt not enter therein.' Oh, dreadful day, when, as for ever afterwards, even this one prayer of the lost soul will be unanswered, 'One drop of water to cool my tongue;' and when, after the bold request, 'Let me pass over, I beseech thee, to behold that pleasant land which lies beyond death's river, and those goodly mountains set apart by Jesus for His people,' nothing but silence shall succeed. Oh, flee from that eternal and irreparable ruin; seek the Lord while He is to be found! He has already spoken to your soul about repentance: say no longer, 'Speak to me no more of this!' Pray first of all, as Moses did, for grace; and look for it not on the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 31 [Dutch translation].

ground of your own excellence, but on the simple ground of Jesus' intercession in your interest. Moses can as little lead the sinner into the Canaan above, as he could of himself enter the Promised Land on earth ; Jesus only, like another Joshua, can open Salem's gates for you to enter in. Betake yourself, then, to the Mediator of a better Covenant, who, for your sakes, offered His prayers and supplications, mixed with tears, so that His cup might pass ! Pray that the Spirit of all grace may also show in you His greatness and His mighty power ! Submit yourselves to be anew brought, through communion with Him, to the glorious state of sons of God, in which the faith of Moses will refresh your soul, and ' Abba, Father,' shall become more than an empty sound !

But when we have thus taken our position in the school of faith, we do not thereby wholly leave unvisited the school of prayer that opens for us here. Does any one suggest that instances like these, of prayer unanswered, must serve rather to deter a man from prayer, than stir us up to practise it, and guide us in the exercise ? We answer that it was not so with Moses, or the multitudes who fared like him and had this testimony, that they pleased God ; nor shall it be the case with any one who has first learned to say, ' It is good for me that I draw near to God.' So little should unanswered prayers be allowed, even for a moment, to affect our firm belief in special answers given to prayer, that we should rather look on them as the exception which establishes the rule, ' To him that knocketh it shall be opened.' We scarce need mention that unanswered prayers would not appear to be so enigmatical, did there not stand upon the other side, as facts, a series of instances in which an answer has been given to prayer ; and heaven and earth would sooner pass away, than that

there should be failure, in one jot or tittle, of the promise left, at His departure, to His followers, by the Mediator of the New and better Covenant, 'Whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.' Then, Christians, only let your prayer be truly offered in that ever blessed name, while you maintain with Him, by faith, that close connection whereby, through His Spirit, you are brought into God's fellowship. See that your faith in special answers given to prayer be not bound up with any abstract notions you have formed beforehand with regard to the connection that exists between God's secret counsel and our perfect liberty to act as men. Such views can never fail to be contracted, and may possibly be partial and changeable: what judgment would you be constrained to pass upon a child that made the trust placed in his father's goodness quite dependent on the notions formed, in his own mind, as to his father's secret plan, and not on his actual experience? See that ye rather simply keep to the great *facts* and the great *promises* of Scripture, which place far beyond all doubt the possibility and certainty of special answers being given to prayer; a God who could not do what far transcends your thoughts would certainly be utterly unworthy of your adoration. Speak freely to Him, in the name of Jesus, about all that lies upon your mind, but always with submission and in hope. Even when he has been disappointed in his prayer, Moses is far more happy than the sinner when he sees his highest earthly wish fulfilled. Pray just as Moses did,—pleading not your own works, but His; firmly persuaded that what God continues to withhold from you must not be indispensable for your eternal happiness, and may be even injurious. And above all, rejoice that you can offer more than one petition which even Moses never could expect to be refused, 'Lord,

increase my faith!’ ‘Create in me a clean heart!’ ‘Guide me with Thy counsel, and receive me to Thy glory!’ And you need never be afraid lest you receive, in answer to requests like these, the words, ‘It is enough; speak to me no more of this matter!’ Christians! pray continually that there may be poured out on you a double portion of this Spirit of prayer.

And finally, the holy place where you saw Moses kneeling thus becomes to you a school where you are taught how you should live. What are the lessons of celestial wisdom, set before us in his disappointment, for the regulation of our private and our daily life? An exhortation, first, to *modesty*. Ye who can often build such proud and lofty castles in the air, see here the fabric of great expectations, built, long years before, by one who was a man according to God’s own heart, but now laid in the dust; and learn to be more moderate in claims which you imagine you can make upon the future, so well known for its uncertainty. The fairest Canaans flourish not beneath, but above the stars; be quite content when, in the wilderness through which you silently pursue your way, there is no lack of bread from heaven, and living water to refresh your soul.—But secondly, an exhortation to more *watchfulness*. Ye who have chosen the good part, do not imagine that the crown has been already won, because you have got through a portion of the way, and never stumbled yet; the last stones may still make you fall; one instant may spoil almost everything: therefore, above all, keep your heart with diligence, for out of it are the issues of life! —But specially, an exhortation to *submission* of our wills to God’s. Ye who so often have contended with your Maker, have you really, at any time, stood still and calmly thought upon the touching words with which this chapter ends? How simple and withal important a

remark is given in ver. 29, 'So we abode in the valley over against Beth-peor.' That quiet waiting, when the Lord does not command us to advance; that ready silence, when there is such ground for loud complaint; that unconditional, implicit following, wherever God appoints our path,—would you not almost envy Moses such submissiveness? and does not even the best man feel how far he is from having such a frame of mind? Come, let us pray to Jesus, that He may Himself conduct us to that eminence; and let us glory in each tribulation, even in those by which our heart is crushed, provided only that our wills are truly bent in due submission to the Lord. The time will come when we shall grieve regarding but one point,—the smallness of our faith, which sometimes made it so extremely difficult for us to stoop, and for that very reason to ascend. But when, with this confession, we have fallen down in heaven, before the feet of our great Guide,—oh, blessed prospect!—He shall then regard us with a look in which we may read more of favour than of wrath; and while He lays His hand upon our mouth, He will reply, 'It is enough; speak no more to me of this matter!'

AMEN.

## CHAPTER XII.

### The Decease.

‘ So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died.’<sup>1</sup>—DEUT. xxxiv. 5*a*.

‘ MARK the perfect, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace.’<sup>2</sup> Could David, in his later years, have ever given an advice which, if but faithfully regarded, will produce as much good fruit? Tell me of any sight possessed of more impressiveness, solemnity, or greater comfort, than the deathbed of a servant of the Lord. The life, indeed, of one who fears the Lord may well be called a school of wisdom, a mirror of God’s faithfulness, a revelation of His glory. Nevertheless, it is his death especially that shows to us the riches of God’s grace towards His people, with a lustre never elsewhere seen. If the Christian’s life has been a battle, death is the hour of victory ; and if the path of God’s own children often runs through cloud and gloom, a kindly light dawns at the end. Just as, in the realm of nature, when a cloudy, sultry day draws to its close, the evening sun not seldom scatters forth its friendly rays, so also, in the spiritual life, it often is the closing days that turn out best. Then faith displays her power to conquer everything ; then love casts tender glances everywhere ; then hope spreads out her wings in all their wide extent ; and there appears to be realization of the words, ‘ Surely the bitterness of death is past !’

<sup>1</sup> Preached Jan. 23, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 37.

Nor is it wonderful that what is stated in the Scriptures, in connection with the death of the most eminent among the men of God, has at all times obtained particular attention, unmistakeable regard. The contemplation of the death of one who fears the Lord bears with it such a blessing as we can but roughly estimate ; and Abel, who first fell on sleep, assuredly was not the only one to whom is due the praise, that after he himself is dead he still speaks by his faith. What one of you has never listened to the language of the pious dead, the oldest of all languages with which we are acquainted in the world ? And—not to mention any other names—who can behold a Jacob, and an Aaron, or a David, or a Simeon, depart in peace, without thus praying from the bottom of his heart, ‘ Let my latter end be like his ’ ? A hundred arguments regarding the reality and worth of faith avail far less for our conviction than one testimony, borne by almost fainting lips, of peace, and joy, and hope. Even the most prosperous of worldly men must feel some envy of the dying Christian, who knows whom he believes. And though we were devoid of every other proof, there still would echo, from the habitations of the dead, the loud ‘ Amen ’ in answer to the words of praise, ‘ He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.’<sup>1</sup>

Must we, then, still crave your attention, when we are about to point you now to Moses’ death ? We feel quite sure there is no need for that ; we only fear that it will scarce be possible fully to satisfy the expectation with which you open the last page of his earthly history. Throughout the course of these our contemplations, you have looked on many scenes of the most elevating character ; but assuredly, that moment when there was pronounced on Moses the inexorable sentence which he

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxviii. 20.

has himself recorded for all time, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,'—this far transcends all else in calm sublimity. Moses in death:—the picture can, perhaps, be fully painted, as it should, only by one of those ambassadors of Heaven, who, on the lonely top of Nebo, though themselves unseen, yet were the witnesses of his decease. What more shall we add to that remarkable account, appended by a later hand to the Fifth Book of Moses, and containing the most unequivocal marks of its full reliability, and of its having come from God? It would be easier, with Israel, to look upon this death with reverential silence, than to answer all the questions that present themselves for our consideration here. Further, we cannot here decline to cast a glance upon the closing incidents in Moses' life. And least of all would you desire that we should silently omit all reference to the memorial in his honour, for which the closing verses of this chapter have expressly been composed. With such abundance of material, it would be difficult to gather everything into a single sermon, if the text did not exactly show us from what point of view the whole could be regarded as a unity. Suppose that Moses' grave could still be pointed out, and that he had to choose the words of the inscription to be placed on it: do you not think that he would most desire the honourable appellation given here, 'Moses, the servant of the Lord'? Then let us here employ this honourable name, and view the death of Moses, with all the incidents therewith connected, as the *death of the servant of the Lord*. Here we are shown, in the most striking way, and by a multitude of proofs, how blessed and sublime may be the death of him who serves the Lord in uprightness of heart. Come with us while we now—more fortunate than Israel, who were obliged to stay behind—in thought ascend to Nebo's top. If any ask,

‘What profit can be found in serving God?’ the sight of such an one as Moses at his death can soon dispel his doubt. Or if another, upright but most timid, trembles at the near approach of death, Moses can teach him how faith overcomes the fear of death. And if there be a third—but why should we anticipate the full enunciation of the lessons which this very hour shall bring before our minds? Come, see for yourselves how the servant of the Lord (a) *awaits his death*; (b) *submits to death*; (c) *survives his death*.

With all the strange and the peculiar features that distinguish Moses’ latter years and death from those of every other man, it will be evident both how and why the righteous servant of the Lord can, from the nature of the case, still die like him. The contemplation will itself cause us to feel the need of looking earnestly to our own end, now drawing near. And Thou, God of all grace, teach all of us to live before Thee, that we may hereafter die with Thee, the Lord. Let Christ become our life, then death shall certainly become our gain. Amen.

## 1.

‘It shall come to pass that, at evening-time, it shall be light.’<sup>1</sup> May we not confidently say that these words of a later seer were abundantly fulfilled to Israel’s greatest prophet? Mark, first, the way in which this servant of the Lord awaits the stroke of death. What persevering industry precedes that death! And what grand promises of blessing give announcement of that death!

It is sad to see a person who has long outlived himself. When the senses have begun to cease performance

<sup>1</sup> Zech. xiv. 7.

of their necessary offices, and the head, once vigorously raised aloft, bends daily nearer to the ground ; when the hand no longer can be used to hold the plough, and the feet but totter at each step which they attempt to take : then, frequently, a feeling of deep pity seizes us, and we begin to say, that an extreme old age cannot be absolutely called a blessing after all. The sight affects us still more deeply when we know that this old man, now in his dotage, was a faithful servant of the Lord, and willingly would be so still, but now is quite incapable of working in His vineyard any more. The Lord has spared His servant Moses so severe a trial as this. He is cut off, indeed, full seventeen years before the age at which his father Amram died ; but he already has far passed the term of years for which most men were then allowed to live, and yet he still remains in all his strength and love of work. ‘Moses,’ as we read in the 7th verse, ‘was an hundred and twenty years old when he died ; his eye was not dim,’—a fact the more remarkable when we reflect how much that organ must have suffered in a desert life of forty years at least, through constant blazing of the sun upon the crystal sand,—‘nor was his natural force abated.’ To none in Israel has he become the object of commiseration, but to all he still remains the subject of regard. If he is now less nimble in his gait, he still remains as firm as when he left vexed Egypt at the head of myriads ; if his heart does not now beat more quickly than before, it still beats warm towards the Lord and Israel. Some weeks have now gone by since Aaron has been gathered to his forefathers ; but even the want of one who seemed to have been indispensable could not cause Moses’ energy, in his last days, to slacken in the least degree. The stately cedar-tree, inexorably marked for cutting down, presents to every passer-by the fatal cipher ; still, his

course is not yet run, his roots are firmly fastened in the earth. Moses is fully conscious that his life is bounded on the one side by the Nile, and on the other by the Jordan ; nevertheless, so very far is even this certain prospect of his death from bringing gloom and heaviness upon his soul, that he now plainly sets himself to make the most of those last hours of life that are appointed him. It is well-nigh incredible what we still see him—as if with one foot in the grave—accomplishing within the weeks immediately before his death. An expedition is begun against the Midianites, and crowned with the desired success.<sup>1</sup> Solemn assemblies of the elders of the people are convened ; the law is read anew to them ; the history of recent years, too, is rehearsed ; and there is pleading for God's right to Israel's highest gratitude and love. Even as an aged father scarcely can allow his darling boy to leave his arms, afraid lest, after his decease, the child will tread the sinner's path, so Moses here exhorts and warns his Israel in tones of deep solicitude. In all this we can easily perceive that, from his sad experience of Israel in the past, fear, infinitely more than hope, as to their future, fills his heart ; yet this does not, even for an instant, keep him from presenting to their minds, in God's name, life and death, the blessing and the curse. Further, he gives command that, after Israel shall have reached the Promised Land, they shall erect large stones upon Mount Ebal, plaster them with lime, and write thereon the words of the law. Moreover, he himself puts all these latest prophecies and lessons in a book, and gives command that this, his legacy, committed to the keeping of the Levites, shall be publicly and solemnly read every seven years. Again, he introduces Joshua to the assembled Israelites as his successor, and encourages his

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxxi. 2.

heart by promising God's help and presence in his work.<sup>1</sup> And finally, when, after this, God in His majesty had made a revelation with regard to the unfaithfulness that soon would show itself among the Israelites, and which demanded yet another warning, as a final and, if possible, a more impressive one,—then he gives utterance, before the people, to the grand and noble Song, preserved in chapter thirty-second, which, in the boldness of its flight, perhaps by far transcends all else we know of even Moses' poetry. Only when this song also has been uttered, heard, and written down, that it may be a witness unto all posterity, does he consider that his earthly task has been fulfilled. Nay, even after this last, dying song, there is heard once more the solemn, earnest exhortation (vers. 46, 47) to lay all these things to heart, and to impress them also on their children's minds. Ye friends of Moses, do you think his vital powers are here diminished, or, on the other hand, that they have now developed to their highest point? Well done, thou good and faithful servant, who dost thus, with girded loins and burning lamp, await the Master's coming,—not content with simple watching, but engaged in working, ay, and winning too, so long as even a single breath remains upon these sacred, blessed lips! Thus to be found (but not surprised) by death, while even our latest efforts are employed in serving Him to whom the whole of life was dedicated—may not this indeed be called a death of which you almost envy Moses? Yes, that is the true power, which perseveres in doing good; that is the true nobility of mind, which lets itself be stirred up by the thought, 'The night cometh, when no man can work,' to do what the hand findeth to do with all its might. I ask of every one who truly has become the Lord's, if there is

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxvii.—xxxii.

anything which he more earnestly desires than to expire like Moses, faithful to his calling, like the soldier at his post? What might perhaps be wanting, in his later years, of youthful vigour, he may possibly make up for by redoubled zeal. Surely, whoever thus regards God's pious servant, ever steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, sees for himself a fine realization of the figurative language used by Eliphaz the Temanite, who likens such a hoary-headed man unto a sheaf of corn, brought safely to the garner in its full maturity.<sup>1</sup>

But probably your thoughts may be anticipating me in the consideration of *the blessings which presaged Moses' decease*. And well you might have such strong predilection for the subject; for, in truth, a more affecting and impressive farewell-utterance can scarcely be conceived, than that which is recorded in the chapter that immediately precedes. Imagine how it must have been with Moses, when, as is expressly told us (xxxii. 48), 'on that selfsame day,' after he had delivered his inimitable parting-song, he heard the Lord's command, 'Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, and die in the mount!' Thus, then, not merely his days, but even his hours are numbered; and when once, at eventide, the sun sinks down behind yon hills, his farewell ray shall shine upon the prophet's lonely resting-place. Courageously the man of God takes up the burden, yet no single murmur of complaint arises in his heart against the grievous load. But still his eyes are once more turned to Israel, who lie encamped below, all over the vast plain, and who are well aware that he, their greatest prophet, shall thus speedily be lost for ever to their gaze. Shall such an one as Moses quietly depart, leaving no blessing after

<sup>1</sup> Job v. 26.

him? will he not even at least give some expression to the love and faithfulness that dwell in him, and bind him closely to the Lord's inheritance? Impossible: his second last address has been an earnest warning,—then his last is one rich promise; and if, in days but recently gone by, his very love to them constrained him to inexorable severity, he now unhesitatingly opens all the treasures within his loving heart, as spacious and as rich as his still vigorous and all-embracing mind. See how, like Jacob on his dying bed, he lifts his hands to heaven, with all solemnity, to bless first one and then another tribe; the Spirit of true prophecy, whose it is to make known hidden things to come, is once more busy over the affairs of God's own chosen ones. I scarcely can refrain from giving you at least a short selection from those blessings, uttered in the form of aspirations or of songs. How powerful and splendid an exordium, whose leading thought is taken from the rising of the sun! 'The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them: He shined forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand went a fiery law for them.' That law, as we are shown even here, is the most splendid crown of Israel; and Moses, who delivered it, is called a king (ver. 5). He speaks about himself as if it were another person he describes; he is no longer in the world, and even now he takes a retrospect of his past work as a completed whole. Once more he places a memorial crown upon the grave of Aaron,—'the man who was God's favourite, and who, impartial in reward and punishment, knew not his brethren nor regarded his own sons.' The weal and woe of the remaining tribes, excepting Simeon, on through the latest times, he here predicts. And when he closes with the words, 'May the eternal God be thy refuge, and may He give support

to thee with everlasting arms,'<sup>1</sup> I almost think I see him press all Israel with both hands to his loving heart, that rather will consent to break than cease to pray for Abraham's posterity! I can but give mere hints; but read this blessing for yourselves, even for the purpose of comparing it with Jacob's dying blessing, which this very Moses has set forth: the points of likeness and of difference between the two furnish abundance of material for meditation, that excites our deepest interest. But specially, endeavour to make out, as if it were inscribed between the lines, what there is in the prophet's heart; and then say what it is that most surprises you,—his strong, unbending faith in the fulfilment of God's ancient promises, in spite of all the deep unworthiness and the unfaithfulness shown by the nation; his indomitable love shown to the race, a love which neither hate nor opposition, nor (what probably says more for him) the ice of sixscore winters cooled; or his lively hope of such a glorious future for the Israelites, that (and be sure you do not fail to mark the point) repressed, at least from utterance, the thought of his own prospect now. For himself, Moses has nothing further to desire; and of himself he has as little to declare, or to complain; not even is there anything besides for which he may express his thanks: that great mind is entirely occupied by one main thought, which quite prevents the utterance of anything besides; and his last breath is spent in loving prayer for his people's good. Behold him now, the prophet who is showering his blessings on the people's heads, as if he also were high priest,—Moses and Aaron,—just as if the two were here combined into a living unity! See how the stream of blessing—for we well may here repeat the opening of Moses' song—descends 'like a refreshing rain upon the dry and thirsty plants!'

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 27 [Dutch translation].

Surely, none but the faithful servant of the Lord can thus meet death! O Israel, so hard in soul against all change for good; see that ye duly estimate this blessing uttered by your mediator as he now departs; and if this Moses, while he lived, so often preached unto deaf ears, at least let not the almost dying one address you now in vain! But write ye also, on the tables of your hearts, the final words of pious age,—relations, friends, who in the last hour of their departure earnestly besought you, in less grand but quite as faithful language, to ‘know the God of your fathers, and to serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind.’ There lies a hidden power in the blessing given, as it were, upon the threshold of the heavenly kingdom by departing faith and love; and no prayer more certainly receives response than that in which a dying one commends those who shall soon bewail his loss unto the everlasting Comforter. Ye who are entering on life, see that ye forfeit not the dying blessing of a parent’s heart, that all through life has beat with deep desires for your prosperity; and Christians, pray that, if it be permitted you to see your friends assembled round your dying bed, there may be as much love and quite as little self-reproach within your heart, as when this Moses bade farewell to Israel!

## 2.

Why should the man, who has thus waited the approach of death, not calmly *fall asleep*? This second point we now consider: here, once more, the sacred narrative shows us the way. What sacred peace illuminates that death! What loving care, bestowed by Heaven, gives sweetness to that death!

‘Death’—that brief word we utter easily. Suppose

however, for an instant, that you could foresee your death,—I shall not say, as many hours and days, but just as many weeks and months as Moses could,—how many, from the time when they have made the terrible discovery, could know an instant's perfect peace? Moses knows it,—he who lived, not under grace, but under law, while life and immortality had not as yet been brought to light. The sun of life in him descends with stately splendour into night; but so long as we can look and see, there is no single cloud that covers it. 'But Moses,—you have never seen your dearest wish on earth fulfilled; you leave so very much behind to which your heart is bound by sacred ties; you still could find so much enjoyment and so much to do on earth; you are a sinner, and you go to meet a God the fierceness of whose wrath your own mouth has made known; and finally, you surely do not know at all how it shall be upon the other side of death?' Ye who speak thus, how little do ye know the power of faith, that still can easily remove even higher mountains than this Nebo, or can make ascent of them! Moses expires, with an unsatisfied desire remaining in his heart, but wholly satisfied with God; and nothing comes more easily to him than to be still, on the last day of earthly life, obeying the loud call in his last song, 'Ascribe ye greatness to our God!' He has not only trusted Heavenly Wisdom, but has tasted Love even in the bitter cup prepared for him at Kadesh; and his heart is now almost as disengaged from an attachment to the land on that side Jordan, as the wilderness on this. So long as God was pleased to place him in the midst of Israel, he knew no greater joy than to be honoured as the leader of their tribes; but now he knows the web of his allotted task is finished to its latest thread: he murmurs neither openly nor secretly because that task is now, without

delay, committed into other hands. 'Enjoyment?'—ah! what joy could he now see behind, for which he might present the prayer, 'Return once more,—only once more'? Or, 'Work?'—surely he now has borne the heat and burden of the day quite long enough, to have a right to claim the rest which waits the weary one in his last resting-place? But '*right?*'—nay, Moses does not think of that; for we have just been listening to him while he prayed touchingly, and surely not in vain, to God for *grace*. That grace shall be the only anchor of his hope when death's storm shall arise; but though he feels the deepest need of that too, he is quite as sure of gaining it. We stay not to determine what he may himself have read in those dark shadows cast by the atoning altar he erected in the midst of Israel; or in the Passover, which he ordained for his own folk; or in the brazen serpent, unto which he pointed such vast multitudes of sufferers from deadly serpent bites. But certainly there is no shadow of a doubt now in his heart, when he remembers how God spake to him out of the cloud, nigh forty years before; and if he once trod Sinai's sides with fear and trembling indescribable, he now approaches Nebo with full confidence. He knows that, for himself, God's wrath is but the utmost point of the protecting, fostering flame of His great love; assured of this, he readily prepares himself, not as one who must needs, but as one who quite willingly lays down his life. Eternity, indeed, is in a sense as little known to him as is the earthly Land of Promise; but 'he waits for Thy salvation, Lord,' no less than Jacob when he died. And now, why dost thou tarry longer here, king in Jeshurun? The hour is come when thou shalt from the Lord receive a better, yea, the highest crown! The last word has been uttered, the most blessed prospect shown: Moses at last arises in the

presence of the whole twelve tribes. How utterly devoid of spirit and true taste is the tradition given in a profane historian,<sup>1</sup> that all the camp went after him, till Moses himself made signs that they should stay behind; that the elders followed him still farther; that, finally, Eleazar and Joshua conducted and supported him up to the very last! He who can die like Moses needs no earthly escort on his final journey through this life. Back, children of the earth!—he has another Guide, unseen by any eye of sense! Already he is marching on, while every step removes him farther from the scene of his career on earth, past the last tents, and up the crooked path that leads to heaven, over the roughest clumps of stones. *These* have not been the sharpest stones of stumbling on the path now almost at its end! Calm peace, the peace of God that passeth understanding, now descends upon his snowy head, as if borne on the evening breeze; such is the latest service rendered to the prophet by the staff of God. In silence, yet courageously, he moves along; and the eagle eye soon marks the limit where the words appear to be addressed to him, 'No farther!' Did the aged man once more think of that memorable walk he had, no further back than a few months, so touching in its reminiscences, when he, perhaps, led Aaron to his lonely deathbed on Mount Hor? Once, when he was returning out of exile, from the land of Midian, he thought the help of Aaron indispensable; but now, when he bids farewell to the pilgrimage of life, he has no need for even Aaron, since that place is now supplied by One far better. What scenes hast thou, O world, to set before our eyes, so charming, so affecting, so impressive as the sight of such a death? . . .

Here are we standing, then, with Moses upon Nebo;

<sup>1</sup> Josephus.

and yet we must raise our thoughts still higher than the man of God, who is already almost glorified. For here, in very deed, the Lord hath His abode ; and only He can give us words through which to speak, in some way as we should, about the loving care which lighted up that death. Are not all things here ordered by a heavenly hand, whose workings you can see even in the smallest incident ? Think of the lonely *spot* that was determined on to form the scene of Moses' death. Far from the earth, near unto heaven, upon the borders of Canaan, and yet beyond the reach of the vast, gazing multitude. Nay, Israel must not be able to depict to their own minds the man of God whom they have seen in all his greatness, with the sunken countenance and the distorted features that appear in death ; he needs must vanish from their sight in his full powers, a more than earthly form, so that his matchless personality may leave the deeper impress on their minds. Think of the *time* when he is summoned to depart,—when everything connected with the desert-life is done, and nothing of the bloody work in conquering Canaan has yet begun : to-day, the tabernacle of his flesh falls down, and scarcely any sound is heard,—to-morrow, if need be, the tents of Israel may be lifted from their last camping-ground. Think of the *words* the Lord last uttered to His servant on the earth, words equally remarkable for holiness, for love, for faithfulness : ' This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob ; I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.' But, above all, think of the *privilege* to which these words refer, and which you scarce can picture to yourself in any way that adequately represents the truth,—the privilege of looking on Canaan. There he beholds, on one side, richly-wooded Gilead, with all its fields and meadows ; while his vision

there is bounded by the steep and lofty Hermon, clad in everlasting snows. There lies the mountain-land of Ephraim, and in the foreground the luxuriant plain on which the palms of Jericho wave to and fro. And yonder, Judah's vineyards smile, adorned with pleasant green; yonder, again, lies Jordan's valley, stretching from the city of palm trees away to distant Zoar; over all, the heavens, from which a more than ordinary glow of light seems to descend upon the land that formed the basis of his faith and hope. It stretches out before his eyes, now specially enlightened, like a map, while there is pointed out to him, as by a heavenly finger, every spot that claims regard; never has such a prospect been enjoyed by Moses upon any mountain-top. And yet, what is even that, compared with the grand view of the Canaan above, that now grows clearer every moment as he looks? Does it not seem as if the spirits of the patriarchs were hovering before his eyes, and beckoning on him to come,—as if some other clouds were vanishing, besides those that obscure the far horizon of this earth,—as if the stillness found on Nebo were becoming yet more still,—as if his spiritual eyesight were becoming constantly more clear? But now the cold kiss of the messenger of death is felt upon his lips; the staff falls gently from his trembling hands, but God Himself receives him, in the agonies of death, into His fatherly embrace. . . . 'So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, by the mouth of the Lord.'<sup>1</sup>

'By the mouth of the Lord.' Whether you understand these words, with most expositors, to signify, 'according to the word that the Lord had spoken;' or, with others, think the reference is to a death which happened *at* the mouth of God, *i.e.* in His immediate presence, in all

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 5, Dutch translation: a closer rendering of the Hebrew than our English version.—TR.

gentleness and blessedness, while he was still engaged in speaking with the Lord,—in either case you witness such a death as earth has never seen at any other time. But is this Moses, then, the only one who has experienced so plainly what it is to have a friend in God, not only when near death, but also in and over death? Put Nebo out of the consideration, the immediate and direct communications that he had with Heaven, the picturesque and most extensive view that he obtained; then say if you can count the multitudes of those who, just like Moses, are found more than conquerors in the fierce strife with death? But nay, we need not set aside all these considerations; for the same thing ever reappears in other forms, though seldom in the same connection as before. Celestial Wisdom still continues to determine both the time and place of death for those who honour her in all integrity of heart; nor is there any mother who can show more tender care in making a first resting-place for her dear child, than that with which the Father in Christ Jesus has selected what is destined to become the final resting-place of His redeemed. The great death-sentence, certainly, continues equally in force for Christians as for Moses; but what enemy is any longer to be feared, who meets you with his weapons broken, and a kiss of peace? 'Peace through the blood of the cross:'—faith in that fact makes separation easy for the Christian, death sweet, and hope of the eternal life a blessed thing. He is already freed from his attachment to the earth before it sinks beneath his feet; he is at home within the better land, even long before he plants his foot in it. If he were but to take a retrospect, indeed, of the vast multitude of his transgressions, then the confidence of faith would disappear more rapidly than breath upon the lip. But he is well aware there is a better sacrifice than any one that Moses instituted; so to speak, he has,

through faith, by slow degrees, outgrown death, though he knows that he shall soon endure the penalty of death. These distant Pisgah-views, far more than we well know, are seen on multitudes of dying beds; you may perceive them in the poorest cottages, where some dear child of God lies stretched upon a humble bed of straw. Those who are struggling in the agonies of death do not describe to you the whole that they begin to see of the good land on yonder side of that dark flood; but could we listen to the whole of what the Spirit of Consolation still can whisper into ears already more than half-closed to the world around, we should, like Paul, be able to make known to others mysteries revealed to us from the third heaven, but not expressed before in any earthly tongue. And how the love of God can sweeten even the bitterness of death, by what He brings about in daily life, by the refreshing He bestows, by influences brought to bear on us, not one of which we possibly can reckon on for even one hour before it comes! If but the peace of God refresh our souls, and God's love guide us on our way, does it make any real difference whether we must meet death, like Moses, upon Pisgah, or like Paul, upon a scaffold, or like Stephen, overwhelmed with stones, or on a cross, as Peter did? The blessedness of death does not depend upon the mode in which we die; and for the Christian, loss of life remains the painful but the certain way to everlasting and inestimable gain. In God's presence there is fulness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore!

### 3.

'Fulness, satisfaction:'—that word brings us to the third particular. We did not see the whole when we observed the way in which the servant of the Lord awaits

and suffers death. How he *survives* death is the final lesson taught by Moses' history. What honour there is paid his memory when he is dead ! And what unutterable blessedness rewards that death !

Once more we leave the heights of Abarim, descending to the plains of Moab down below. It is a change from heaven to earth, yet the transition is as touching as it is immense. 'The children of Israel wept for Moses, in the plains of Moab, thirty days.' I know, indeed, that thirty days were spent in mourning over Aaron too ; and that the solemn lamentations of the Orientals were not always felt as deeply as observance of them might be called general and comparatively tedious. Nevertheless, do you not also think that, over Moses, there were certainly poured other tears than those of simulated grief ; and that, within the first month after his decease, many an eye looked, in deep sadness, on the place left void through death ? No one need watch to see whether the man of God will possibly return, or set about the search for his remains. Well do men know they will not look on him again on earth ; and scarcely has he vanished from their eyes—not from their hearts—ere there ascends from earth to heaven a sound of woe. The cry no longer reaches the departed one ; but those who have been left behind call, each unto his fellow, through the midst of tears, that earth has suffered a great loss, yea, in a certain aspect, an irreparable loss. Would conscience not be roused in those who formerly made Moses' life so wretched, but who now are well aware how high his true position was,—how deeply, too, they often fell ? I think I see how such as Joshua, in deepest sadness, daily mourn the absence of his guidance and advice ; I think I hear the testimony of the many blind whose eye he was, the many weak to whom he was a hand, the many in perplexity whose counsellor he was :

'Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?' The time of mourning hastens to an end, but Moses' memory is carried with the Israelites, as something sacred, from the wilderness into the Promised Land, now opened for their entering. With one exception, his posterity quite disappear from off the stage in history,<sup>1</sup> but his mighty spirit animates the words and deeds of Joshua; and when the latter, in his turn, forsakes the great arena here below, it is not till the people have anew been bound, by the most sacred oaths, to the observance of the whole Mosaic law. And soon his image is found hovering before the minds of all those judges, kings, and prophets who were faithful to the Lord; the book of Moses' law remains the basis of religious teaching, and the record of God's ancient revelation, throughout many ages afterward. Yea, verily, the further back that form recedes into the past, so much more lustrously does it appear before the eyes of all who look at it attentively; of all the seers who come treading in his footprints, which are ineffaceable, there is no single one in Israel that reaches such a height; of all the legislators who are still the pride of ancient heathendom, there is no single one that can compare with him. Where are they all,—the Dracos, Numas, Solons, and Lycurguses, and all those who succeeded them? whose image has a brighter halo crowning it? Their work has perished with them; that of Moses is as permanent as Israel,—eternal as the God of Israel Himself. Even unbelief bears witness, though unwillingly, to Moses' matchless greatness, by the violence of the attacks which it preferred to make against these sacred pages, and by the futility (already plain enough!) of its attempts to give an explanation, by a method merely natural, of a personality, a work, a law like those of Moses. And the Christian;—

<sup>1</sup> I Chron. xxiii. 14, xxvi. 24.

yes, he renders thanks to God that he has Jesus, and not Moses, for his Master, and resists most strenuously all attempts to bring him back from the Redeemer to the schoolmaster with his hard discipline. Yet not a moment does he hesitate to show respect for Moses' greatness, and adopt the language used already by the son of Sirach in his praise,<sup>1</sup>—'Moses, the favoured one, beloved of God and man, whose memory is blessed, and whom God has made in glory like His saints!' And did not even God's incarnate Son once, when a child, sit at the feet of Moses? has He not, too, in His mediatorship, so far from abrogating Moses' law, rather fulfilled it gloriously? Did not the apostles, in the mirror of the Old Mosaic Covenant, behold the glory of the New? and do not we perceive, in Paul, the spirit which had animated Moses risen again with mighty power? And though the legal dispensation, with its shadows, has now passed away, does not its founder still address his brethren? Even as of old, Moses has still, in every city, those who preach him, and who read him every Sabbath in the synagogues;<sup>2</sup> and though, alas! the veil formed by the Talmud over Israel's face is thicker far than that which once obscured his sight, yet he continues to fulfil his lofty calling as a servant—to prepare the way for Christ. Yes, to the whole of Christendom on earth, his word comes as a message sent from God; the history he writes is like a mine of gold; his life and death become a revelation of God's glory; and in heaven the songs of Moses and the Lamb still mingle on the lips of the redeemed.<sup>3</sup> And when, for weeks on end, he has again by turns been putting many to the blush, and giving us encouragement, or guiding us and making us devote our lives more to the Lord,—who will continue to affirm that his name belongs to the unprofitable recol-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i. 2.

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

<sup>3</sup> Rev. xv. 3.

lections of a long-dead past? Who will not rather apply to him the words used by the Lord with reference to His apostles, 'I have ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain'?<sup>1</sup> So true is it that the name of the righteous is held in everlasting remembrance, and that, even on this side of the grave, there is reward reserved for all who fear the Lord and who record His name. Say not that the comparison of every other death with that of Moses fails us here, because even the most faithful servant of the Lord among us has not even the smallest right to expect the thousandth part of the honour paid to Moses' memory. The question to be asked is not, how widely does the fragrance of our Christian name and our example spread around, but whether it indeed be true that our life's story also may be summed up in the words, 'He walked with God, and God took him.' If it be so, we need not fear even though we are forgotten on the earth; and the tears of love and gratitude, shed on our dust, will shine more brilliantly, in the esteem of God's own angels, than the polished marble covering the sinner's bones. Those who walk in all humility before the face of God, and who are even anxious that their name should be unknown,—I mention merely Thomas à Kempis,—such men not seldom still continue to be held in far more precious memory, even after ages pass away; and is it possible that Hofacker, or Chalmers, or Adolph Monod can be the only servants of the Lord who still continue to exert a greater influence, after their death, than during life? Oh, what a blessed privilege, when any feeble word of ours, or our example, proves to this or that man, whom we knew not here below, but shall meet up in heaven, a savour of life unto eternal life! Christians! do you know anything that is to be accorded us,

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 16.

when we are dead, finer than that most honourable testimony, 'They have fought the good fight, they have finished their course, they have kept the faith'?

'Yes,' you will say, 'something that is assuredly far finer than even that,—the crown of righteousness itself, which is awarded by the righteous Judge.' And you are right: how could we stop, content with what we have already said of Moses, without casting one more glance, at least, at the unutterable blessedness that followed on the death of this great servant of the Lord? How small a thing is even the honour which we pay his memory, compared with all the joy prepared for him in the Canaan above! His last look rested on the earth; but now, who shall describe this first look up in heaven? That azure stream and those green lanes now vanish from his sight; but the palms of Paradise wave their glad welcome, while the stream of living water now for ever satisfies his thirst. I will not venture to express myself decidedly regarding the dispute which, as we learn from a remarkable tradition, Michael the Archangel carried on with Satan as to Moses' body.<sup>1</sup> Yet, viewing this in its connection with the statement that no man has ever known his grave, after the Lord Himself had laid him in his rest, I cannot but consider it at least as probable that Moses died, though—and in this respect, too, he becomes a type of Christ—his soul was not left in the grave, nor did God's holy one see corruption.<sup>2</sup> If we could speak of merit here, is there another man whose exaltation to such honour would be less astonishing, when we behold him placed upon a level with both Enoch and Elijah? Certainly, such an opinion gains no little confirmation from his being seen on Tabor afterwards, in glorious robes of light. If, by his death,

<sup>1</sup> Jude, ver. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xvi. 10.

the rigorous requirements of God's holiness were satisfied, especially on Israel's behalf, his honourable resurrection gave him, on the other hand, the fullest compensation he could wish ; and such immediate exaltation into glory, after his death-sentence had been so inexorably carried out, comes on us like a ray of sunlight breaking through a tempest-cloud. In vain does he who has the power of death demand that he shall be allowed to exercise his right upon that lifeless form : 'The Lord rebuke thee,' calmly says the resurrection-messenger ; and forthwith, in the man of God, what was corruptible is clothed with immortality. Oh that we now could rise on eagles' wings,—nay, on the wings of dawn,—to reach, if only for a moment, the pure atmosphere in which a Moses has, for ages past, been privileged to breathe ! What a transition, from the wilderness into the paradise of everlasting life ; from the society of Israel into the company of angels ; from the earthly manna to the joyful feast of heaven ! What light is shed now on the past, the present, and the future of the Israelites ; and what a pleasure is it, when, with Abraham, he can behold the day when Abraham's great Son was to effect salvation, and, together with Elijah, greet that Saviour when He comes ! What a sight,—to find the promises and threatenings of his own law even to this very moment being carried out upon his people, whom he still regards from heaven in love ! And what a future to expect,—to see that nation yet once more restored, the honour of the law so thoroughly maintained, grace fully glorified, the whole earth once more changed into one Nebo where God's glory is revealed, but where death reigns no more ! Moses, Moses, what inexpressible deliverance is this of which you prophesy to us, that never yet has entered any human heart ? But surely, brethren, where this Moses now has gone, thither shall all those

one by one remove, who, after having lived, like him, upright in heart before the Lord, though quite lost to our view, yet have not wholly disappeared from God's immense domain. This Nebo, too, proclaims that the existence of God's servants does not terminate, but still goes on—nay, properly begins only at death; and the whole history of those who fall asleep in Christ admits of being summarized in these five words, 'for all live unto God.' Moses and Aaron,—they and such as they still live! The Joshuas and Davids,—they still live! The Daniels and Isaiahs,—they still live! Your godly friends that fell asleep, some early and some late,—they are not dead, but they still live! Yes, that alone deserves the name of life,—to be no longer burdened and encumbered with the load of flesh that here oppressed them; to be free from wrestling any more with sin, that daily vexed and plagued them here; no more to stand in trembling awe of death, the fear of which, though they might combat it as strongly as they chose, they never could entirely lay aside. To be sanctified, and to attain salvation; to behold the Lord Himself, and listen while He points out to His children the celestial Canaan, and shows them place by place, just as He showed the earthly one to Moses here; and now to meet with Jesus, whom he only looked upon before in the dim distance. . . . But here we must stop. This Moses was permitted to behold the earthly Land of Promise,—not to enter in; we do not yet behold the heavenly one, but are assured of an abundant entrance, through God's grace. He who gave Moses burial shall one day bring again with Him, in glory, all those who have fallen asleep in Jesus Christ. Then shall they all be perfected,—those who have been redeemed in early and in later days of grace,—when Christ, who is their life, has been revealed. Till then, O Moses, thou shalt still surpass us in thy

glory ; but we do not separate without the words of faith and hope,—‘Until we meet again!’

‘Until we meet!’ What words these are to form the close of our last contemplation of the life of Moses! To how many or how few of us will they be something more than a mere empty sound? You feel yourselves that we must not now separate, ere we have turned from looking at the servant of the Lord in death, to cast a glance upon ourselves. We still in thought are standing upon Nebo, and in the name of God, whose is the power of life and death, we ask both you and our own selves, ‘Your hour, too, soon shall come; will your death be, in any measure, such as Moses’ was?’ ‘Undoubtedly,’ I hear some say; ‘Impossible,’ I hear some others cry; ‘Thank God,’ some others still exclaim. Love for your souls forbids my closing ere I treat of such diversified replies.

‘Undoubtedly,’ I hear some say, ‘I hope to die as Moses did. I have, indeed, my faults and weaknesses,—perhaps far more than he; but I do not by any means belong to those who well may be afraid of being lost. I have been most religiously brought up; I am, in general, most piously inclined; and, like him, I find nothing that delights me more than living for the good of other men. The laws of Moses, in so far as they concern us still, I have observed from youth till now. I do not swear, or break the Sabbath day; I am not guilty of unchastity; I do not steal; I am no slanderer; I give to every one his due. Assuredly, if such as I had still some cause to be afraid of death—’ No more, my friend, unless you wish that every word which you may utter yet should cast another stone into the scale which shows you are condemned. If Moses had not had some other reasons for ascending joyfully the hill of death,

how sad and mournful would his end have been ; and how unutterably great your self-deceit is, when you build your house of hope, for the eternity now drawing near, on such a loose and sandy soil ! ‘ You have religious impressions,’—had not Israel, also, such impressions frequently ? and yet, who of all Israel would have faced death with calmness such as Moses showed ? ‘ You give to every one his due : ’ then, have you also given to God your heart, as that of Moses was, in honesty and faithfulness, given to the Lord ? For, mark,—without this one essential, all else avails not ; nor is it in vain that these words were proclaimed and echoed from another mountain-top : ‘ Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.’<sup>1</sup> The first and most important question which concerns us here is not what we appear to be,—not even simply what we do,—but, above all, what we are inwardly, before the eyes of Him who searches hearts and reins ; and though the one-half of the world should call us blessed, verily I say unto you, if our life has not been like the life of Moses, one in fellowship with God, our death shall never be like Moses’ death. But know ye not that there may also come another death ; and must we picture it to you in darkest hues ? Oh, dreadful is the sinner’s fate, who—not like Moses, long prepared, but with surprise—hears the command addressed to him while straying on his fatal path, ‘ Return thou to destruction ! ’ He, too, like Moses, will look back, but back upon a life of carelessness and sin, of which each reminiscence rises up against him with a crushing force. He, too, like Moses, must depart ; but he will not be able to perform what Moses could, and would, and might. To him, too, a Canaan—the heavenly

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 20.

one—is shown; but there remains against him the dread sentence in eternal force, ‘No entrance here for you!’ Thus die, without God and without hope, not merely the bold libertine, the hypocrite, and he who basely makes himself a slave to his own lusts, but all who seek their portion in this life; thus shall ye also die, ye who are unrenewed in heart, when death comes on you suddenly, and finds you have not known the second birth. How, brethren, could we spare you such disquieting reminders, when, as you are well aware, even ministers who preach the gospel do not know the day and hour, and cannot but feel deep concern lest there be passed on them the dreadful sentence, ‘You have not shown sufficient earnestness in exhortation and in prayer; the blood of those whom you have led astray shall be required of you!’ For the sake of our—nay, for the sake of your own everlasting welfare, we entreat you not a moment longer to deceive yourselves with false ideas as regards your state. Ye who are old in years, perhaps your eye already has grown dim, and your best strength departed; but it is not yet too late to see your sins and to forsake destruction’s path. Ye who are young in years, reflect that Moses, in his dying hour, assuredly did not regret that he had made a good choice in his early days. Whoever we may be, the spot that shall receive our lifeless dust is ready even now: are we, like Moses, able fearlessly to tread on it?

But others cry, ‘That is impossible! Moses, indeed, may thus depart in peace,—but then, he was among God’s chosen ones; he had been long, and in a most especial way, assured of grace with God; he had the witness of a good conscience before God—in short, he was a man surpassing thousands even of other men. I am a man like—nay, far worse than others. Oh, if you, who preach the gospel, knew what reason I have

for detesting my own self. . . .’ That, certainly, we do not know ; but we know something better far,—that there is not a sinner, on this side the grave, who need despair of reaching such an end as Moses did. But what was it that gave the man of God such confidence when the decisive hour approached? Surely it was not his own righteousness, or faithfulness unto his sacred calling? Ah, even the lustre of a brilliant life grows dim, when there comes down before our eyes the cloud of death ; and Moses, under that Old Dispensation, never would have overcome the last great enemy, if he had known no better righteousness before the heavenly Judge than merely that resulting from the keeping of the law. But in his latest song he sings these words in honour of the Lord : ‘ He is the Rock, whose work is perfect ; ’ and God’s grace, God’s faithfulness, God’s pity even to the greatest sinner, form what he can now lay down his head upon, when otherwise the stones of Nebo certainly would have been far too hard for him. My fellow sinners, look to Nebo—nay, look to Golgotha, where, for every one who will believe, the law’s curse has been borne and turned away ; and in the loving heart of Christ that died, seek for the rest you cannot find within yourselves. When you stand at His cross, you find a fairer view presented to your eyes than that which Moses saw ; and God there comes before you, not in the capacity of Judge, but as a Father who forgives. The whole appearance and the work of Moses have been pointing you to Christ ; nay, God Himself points you to Him on each occasion when the gospel is proclaimed, and calls to you from heaven, ‘ Turn ye to Him, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth ! ’ Moses alone was privileged to tread on Nebo, but Golgotha stands with access free to all, from every side. Only, do not forget that, to depart like Moses,

full of gratitude, we must first learn to pray like him ; and that we may at death know what it is to have a peaceful Nebo, we must previously have felt the curse of Sinai in our conscience, and received upon Golgotha the assurance of God's grace. Then, whosoever you may be, do not leave Moses' company, unless it be to come unto the Mediator of the second and the better Covenant. Give ear to his last exhortation, and return unto the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Obey His voice, and ask Him to baptize you also with the Holy Ghost, that rested on this Moses so abundantly. Do not inquire if all of you are chosen to eternal life or not, but rather bear in mind the words of Moses, uttered in the closing days of life : 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God ; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children.'<sup>2</sup> Cling you, like him, to God's sure promises ; and let your life, like his, become a daily sacrifice of true obedience—ever offered, and yet never perfected. And then shall you, too, feel increasingly the witness in your hearts, that you are growing constantly, and ripening for heaven. And in whatever place death comes on you, the words of Him who is the Prince of life shall be in all respects confirmed : 'He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'<sup>3</sup>

Ye friends of God and of the Lord, is that not even already your experience ? 'Thank God,' may be your answer, 'I shall not require to wait so long as Moses for fulfilment of the hope laid up in heaven.' Yes, well you may thus praise the Father, that hath now begotten you unto this living hope. Oh, what can faith not bear with, and be quite content to wait on earth, when it discovers at the end a Nebo, and above that Nebo a wide - open heaven ! Surely the stones of

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxx. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxix. 29.

<sup>3</sup> John xi. 25.

Abarim proclaim, 'There remaineth a rest to the people of God;' and that rest shall be the more refreshing to our souls, the longer we have wrought, and the more wearisome our task has been. 'Then let us labour,' Moses still exclaims as he departs, 'to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the example of Israel's unbelief!'<sup>1</sup> Let us, like him, all the more faithfully perform what has been laid on us, the more distinctly we perceive a secret voice that says it will not be much longer now; and let us not impose upon our Leader the disgrace of bearing the last burdens of our journey through the wilderness with heavy hearts and drooping heads. Let us without reserve commit all care as to the time, and mode, and place of death to Him who, then especially, never forsakes His friends; and let us only see to this one point—to be indeed prepared! If we already miss those who, like Moses, have departed at God's beckoning, let us show faith like theirs, and mark the issue of their earthly course, rejoicing specially in this,—that Jesus Christ shall still remain the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever! Oh, what a blessed comfort is it that, while we have seen the mediator of the Older Covenant die for the sins that were his own, the Mediator of the New has died in our behalf, and now He lives for evermore, and has the keys of hell and death! Just as the days of mourning over Moses reached an end, so, too, the close of even the deepest sorrow of this earth approaches; and eternity unites all those that truly loved the Lord, like Moses and Elijah, who had never known each other on the earth, but found each other up in heaven. And now, like Peter, John, and James on Tabor, you see Moses there once more—but with no veil nor spot upon his face. Nay, more, like these

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 11.

selfsame disciples, you see Moses straightway disappear, and you behold—Jesus alone. Yes, Jesus only; and in Him, what Moses looked for far more than fulfilled; and through Him, Moses' blessedness made sure to all His own. How grand a sight! Compared with this, all Sinai's glory, Nebo's too, and even Tabor's, pales before our eyes! Yes, willingly we bid farewell to that Old Dispensation, even with all the glory which belonged to it. And then, too, blessed Moses, whom we never can forget, withdraw into thy cloud of light! Now we have Jesus, and we will retain our hold of Him; nor shall we ever look on any one with greater love than Jesus, and Jesus alone.

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