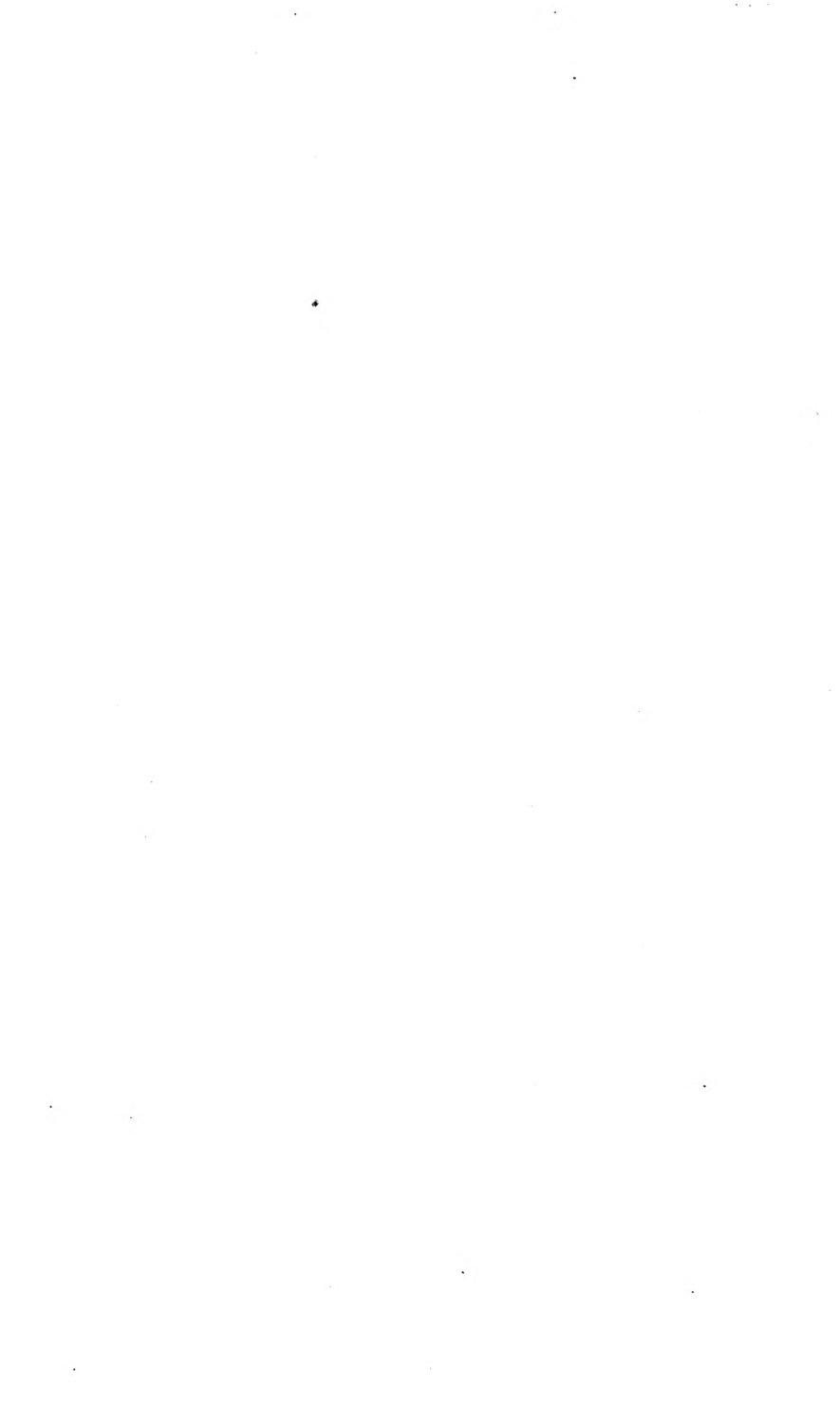


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*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*



BY

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,

*Minister of the City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, London.*

"THE INNER LIFE OF CHRIST," ETC.



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# THE PENTATEUCH

(Continued).

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

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“*Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God.*”—DEUT. i. 32.

Note the possibility of partial faith.—There may be very considerable credence in divine promises, yet there may be one weak point.—In this as in other respects the law holds good: he that offends in one point offends in all.—Faith is no stronger than its weakest point.—We must not expect to realise divine blessings if we bring a crippled faith to the exercise.—It is sometimes supposed that faith is one act, and that as such it is either strong or weak.—All consciousness and all spiritual history distinctly disprove this theory.—We may have a general faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and yet encounter with strong doubt some particular injunction or promise which appeals to our self-sacrifice.—We may believe in other men praying and have doubts about our own prayers.—We may have general faith in Christian doctrine and yet be lacking in the particular faith which applies that doctrine to actual life.—We should examine the whole line of faith day by day to see

which points are weak and to amend them accordingly.—What if we believe God and do not practise godliness?—Where is faith then?

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“*Your little ones . . . shall go in thither.*”—DEUT. i. 39.

God’s purposes are not to be broken off.—Wherever they appear to be broken off it is only in detail and momentarily: the great line still stretches onward towards the completion of the eternal decree.—It is not in the power of man to frustrate the purposes of heaven.—Why do the heathen rage?—The generations are one as to the divine intention, though multitudinous in their particular details; the divine thought, therefore, cannot be judged here and now or at any particular break in history, it must be judged when all is completed and sealed.—The first shall be last and the last shall be first.—Those who are little now may be great hereafter.—The little are not condemned because of the sins of their ancestors.—Our fathers have failed, but that is

no reason why we should not succeed.—God's regard is continually fixed upon character, and never upon mere personality.—Heaven is for the good and for none else, so all wealth, power, fame go for nothing in view of that grand realisation.—There is always a promise laid up for humanity. Better things are yet to grow upon the earth, and fairer lights are yet to shine on human history.—The future has a continual influence upon the present.—Posterity ought to do something for contemporaries, where the mind is alive to the influence of actions and the certainty of harvest coming after seed-time.

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 “*There was not one city too strong for us.*”—DEUT. ii. 36.

This is a human testimony to divine promise.—Every city appeared to be too strong, yet in the strength of the Almighty the most powerful cities were as straw before fire.—What is true of cities is true of temptations.—There need not be one temptation that can distress the tried Christian.—If left to himself every temptation would be too much for him; but he is never left to himself; he is fighting God's battle; he is not at the war at his own charges, but at the cost of God, and under the security of heaven.—When we reach the better land we shall be enabled to repeat this testimony according to the variety of the circumstances through which we have come.—It will apply to difficulties of every kind,—personal, social, spiritual: the testimony will be that throughout the whole scheme of life he that was for us was more than all they that were against us.—My soul, hope thou in God!

—  
 “*Thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness.*”—DEUT. iii. 24.

This is what is always happening.

—The broadest revelation is but a beginning of the disclosure of divine riches.—Even if there be no more seed given, the possibilities of growth and development are infinite.—At the last we shall feel that we have but begun to see the greatness of God.—This is the glory of the Bible: no man can read it through with the feeling that he has exhausted its whole meaning.—The Bible grows by being read.—Without doing any violence to words or to historical forms it is felt that again and again new meanings surprise the soul like unexpected light.—The same rule holds good with regard to providence, or the daily ministry of life.—There comes a day in every man's history when he sees the beginning of the greatness of God in the outlining and direction of his own life.—Looking back to his fancy, his weakness, his poverty, his friendlessness it may be, he is surprised to find how out of the very dust of the earth God has made a man.—It is a singular testimony but universal in the Christian Church that God is never regarded as a dwindling quantity or as a contracting revelation; he is always represented as surprising students, believers, worshippers, with new resources.—He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.—When man has overtaken God he will himself be God.—It is of the very essence of God that he should be unsearchable and his wisdom past finding out.—This should be an encouragement to us in our spiritual education.—Progress should be the law and the motto of every process of spiritual inquiry.—There is always some unattained height, some unmeasured orb, some untraversed ocean.—“I count not myself to have apprehended.”—Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—All human education is but a series of beginnings.—Finality



in religious progress is impossible, and where it is supposed to have been attained the supposition risks the destiny of the soul.

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 "Behold . . . not go."—DEUT. iii. 27.

This was what was to occur in the case of Moses. He was to have a sight of the promised land, but he was not to go into it.—This was no exceptional act on the part of God; on the contrary it is what he is always doing as the ages move onwards.—There are men who see what they will never personally enjoy; and however much their impatience may wish to turn sight into still closer uses, they are filled with ecstatic joy even by the vision of the good things which are yet to come.—In this way we should live in one another and for one another.—Moses could return from the mountain and say that he had seen the good land; even that message would be a comfort to those who were weary, and in whom wonder was fast turning into doubt.—There must always be men in a progressive age who see further than others.—As some see the time when men shall learn war no more.—Others see the time when there will be no need for any man to say to his brother, "Know the Lord," for all shall know him from the least unto the greatest.—This method of divine providence is educational, inasmuch as it shows that not to go does not prevent the enjoyment of the soul in the prospect of realised promises. It is something to submit gracefully to a subordination of the individual, and to accept gladly benefits which are intended for the whole commonwealth.—There is no tone of impatience in the statement of Moses when he hears the Lord's proposition.—We must accept our place

whether we are seers or literal travellers.—It is no small pleasure to see even in dream or in assured hope the beautiful summer which is yet to spread its glories over the whole land.—The enjoyment is, indeed, intensely spiritual, but not, for that reason, the less real.—Moses may have had a fuller realisation of the promised land than the children of Israel; they had to endure the battle and the fatigue, and to win their way inch by inch: Moses saw the land, and knew that every foot of it would be given to the people whom he had led.—Aged Christians must take this standpoint.—Exhausted ministers must content themselves with the view that is before them, and leave others to secure that view in all its detail and literal value.—The oldest man should have the keenest sight into the beautiful future.—He uses his old age mischievously who uses it as a period of languor or sleep: the oldest man should have the most cheerful voice in the church.

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 "So we abide in the valley."—DEUT. iii. 29.

Places have moral interest.—Sometimes the valley is in the highland, and is therefore only a valley relatively: as compared with valleys far away down it may actually be a very high mountain.—The lesson we have to learn is to abide in the place assigned by Providence.—There is a subtle tone of submission and patience in the text. There is no complaining as to the lot.—The valley is accepted as a sanctuary. It was a valley of God's making, and therefore was to be regarded as a place on which he had expended special care.—In the valley we may have *shelter*.—In the valley we may have *harvests*.—In the valley we may have

*security.*—It is the business of the Christian to discover the advantages of his position rather than to moan over its disadvantages.—There is another valley in which we shall not abide, but shall pass through it under the comfort of the rod and the staff of the divine Shepherd.—Some persons seem never to get out of the valley; they literally abide in it as men abide in a home.—Who are we that we should chide the Providence which has made such appointments? How do we know how much the dwellers in the valley are saved from? Who can tell what compensations fall to their lot?—The text is not supposed to teach the kind of contentment which it is almost impossible to distinguish from indifference. Such contentment is no virtue. The true contentment is that which accepts the hard lot without repining, knowing that God has some good purpose in its appointment, and assured that even the hardest position may be turned to noble uses.—When our superiors attempt to keep us in the valley we may well inquire as to their authority: when God means us to abide in the valley we may be sure that he will not forsake us in our lowest estate.

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 “*The Lord hath brought you forth . . . out of the iron furnace.*”—DEUT. iv. 20.

Imagery is sometimes the most real method of representation. There was neither furnace nor iron in the case in any literal sense, and yet the moral experience of the people could not better be represented than that of having spent no small portion of their life in a burning fiery furnace.—Sorrow creates its own imagery.—What is exaggeration to one man is literal truth to another.—We are indebted to sorrow for the sublimest imagery.—

The Psalms are full of proof that such is the case.—The divine power is always magnified by spiritual worshippers.—They do not look upon history as a series of chances, but as a line along which the divine Being moves with dignity and beneficence.—He allows men to be thrown into the iron furnace, and has profound reasons for so doing; it is not his pleasure that they should be there, but it is certainly for their good that they should know the ministry of fire: the Lord knows exactly how long we have been in the furnace: he knows precisely what benefit has arisen from our being there: he knows when to liberate us from distress and despair.—There is no furnace too deep for the Lord to penetrate.—Though the furnace be of iron he can melt it and lead forth the captive with a new song in his mouth.—Do not regard furnaces as of men's construction, or as expressing the triumph of evil principles.—There hath no temptation happened unto you that is not directly sent of God, in the sense of trial and discipline.—He who has come out of the furnace can speak most tenderly of the power and compassion of God.—Not to have been in the furnace is not to have been in one of the most fruitful schools appointed by Providence for the education of mankind.—To have been in the furnace is to have learned the holy art of sympathy. To have been comforted ourselves is to be qualified to give comfort to others.—He who has dug most graves can speak most tenderly to the bereaved.—He who has stood in the midst of desolated acres without losing his confidence in God is by so much qualified to preach the duty and the joy of resignation.—The whole human race will one day be led out of the furnace, but not until the lessons of that tremendous discipline have been fully learned and applied in all the

progress and duty of life.—Throughout the whole of the Scriptures it is the Lord who is magnified and not man who is praised for having found out some secret way of escape.—To know the Lord as a Deliverer in great crises and straits is to be assured that, in all the minor difficulties and trials of life, his presence shall be our protection and our hope.

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 "I must not go . . . but ye shall go."—  
 DEUT. iv. 22.

This is a brave speech on the part of an old man. Such speeches ought to be uttered by the most advanced Christians to-day.—This man utters his speech without complaint.—It seems impossible to reconcile the imperfect revelation granted to some men with the goodness of God.—They come so near seeing the perfect light, and yet die without beholding the noontide glory.—It would have been very different with the people had Moses been a man of another spirit; querulous, discontented, complaining against God.—The spirit of progress rejoices in the progress of others.—We are not to limit the revelation of God by that which we see ourselves.—We must look to the future of the race and see in that future something brighter than has yet shone upon our own vision.—That thought may be applied to theological thinkers.—There is nothing final in theological investigation.—Interpretation will show the progressiveness even of the Bible itself.—The greatest students of the book die exclaiming to the younger men, "Ye shall go over, and possess the good land."—The thought should also be applied to Christian workers as well as to Christian students.—Though we die without reaping the harvest, the harvest will surely be reaped by others.

—We should so live that when we come to die our last speech may be one of encouragement to the men who are following.—The man who dies thus does not die at all, in any degrading sense.—Moses, though dead according to the flesh, lived in all the power of the spirit, and was a continual inspiration to the people whom he had led so many years in the wilderness.—There is always a good land to be possessed; a land of larger liberty; a land of larger knowledge; a land of surer trust in divine realities.—The spirit of the Church must be a spirit of conquest; when it drops from this noble elevation it inflicts upon itself a most humiliating disability.

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 "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day."—DEUT. v. 3.

There is a general revelation intended for all men through all time.—There is also a special revelation given to individuals, and limited by precise periods of duration.—All moral revelation—that is, revelation dealing with righteousness, truth, duty—is universal and everlasting.—Jesus Christ answered the lawyer who temptingly questioned him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?"—Whilst it is true that some portions of the Bible were written for individuals, and were limited by local circumstances, it is surprising how many of these apparently merely local texts assume a relation to our individual necessities.—Wherever this is the case we have been mistaken in calling such passages local and limited.—The heart often creates its own Scripture. When the true soul reads the Bible and sees in it an anticipation of his distresses and a remedy for his sufferings, he is

entitled to believe that the passage was written for himself as if he had been the only individual in the world.—We are not to go in quest of these passages as if with an intention to force them into new meanings, but when they open naturally to the touch of necessity and pain we are certainly entitled to accept their doctrine and their solace.—It is beyond all doubt that every law bearing upon purity of spirit and goodness of conduct was written for the benefit of the whole race throughout every age of its development.—This is at once the glory and the defence of the Bible.—It abides through all time; the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.—The Bible is a book addressed to humanity, and therefore it is at home in every land and in every language.—It has been remarked upon as a notable and suggestive circumstance that no book is so available for purposes of translation into all tongues as is the Bible.—Every man whose soul is hungry has, by virtue of his hunger, a right to this tree of life.—Let every one beware, however, how he takes the consolations and omits the commandments.—This would be a felonious use of the Scriptures.—The Bible is not to be read as a compliment to our feelings, but as a stimulus to our whole nature, that the man of God may be thoroughly instructed and perfected in all holiness.—Many men are particular about having the covenants confirmed who do not appear to be quite so particular about having the commandments obeyed.

—  
 “*The Lord loved you.*”—DEUT. vii. 8.

The word love is an Old Testament word.—It would not be difficult to show that the tenderest expressions ever used by heaven to earth are reported not in the New Testament but

in the Old.—It is not enough for the people to know that their Lord is almighty, because power may become a terror.—Not only power belongeth unto God but also mercy: this is the complete aspect of the divine nature.—That the Lord loved Israel was shown by long-suffering, by hopeful patience, by pouring down blessing upon blessing, notwithstanding the ingratitude of the people; it would seem as if even sin itself was hardly allowed to block out the light of heaven.—The love of God is the true interpretation of the history of man in all its movement towards nobility and spiritual sovereignty and rest.—Nothing but love could account for the continuance of the world under all its sinfulness and ingratitude.—It is love that explains the greatest revelations of God.—It is love that explains the Cross of Jesus Christ.—It is love that explains the assured progress of redeemed and sanctified souls.—The love of God excludes all other claims to his attention and interest: thus we are not allowed to say that God's favours come to us on account of our merit, or ancestry, or excellence above others; whatever we have is of the free mercy and love of God.—The love which explains all the past is the surest guarantee of all the future.—Love never changes.—What is true of divine love in the soul is true of that same love in God himself; it hopeth all things, endureth all things, believeth all things, it never faileth.—It is our joy to believe in a God of love; nay, in our highest moods we do not regard love as an attribute of God, but we say God himself is love.—Love does not exclude discipline.—Love does not exclude anger.—But on the other side, neither discipline nor anger changes or diminishes the love of God.—“Good when he gives, supremely good; not less when he denies.”

“*The faithful God.*”—DEUT. vii. 9.

Considerable instruction is supplied by noting the qualifying terms which are often attached to the divine name.—We read of the living God, the mighty God, the glorious Lord God, and in the text of the faithful God.—Sometimes the qualifying terms are rather repellent than attractive, as, for example, “the great and terrible God,” and in Daniel we read of the “great and dreadful God.”—These terms do not occur in the New Testament, yet even in the later books of revelation God is described as “a consuming fire,” and in the Apocalypse we read of “the wrath of the Lamb,” so that there is a line of consistency in the Old Testament and the New as regards the description of the character of God.—Perhaps there is no word which is more profoundly comfortable than the word “faithful” as applied to the divine Being.—It would appear as if “love” were more attractive and soothing, but this is an appearance only. Faithfulness is love; without faithfulness love itself would be impossible, because it would become a mere sentiment, liable to be cooled and changed by passing circumstances. It should be observed that even in the Old Testament, in the very text in which the divine Being is described as the great and terrible God, he is further described as “keeping covenant and mercy for evermore with them that love him and observe his commandments.”—God is not the less loving because he is “great and terrible.”—The Apostle Paul is very fond of applying the word “faithful,” to God and to Jesus Christ, thus: “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”—“The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.”—“God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted

above that ye are able.”—“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”—The Apostle John, too, in a remarkable passage, avails himself of the same descriptive term: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”—Thus forgiveness itself is an expression of faithfulness and justice, and therefore may be accepted as essential and everlasting.—If God is faithful himself, he expects faithfulness in others.—He praises faithfulness in those who have completed their course of life honourably: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”—He would see himself in others.—Faithfulness means consistency, permanency, reality of thought and service, and is absolutely intolerant of all fickleness, self-regard, men-pleasing, and time-serving.—“Be thou faithful unto death.”

“ . . . to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself.”—DEUT. ix. 1.

This would seem to be an inversion of the doctrine of proportion.—We forget, however, that there is a proportion of quality as well as a proportion of quantity.—Force is not to be measured by bulk.—The helm is very small compared to the whole ship, yet it turns the vessel’s course. The man is very small physically in relation to the mountain which is thousands of feet high, yet the man is master of the mountain. The rider is small in strength compared with the horse he rides, yet the steed obeys the touch of his hand.—We constantly see how apparently little things rule obviously great bulks and quantities.—The true sovereignty is in the spirit.—This is the seat of the highest miracles that are wrought; such miracles simply illustrate the sovereign influence of

mind over matter.—How little is man as to mere arithmetical measurement compared with the great globe; yet God has put all things under the hands of man: "All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."—Let us reason upwards towards moral power: the power of ideas, impulses, sympathies, convictions.—The time will come when moral forces will be regarded as the true sovereignties. Towards this consummation Christ has been working from the beginning. The sword shall be beaten into a ploughshare, and all violence shall be deposed by the quietness of power.—Carry this a step higher into the religious region, and draw from the whole reasoning the inference that the religious nature is the most influential of all.—Truth shall take captive all the superstitions, idolatries, misconceptions, and false worships of the world.—We must admit what may be called even the smallest truth; let it have free course, and it will overturn the most ancient thrones and dominions which have been claimed by the powers of darkness.—Even the light of a candle will break up the darkness which fills the largest building.—In the strength of these thoughts and hopes every Christian should toil gladly, delighting himself with the pleasures of expectancy, knowing that the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God.

—  
*"The Lord hearkened unto me at that time also."*—DEUT. ix. 19.

The memorable prayers of life.—Times of conscious conquest.—Who cannot recall periods in which the Lord by consent allowed himself to be overthrown, as if in war and wrest-

ling, by the tender violence of love?—These great memories stimulate us to renewed endeavours in prayer and service.—We date our best endeavours from our latest conquests.—Only the good man can say whether prayer can be answered or not.—Moses here pledges his word as to the reality of answered prayer.—To destroy this answer we must first discredit Moses.—This is the real reply to those who would discuss the virtue of prayer.—This is not a question which can be settled in controversial terms, or within the narrow grounds of verbal definition; the inquiry must be addressed to the praying soul itself; the praying soul has never feared to say that its supplications have been rewarded with great answers.—Family history may be inquired into to bear evidence upon this matter. What of sickness? What of deliverance in the time of vital perplexity? What about the dispersion of clouds that hung like an infinite night over the whole life? What of sudden and unexpected answers to questions which we expected would cut us like swords?—A man must be very wise who can answer all such questions offhandedly, and dispense with the idea of the personality and intervention of God in the shaping and direction of human affairs.

—  
*"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart."*—DEUT. x. 16.

What God wants is moral purity.—We cannot live in rites and ceremonies.—It was well to begin with the outward, but the meaning was that we should go forward to the inward and spiritual.—Nor was this revelation of the spiritual purpose long delayed; even in the Old Testament we read, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your

heart, ye men of Judah.”—Nothing would be more convenient or more pleasant to the carnal man than to merely observe some outward laws and regulations; but the word of the Lord is sharper than any two-edged sword, and its business is done in the innermost heart of man. “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. . . . Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.”—There is, therefore, an evangelical or spiritual circumcision.—“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”—If we have escaped that which is physically painful, we have come into that which is spiritually disciplinary.—“Rend your heart, and not your garments.”—Man himself is called upon to do this, not that he has the ability to complete the circumcision, but any desire which he shows to begin it will call the almightiness of God to his aid.

“For ye are not as yet come to the rest.”

—DEUT. xii. 9.

Still, it is of infinite value to the soul to know that there is a rest.—A man is helped through the week by knowing that he is coming to a period when labour will be suspended, and quietness will be at least rendered possible.—If we are stimulated by beginnings, we are comforted by promised endings.—To be told that there is no termination to the road we are upon, discourages us for advancing even the next few yards; but to be told that every few yards traversed will bring us nearer the end, where we may expect home and rest and security, is really to nerve us for service and danger.—Heaven is not

promised as an appeal to our selfishness, but as a comfort to our weakness and a sure reward of all obedience and excellence in human life.—Even the Apostle looked forward to the close with the highest gratification and thankfulness, seeing, as he did, the crown of righteousness which was laid up for him, and knowing that he should join the general assembly and church of the firstborn.—A man need not work the less energetically on Monday because he sees in the distance the quiet Sabbath-day offering him harbour and refuge.—There is a period of strife which is to be succeeded by a period of rest. But what rest can he have who has never known the strife? Is not all pleasure, in some degree, by contrast? The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, simply because he is a labouring man and has earned the repose which his exhaustion needs.—What heaven can they have who have made earth into a mere sleeping-place or garden of delights, having walled out, so far as it is possible to human wealth and vanity to do so, all darkness and necessity and trouble?—What a home-coming must the true soldier have who is conscious of having fought patriotically and daringly in the interests he went out to serve!—A beautiful picture is given of the ending from all toil and strife in the good cause.—“And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand.”—Christ himself was encouraged by the disclosed termination of his toil and suffering.—He knew that he must reign until he had put all enemies under his feet.—For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame. Here every good worker may be com-

forted and stimulated: if the work were to go on for ever, it seems as if our poor strength would regard its continuity with despair; but not knowing how soon it may end, and knowing that all faithfulness will end in heaven, the soul is encouraged to put on its strength, and to do with its whole might whatsoever it may find to do.—“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

“... when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about. . . . Then there shall be a place.”—DEUT. xii. 10, 11.

There are temporary rests on the road of life.—The battle is sometimes suspended, and we know not when it may be resumed.—Some spiritual use is to be made even of temporary cessations of difficulty.—The religious use which was to be made in ancient times of periods of rest expressed itself in the building of altars and the offering of sacrifices.—Ancient life seemed to be divided between war and worship.—In reality that distribution would seem to be continued throughout all time.—The Christian is either in the field of battle or in the house of prayer.—Even rest is not to be spent slothfully, but is to be enjoyed with a religious purpose as well as to be inspired by religious thankfulness.—When Jesus Christ offered his disciples rest, it was only for a limited time. His words were, “Come ye into a desert place, and rest a while,”—not rest a long time, and certainly not rest for the remainder of your days, but rest a while—take a breath, stand still for a moment, and then resume with energy the pursuits of life.—The holiday is only to make the subsequent labour more energetic and hopeful.—We are not to use rest as a confection which would give us distaste for labour.—

Nor are we to use rest as a kind of opiate which would disable the very powers it affects to renew.—Even rest may be a form of labour, or, at least, it may be so enjoyed as to give the soul promise of renewed endeavour to redeem human life and bless the human lot, now so full of sadness, and now so enfeebled by weariness.—It is but cowardice for men to run away from labour that they may enjoy inglorious ease.—When merchant-men succeed in laying by sufficient to maintain themselves in comfort, they should be planning some new sphere of activity, so that they may better serve their day and generation when they are released from the wear and tear of the drudgery of life.—No man is to say to his soul, Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; he is rather to say, I have no further care about the body; now shall my soul have full swing in the highest and best activity.—This is the true preparation before the Sabbath—the Sabbath of heaven.

“... as he is able.”—DEUT. xvi. 17.

This is the law of giving in the Old Testament, and it is the law of giving in the New Testament.—It is a just and equitable law.—It devolves a supreme responsibility upon the giver.—It makes him an accountant in the sight of God.—He has to add up his resources and diligently to consider their sum, and then to give as he may be able.—This law does not relate to money only, but to time, influence, and sympathy.—Nothing would be so easy for many men as to buy themselves off, by the gifts of money, from all further service. Simply because of the abundance of their wealth, money is as nothing to them, and the giving of it is not felt.—It is only when the giving is touched with the pain of sacrifice that it becomes of any value



in the sanctuary.—Still, most of us have to begin with the donation of money, but no man has to end with it.—There is no niggardliness in the promises of God in relation to the true giver, of whatever nature his gifts may be.—“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”—“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”—Jesus Christ noticed what gifts were thrown into the treasury, and he regarded them all in the light of proportion.—“God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love.”—Not a cup of cold water is to go unrewarded if given to a disciple in the name of Christ.—These grand moral standards of gift and service constitute a powerful defence of the heavenly origin of the Bible.

... *then thy brother should seem vile unto thee.*—DEUT. xxv. 3.

This was the law of punishment as laid down by Moses.—The stripes were to be not more than forty, because if there were more—that is to say, if they were given at random—the man who received them would become “vile” in the sight of the man who inflicted them.—A measure of punishment is rendered necessary by the quality of the man who is punished.—Man is not to be regarded as a beast of burden. Even when he has done wrong he is a man still, and a man capable of restoration and re-adoption into good citizenship.—Thus mercy is wonderfully mingled with law even in the Old Testament.—When God corrected his people he said he would

“correct them in measure.”—Where the punishment ends hope is to begin.—This is really the meaning of all controversial chastisements, losses, and difficulties of every kind.—They do not come with overwhelming and destructive force; they come “in measure,” and with a purpose of mercy; and as to how we receive such visitations, that will depend upon the spirit in which we view them; if we view them as chastisements only, or the expressions of an arbitrary will, we shall quail under them and be driven into despair; but if we look aside from the chastisement into the purpose it was meant to elucidate or enforce, then we shall kiss the hand which lifts the rod.—When the sufferings of Bildad seemed to be intolerable, the exclamation was: “Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight?” The Apostles, too, when apparently left without regard either from God or man, betook themselves to the same line of reasoning: “We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.”—Parents should take notice of this law of measured correction.—So should all magistrates and judges.—God himself regulates his discipline by it, and expects that every man on whom the rod falls will bethink himself and turn and repent.—Man should never be so treated as to cause his manhood to be ignored.—Contempt should never be either the reason or the result of any course of punishment.—When penalty ceases to be connected with hope, it ceases to be righteous.—Behold the goodness and the sovereignty of the Lord.—Blessed are they who have accepted the chastisement and have turned it into a renewal of hope and an assurance of ultimate purification.

## SELECTED NOTE.

"We find that in the guidance of the human race, from the earliest ages downwards, more especially in the lives of the three patriarchs, God prepared the way by revelations for the covenant which he made at Sinai with the people of Israel. But in these preparations we can discover no sign of any legendary and unhistorical transference of later circumstances and institutions, either Mosaic or post-Mosaic, to the patriarchal age; and they are sufficiently justified by the facts themselves, since the Mosaic economy cannot possibly have been brought into the world, like a *deus ex machina*, without the slightest previous preparation. The natural simplicity of the patriarchal life, which shines out in every narrative, is another thing that produces on every unprejudiced reader the impression of a genuine historical tradition. This tradition, therefore, even though for the most part transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth alone, has every title to credibility, since it was perpetuated within the patriarchal family, "in which, according to divine command (Gen. xviii. 19), the manifestations of God in the lives of our fathers were handed down as an heirloom, and that with all the greater care, in proportion to the longevity of the patriarchs, the simplicity of their life, and the closeness of their seclusion from foreign and discordant influences. Such a tradition would undoubtedly be guarded with the greatest care. It was the foundation of the very existence of the chosen family, the bond of its unity, the mirror of its duties, the pledge of its future history, and therefore its dearest inheritance" (*Delitzsch*). But we are by no means to suppose that all the accounts and incidents in the book of Genesis were dependent upon oral tradition; on the contrary, there is much which was simply copied from written documents handed down from the earliest times. Not only the ancient genealogies, which may be distinguished at once from the historical narratives by their antique style, with its repetitions of almost stereotyped formularies, and by the peculiar forms of the names which they contain, but certain historical sections—such, for example, as the account of the war in Gen. xiv., with its superabundance of genuine and exact accounts of a primitive age, both historical and geographical, and its old words, which had disappeared from the living language before the time of Moses, as well as many others—were unquestionably copied by Moses from ancient documents."

## GENERAL REVIEW.

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### PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let there be in our hearts a light brighter than noonday. We would that the Son of man might live within us his life of light, and cause all our life to burn with his glory, so that men passing by may take knowledge of us that we have lived with Jesus, and that we no longer live ourselves but that Christ liveth in us. For this miracle we pray. We ask for no change in thy great creation which we cannot follow because of our littleness and dimness of sight; but we ask for a miracle within, a transformation which we can realise as to its results, though quite unable to tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. We would be born again. We would see with new eyes and hear with new hearing, and answer all the appeals of thy providence with new voices. We would be startled by our new selves; we would wonder at the music of the new voice; we would be soothed by the tones of the new intercession. Withhold not this sign from us! Grant this token from heaven! We shall know it well, for there is none like it, nor can it be simulated with perfectness. We bless thee for any love of light we have. Once we loved darkness rather than light. Thou hast brought us out of darkness not only into light, but into a marvellous light—like light upon light, day upon day, until shamed darkness has fled away, and all heaven burns with glory. Help us evermore to walk as children of the day and not of the night, to speak the language of light, and to be found always amongst those who are not afraid or ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. We owe ourselves unto that Gospel: we were dead, and are alive again; we were lost, and are found; and now, in possession of this immortal life, we stand up before thee a ransomed host, our hearts kindling with gratitude, our lives prepared for sacrifice. We will not think of the troubles thou hast caused us to pass through, for the joy is greater because of the sorrow. Men forget the night in the morning; the reaper forgets the seed-time in the golden harvest, when his barns are too small, when his fields are rich with corn; so do we forget our trouble in our gladness. The trouble was but for a moment; the joy is an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. This thou hast taught us by divine ministry; for hast thou not taught thy servant to say that where sin abounded grace did much more abound? so that even sinners began to sing; their crime had vanished like a black, windy night, and their adoption had excited within them the spirit of worship and the angel of music. We forget our hunger at the feast; we soon forget the cold in which we shivered when we stand at our Father's board, and are under the light of our Father's blessing. Make us rich with wisdom, wealthy

in understanding; give us the unsearchable riches of Christ as our treasure; then when the drought cometh we shall not see it, and when the springs are dried up there shall be a secret fountain in the sanctuary. We bless thee for all the way along which thou hast led us—now in the deep valleys, now full of sunshine and summer gladness; here an inviolable palace, there a grave-stone rich with memories, and yonder a bright place where we feasted well, and sang loudly, and wished the day were twice as long. For all the road we thank thee. It has been educational; we have been receiving stimulus by all the progress we have made; and now that we are here, putting up another Sabbath milestone, we will say,—Hitherto hath the Lord helped us, and as for the rest of the road, we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint. Keep us as the apple of thine eye. Receive special thanks and blessings, from all who have special thanks and acknowledgments to make to thee—for individual blessings, for family life, for business prosperity, for direction, guidance, sympathy, and hope. The Lord look upon the country; it is ours, and we love it, and pray for it. But all lands are thine. We pray continually that the glory of the Lord may cover the whole earth. We stand here, but we live everywhere: we touch a point, but pray for a whole circumference—the entire family of man. Liberate the slave; break the arm of the tyrant; cause sudden night to fall upon those who are in eager quest of things forbidden, and prosper every good man and upright cause and true purpose; and bring all into the great millennial light, the grand era of Christian reign, when the Lord shall be enthroned, and all men shall know in their hearts that the night is gone and the morning has come. Amen.

### THE GREAT QUESTIONS OF THE PENTATEUCH.

**I**T is instructive to notice the exact position of the first question in the Bible. It has come to be quite a common and simple thing for us to ask questions. We think nothing of it. Some men hardly think of anything. Many suppose that they have a perfect right to ask questions. There is a morality in question-asking, and, therefore, a limit. Persons will say, with assumed or sincere feeling, Surely we have a right to ask a question? The answer to that innocent suggestion is a broad and emphatic denial. Persons are accustomed to call certain questions "harmless." There is no harmless question that has an unavowed motive behind it, or that seeks to serve an ulterior but undiscovered purpose. The most "harmless" questions and suggestions to be found in the whole range of the Bible are the utterances of the devil! He was perfectly "harmless"! The mark of interrogation he softened into a dying cadence; the evil suggestion he conveyed with armfuls of flowers, rich with colour

and fragrance. When the devil spoke to Jesus the words were of the most "harmless" nature ; when he accosted our first parents it was with the civility of a "Good-morning," with the calculated courtesy of a spirit that has an object. But the words are without stain or suggestion of evil. At first they were but an inquiry ; and to ask a question of a human being in a human voice is surely the very first element of civility.

Where is the first mark of interrogation in the Bible ? Who instituted that punctuation ? Up to that time we had been content with comma and semicolon and period : who introduces this crooked mark ? You will find that the first question is in the very first book of the Bible :—"And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ?" (Gen. iii. 1). Question-asking has been the ruin of the world. Yet it is so simple that every man thinks he has a right to it. He reflects not that to ask a question is to put out boundaries, to seek intellectual enlargement at some possible moral cost. Question-asking either begets discontentment or fosters it. Men would be better if they asked no questions, except those that obviously limit themselves as to their moral purpose, or that indicate the urgency and sanctity of a prayer. One question begets another. Questions can never be answered. The mischief is that question-asking is considered a sign of intellectual progress ; within given limits it may be justly so regarded, but there is a limitation to interrogative inquiry, and we should be careful about the limit before we put the question. There comes to be quite a trick of question-asking, which is often mistaken for genius ; so men become proud of it : having put one difficult question, and seen how the interlocutor is utterly puzzled, another is invented, because the cheapest of all cleverness consists in asking questions and composedly waiting for replies that can never be given. By asking a question you may ruffle a mind : by putting an inquiry you may poison a life ; the question may be harmless in words, but most fruitful of baleful issue in the outworking of all the processes which it begins. Here is a new form of human conversation. Up to this point we have had next to no conversation ; the man and woman have been created, but as to what passed between them we

know next to nothing; it is the third party who excites new intellectual ferment or disquietude, or who quietly troubles the life with an inquiry, and then vanishes. We may ask questions of ourselves, sharp, penetrating, accusatory questions; we may stimulate ourselves by inquiries keen as double-edged swords; but there is a question-asking that is profanity, because it touches upon the impossible and vexes the mind by chafing against the infinite limitation, the eternal boundary, on which is written, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. Let a man encounter that utterance with *Why?* and he is lost. The moment he says *Why?* he has overleaped himself; he has passed the altar-line; he is no longer safe. If he did say *Why?* he should say it timidly, reverentially, with the awe and the wonder akin to prayer; but he should not put the word as a question to which he demands an answer before he will believe, or adore, or serve the Spirit of creation. Nor is this intellectual timidity: it is intellectual self-restraint, which is the highest intellectual courage; it is the very heroism of faith. It says, The world is larger than I comprehend. I have not time to settle all the questions which vex even the surface of life; I must therefore live a day at a time, and take one step at a time, and not turn over a page until I have read the page preceding; and thus I will be led and educated from point to point. The devil often comes into the mind in the form of a question, and comes in with some civility, because of the frankness and perfect courtesy of the inquiry. He asks questions about the books we read, the prayers we pray, the events we endeavour to construe into moral significance. Upon the altar, where we have been since childhood, he simply writes with black finger a mark of interrogation; not a word is said, but the query looks us in the face and makes us afraid, because our hearts are greater than our heads, our moral emotion and desire in excess of our intellectual education: and this must always be so, because feeling is the universal language, and is not within the sphere of debate, controversy, or intellectual contention. Search into the origin of question-asking. Be suspicious of all inquiries that are "absolutely harmless." Nothing is so easily disturbed as the angel of faith—not disturbed through fear; but, because of a sensitiveness akin to the sensibility of God, the fall of a leaf in the night-wind is heard, a sound of a distant step is detected. A sigh may take

an interrogative form; a prayer may be but an aspect of scepticism. Watch the question-gate! It is an element in the bad renown of the devil that he began the battle by asking a "harmless question."

Who put the next inquiry? You will find that the next question was put by Jehovah himself:—"And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"—(Gen. iii. 9)—an extraordinary inquiry when searched into; an impossible inquiry from certain points of view. Is Omniscience blind? Did he who formed the eye not see? "Where" does not always relate to locality; it is a wide word, full of solemn and tender suggestion. A man may be standing face to face with you, but be separated from you in heart by the diameter of creation. "Where art thou?" is not a mere inquiry of position, or relating to measurable points, but where art thou morally, sympathetically? where art thou in purpose, in supreme desire, in settled and chastened motive? A man may be in the sanctuary, and yet far from the altar. This is a novel question. Where art thou?—yesterday at the gate meeting me, waiting for me; here, as it were, first, longing for the light to come back again; why this change? what has occurred? Who told thee thou wast naked? A man is not naked until he is told that he is naked. It is the ear that makes the sound which is struck and elicited in the infinite wilderness. Now question-asking introduces a new element into human intercourse and human responsibility. Already here is a great white throne; the judgment is set, and the question is asked which will determine the destiny of the world. Everything depends upon our answer to this simple inquiry. Does human liberty begin here—at least in some new phase? or is human liberty bounded by this inquiry? Has not a man a right to be either here or there, outside the garden or inside, on the right hand or on the left? May he not walk east or west, as he pleases? Why this Voice that asks as to locality, or purpose, or sympathy, or moral attitude and relation? Temptation had not long been in the world when judgment followed it. Where men will ask questions, or allow questions to be received into the mind, they have begun a criticism which

God will continue. The question-asking cannot be all on one side. God may not ask for information: he asks that in answering his inquiry man may accuse and confound himself. Remember how true it is that men realise certain positions upon being told of them. Happily, this tells in both ways. Say to some poor soul who is blind, and groping, and wondering. "Behold, he prayeth,"—and he may actually pray. You have supplied him with a form of words which exactly expresses his feeling. He knew not what he was doing; he was upon a border-line; he seemed to see men as trees walking, and to see new lights and gleams in the sky—a mystic writing in the clouds—and he felt his hands rising upwards as if to seize some nearing blessing; but he knew not what he did until an angel said, "Behold, he prayeth." Say to some earnest student, who dare not so much as lift his eyes unto heaven, but who, closing them, looks on high with inward vision alight with the tender gleam of hope—say to him, "Thou art also a Christian: thy speech betrayeth thee, thy look identifies thee; thou art also a follower of the Son of man," and the very suggestion may be the one spark that was needed to cause his courage to flame up in testimony and holy avowal and witness. Yesterday the man knew not that he was naked. Some one must have told him.

So we have the first question directly traceable to the enemy, and the second question directly falling from the lips of Jehovah. Is there any more question-asking? Who asks another great question?—the angels. We may call them angels: we cannot tell who they were; they were mysterious personalities; they were representative of those mystic influences which are continually playing around human life, exciting wonder, or fear, or joy—persons without names, influences without nameable bounds, ministries that allure, or deter, or sway, or repel; and we cannot tell by what authority they speak; yet they work miracles, they feed multitudes, they quiet the sea. Three of these mysterious personalities are before us. They ask a question in reply to human unbelief:—"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"—(Gen. xviii. 14)—the thing we always forget. Having learned it to-day, to-morrow we shall forget the solemn lesson. We follow our eyes, and call it faith; we believe



mightily concerning things which are already in our clutch, but such belief is not accredited to us as faith. What we have to consider in the difficult circumstances of life is—the Lord's power. It is perfectly clear that we may be in a deadlock; the walls are thick, the doors are of iron, the key is lost, and we cannot escape; but the question is not for us at all. Therein is our mistake—that we suppose the circumstances to be bounded by our personality. Through all the winds of time, all the currents of the centuries, there comes this all-exciting yet all-quieting inquiry—"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" He gives, he takes away; he shakes the prison; he conducts the ministries of life: the Lord reigneth. Christians will say so in theory: they would dispute with any man who offered to deny it: but who believes it? Not only have we come to the last loaf, but we have come to the last little piece of the loaf, and we are all an hungered; that is the time when the question is to come to us with the power and sanction of a faith—"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" So to say, we disappoint God of his opportunities: we will persist in out-running him; and thus he allows our weakness to go first in many instances. The thing to be done is to leave him a clear field, bounded east, west, north, and south by absolute necessity: there is the divine sphere; but whilst we are looking around and exciting our poor ignorance and weakness, and persisting in doing something, God may not work. He often waits until we are asleep, and takes our sleep as a kind of faith. He says, in effect,—I must not be too hard with them: they are question-askers; they were early serpent-bitten: bitten through an interrogation, and the poison has been awful in effect; they cannot believe: I must wait until they are dead asleep, and at midnight I will work some wonder for them; even then, when they begin to rub their eyes in a new wakefulness, they will ask questions, and wonder who did it, as if they were in a dream; and they will attribute the whole incident to a species of somnambulism;—still, they were made yesterday: they dwell in dust, in clay of the earth; their breath is in their nostrils; I must account sleep as a kind of faith, and unconsciousness as a species of trust; I will not forsake them, I will set a miracle at their bedside,

so that when they awake they may begin to believe. Thus we are drawn on little by little, line by line. Blessed be God, we have come a long way from the first point in many instances. Some are now, in mid-life, beginning to pray; they say they see it now. It has taken them full fifty years to begin to see men as trees walking, but they now do so begin; and they attest their faith by a new tone in the voice, by a new aspect of kindness, by a new gait in the world as they pass along; they are more upright, their very stature seems to have increased, there is a fearlessness of a subtle kind about their down-sitting and their up-rising; they say they see it now! Will they use their sight to-morrow under a new set of circumstances? No; they will be as blind as ever then. But the Lord knoweth we are dust—a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away—question-askers, who mistake interrogation for revelation, and a power of scepticism as a sign of intellectual progress.

Thus we have had three interrogators—the serpent, Jehovah, angels. Will not man ask some question little or great? Shall there be no human element in all this interrogation? There are human questions in the Bible, as for example:—“Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”—(Gen. xviii. 23)—the first time we have heard so solemn a question from human lips. The question is being asked to-day. It does seem as if Providence were marked by indiscriminateness. A man is killed at the altar: if so, does not that destroy the theory of particular providence? A man has fallen down dead in church. Impossible! if God be so careful of his loving ones. The righteous have been thrown down in the streets, and the wicked have plundered them, and passed on and enjoyed the booty with a fool's laugh; virtue has been pinched with poverty, vice has multiplied its balance at the usurer's:—“Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” It looks so. The one soul in the house that prayed is dead, and they who laughed at the suppliant live to turn the memory into jesting. “Wilt thou destroy the righteous *and not* the wicked?” would seem to be a question justified by some limited aspects of Providence. These are mysteries—not created by the Bible, but found outside the Bible and independently of the Bible, and are to be adjudged

and determined apart altogether from Christian faith, if we will have it so. Blessed be God, they can be otherwise adjudged within the sanctuary, by the help of Christian faith; and then there comes a light upon all the gloom, and if the midnight is not sunny, it is so full of stars that it cannot be called darkness.

Let us now turn to some questions which were put directly to Almighty God Himself. Since question-asking has begun, who can tell to what lengths it may go? We have just seen that the devil put the first question, and began that dangerous method of intellectual development, and that he is in no wise less guilty because the first question was, from an outside point of view, perfectly harmless as to words. One of the great questions put by man to God was this: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. iv. 9). There are two tones in that inquiry. The one is a tone of amazement. God's investigation into the destiny of Abel seems to have amazed with unutterable astonishment the murderer of his brother. The inquiry came upon Cain like a revelation. He did not comprehend the fact that society is one, that humanity is one, that we are responsible socially for one another to a very high degree—for one another's strength, progress, honour, and specially responsible for one another's life. So the inquiry may be taken as an expression of astonishment, meaning—"If I had known that I was my brother's keeper and had to be called to account because of my brother, I should have looked after him; I should have been careful about him; nothing should have been keener than my criticism of my own spirit and action towards him; I am wonderstruck; I knew not that I was my brother's keeper." But that is not the natural tone of the inquiry; that only constitutes one of those mean excuses of which inventive minds may take advantage in the hour of accusation and judgment. We must not practise the unworthy trick of amazement too much. Even astonishment may cease to be a miracle. We may be far too much amazed, and in astonishment we may fritter away any supposed claim we had to frankness and innocence and simplicity of mind. There is an amazement that is self-condemnatory. What is the natural tone of the inquiry? It is one of peevish reproach. The question ought to be asked with great keenness and

poignancy of voice. It is the inquiry of an offending man who is conscious of guilt and afraid of punishment, and who yet wishes, with an apparent defiance, to keep back the arm that would smite him in return. All sin leads to peevishness of manner. The bad man is never profoundly serene. He knows not the poetry or the order of fully-rounded composure and contentment—the fall of a leaf frightens him out of his simulated propriety; the closing of a door, the opening of a window, the touch of a child, an unexpected question,—these continually alarm and extort from him fretful inquiries, petulant remarks, impetuous criticism. Thus sin riddles the character through and through, punctuates it, makes it full of holes, takes away all its solidity, continuity, strength, and nobleness. A peevish voice may mark the course of sin, avowed or unavowed. It is singular how character comes out in vocal tones, in menial attitudes, in exclamations of surprise or petulance. That was the natural tone of Cain's inquiry. He asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" in a tone which means, "What have I to do with him? He is capable of taking care of himself; I cannot always be going about after my brother; he is a man as well as I am; he must beware of all dangers and of all surprises, and bring himself home again after the journeying of the day,"—a speech too independent to be candid, too defiant to be religious, too hurriedly spoken with hot lips to express the conviction of a solid affection, or the desire of fraternal solicitude. Cain will not plead guilty, nor will he avow innocence in so many words; he will avail himself of a question—a question so large as to be an open gate through which he may escape the judgment of God. Understand that this question was put to the Almighty as the result of an inquiry of his own. God made inquest for blood. The first speech was made by the Almighty himself. Instead of being met frankly and lovingly it was met by an inquiry. This is the method of sin in all time: it seeks to put the judge off the scent; it attempts to divert the mind, to distract the attention, to suggest a new possibility; and, with some claim of a haughty kind to independence, it seeks to enclose the soul within walls which must not be violated even by the Judge of the whole earth. Let us read our own character in this kind of questioning. We have lost the straight line: we have ourselves

become as crooked as the interrogation with which we punctuate our utterances. God meant us to be upright, plain of speech, real in soul and heart, sound in motive, having nothing to hide ; and we have resorted to the cunning of a question, to the evasion of an "innocent" inquiry.

Another question put directly to the Almighty himself was propounded by the astounded Abraham :—" Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) This question was indeed put to three men who visited him ; but it is our joy to believe that one of those personalities represented the Lord God himself. There was a mystery about the Third Man which none could understand. The same Man comes up again and again in Biblical history, and works wonders in the lives of men—now by dreams, now by mental visions, now by disturbing impressions, and anon by events which man did not begin and which man cannot perfectly control. For this reason we hesitate not to say that the question was addressed to the Eternal himself. A wonderful word occurs in this question. Wonderful words are startled out of men by marvellous ministries of a supernatural kind. Here is one of the grandest words in all human speech. That little word is "right." What is "right" ? Who can define it ? All men can define it within, in the court of conscience, and receive the sanction of judgment and reason ; but who can define it outwardly and to another so as to bind that other by his definition ? We must not escape from the pressure of this inquiry by taking refuge in the impossibility of one man defining right for another. Every man knows what right is. When he begins to quibble about the etymological definition he begins to show that he knows himself to be wrong. This is a marvellous fact in the constitution of men who have lived under Christianising influences—and it has often appeared in nations to which the name of Christ was utterly unknown—that there should be a spirit in man that knows right from wrong, that feels it, that, how poor soever may be the faculty and use of speech, yet in the soul there is a sense that says, This is right, that is wrong ; Thou shalt, thou shalt not. Herein the commandments have their supreme hold upon our moral attention. They are indisputable. The moment we hear them, we hear, so to say, our mother-tongue. We know it, arise to it, and say, That is

right ; whatever may be said upon the other side is of the nature of a quibble, a fool's criticism ; it is without solidity and reality, it will not bear the pressure of life all round ; these great commandments thundered from the mountain are right : we affirm them, and confirm them, and answer back again, This is right. Abraham knew from observation, from experience, that the Judge of the whole earth would do right. Some have discovered a tone of doubt in this inquiry. There may be such a tone, for who can altogether escape the plaguing action of doubt within the mind ? He would be a bold man who would say that there was no doubt in this inquiry, who would affirm that conscience was not alarmed in the case of Abraham. Yet there is surely another tone in it. Abraham has life enough behind him to justify complete confidence in God. By such life alone can such confidence be established. We cannot have theoretical confidences, metaphysical trusts and dependencies ; we are not sufficiently trained and chastened to seize such filmy supports and insubstantial claims and guarantees. The time will come when we shall value the spiritual and be able to see it and penetrate to its real meaning ; but now we want fact, history, things that have really occurred under our eyes, within our touch, that we can affirm beyond all disputation, to which we can call witnesses whose word is an oath, whose affirmation is a bond. Thus has God trained us, and we ourselves ought to have a lifetime to fall back upon in the presence of all great doubts and all startling wonders or new phases of providence. When the heavens are black, and not a star struggles through the gloom ; when the sea is in infinite trouble, and the rocks crack under our feet, giving way because of some sudden shock, we should be able to say, reading the Bible of our life,—This is right, this will be justified ; at present all is mystery, but suddenly the Lord will come to his temple, and where there is darkness there shall sit the morning—the queen of light—the very benediction of God. What is our lifetime worth if we cannot talk so ? We must not refer even to the Bible itself, solely, for proofs of this ; we must refer to our own experience in addition. Our own experience will confirm the Bible, will annotate it with vivid comment ; but to read the Bible only in the presence of stupendous events and crises may be but to vex inquiring minds. The Bible may come better

afterwards. Christians should be able to say, Fear not : be calm ; the God whose I am and whom I serve will bring this storm to peace, will overrule these events, and out of tumult will bring solemn and heavenly harmony. Then may come the ancient testimony, the witness of patriarchs and sages long dead ; but all such testimony must be accentuated by personal experience, must live because of the speaker's own energy. We cannot live upon dead men : we cannot always be quoting their words and simply resting upon their authority ; we must be able to confirm it, and explain it, and repeat it in modern tone and expression, and so make the Bible the newest of books, by lifting up its mysteries into newness of expression and reality. We have said that wonderful words are startled out of men. Probably Abraham, when he began his question, did not know how it would end ; but how sorrow makes men eloquent ; how great occasions change the countenances of men and make them shine with light, and express eagerness, expectancy, or devoutness, as the case may be ; how little we knew what we should say until the great storm drove around us in mighty whirl and tempest and rain ! It was then that our heart found its tongue ; then that our understanding became as a flame ; and then that our lips were as a rock from which streams of eloquence flowed. Men must be trained by severe trials and great crises, and have their questions verified by the very stress of the circumstances which tried their faith. We learn a new language in new circumstances. The climate changes the customs of a people. Let a change take place in the temperature, and that change repeats itself in all the action of civilisation : men address themselves to the altered temperature whether in an access of heat or an increase of cold. Civilisation repeats the sun. Modern living human nature practically recites what is passing in great nature ; it may be without speech, but the reproduction is certainly accomplished. So it is in all the breadth of human education. Let God burn upon a man's life like a hot sun, and the man answers the blistering heat by an attitude or an exclamation. Let the Lord's cold smite man in the face—great morsels of ice, great showers of snow—and man shudders back his reply to the inclement heavens. Let a man's life be assailed, and great judgments be brought to his knowledge, and he will ask questions, and introduce

into those questions words of the noblest and solidest kind. Thus are we trained; thus are we vexed into new progress; thus are we driven up many a hill and along many a valley. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes!"

One more question will satisfy our inquiry as to the kind of interrogation that may be addressed directly to the Almighty. Said Moses: When I go to Egypt and speak to the children of Israel, they will say to me, Who sent thee? what is his name? What shall I say? (Exod. iii. 13). That is a grand historical picture!—a man about to be sent, but who will not go until he has his credentials: a strong man conscious of weakness, not unwilling to plead infirmity, somewhat inventive, it may be, in the multiplication of excuses; but all this must be made up by a name, a password, a secret masonry:—How shall I shake hands with the strangers? What shall I give them to show that I am no common man or mere adventurer? When they ask me quietly, What is his name? what shall I say? I could invent names, but must not; give me a name they will know at once: if they have never heard it before, yet it shall be so grand, rich, complete, that the moment they hear it they will say—Never did man invent that appellation. What is thy name? We know things and persons by names. Names may be only momentary conveniences; still, they *are* conveniences, and cannot be dispensed with. Entrust me with thy name! And what a name it was!—"I AM THAT I AM!" Say that to the children of Israel, and they will hear in it the boom of a sea over which they have sailed; whisper that name to them—if such a name will accommodate itself to a whisper—and the host will answer, "That is verily the name of our God." We are at liberty to ask such questions as Moses. They must be marked by reverence; we must mean what we say. There is a flippant interrogation that gets no reply. Sometimes we ask questions without putting them into an interrogative form. A question may be suggested as well as plainly put. A prayer may be a great inquiry without the mark of interrogation ever occurring in the solemn speech. Man can be in an attitude of groping, lighting a candle, and sweeping the house diligently for a piece



that is lost. Man can be uttering words, and leaving God to punctuate them. The heart can hurry through a speech which may be incoherent to ears that cannot hear the inner music, but which is perfectly continuous and complete to the ear of listening heaven. Yet are we forbidden to ask questions? That depends upon the nature of the inquiry, as we have just seen. Men may ask certain questions in a certain way, if they do not hinder divine progress. Never make a question an excuse. Never turn a question into a mystery, and say, This is the end, and advance is therefore impossible. There are questions which the heart will dictate, and which the judgment will know to be right. He is evasive in mind, he is ignoble in temper, who supposes that he does not know when he is asking a right question. Do not attempt to puzzle God, to multiply mysteries, to invent or create them. If we ask God for a clean heart and a right spirit, we know we are asking a question that is proper, and that God waits to answer. Beware of merely intellectual inventiveness in the sanctuary. Beware of that busy faculty which can always excite doubt and disturb the mind, and lead away the attention, or fasten it upon false issues. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding; and let no soul attempt to do itself the infinite dishonour of putting questions which it does not want to have answered, or of raising inquiries the reply to which it can never understand. There is enough to be done. Life is too solemn, because too short, to be frittered away in vain interrogation. If we search the Scriptures, and ask the Holy Spirit to be with us, ruling our temper into quietude, and creating within us a spirit of docility, we shall understand as we read: light will come up out of the Word—down upon the Word. In God's light we shall see light, and our one question will be—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast given a wonderful setting to our life. Even the poorest man may behold thy heavens and look upon all the host thereof, and wonder concerning their meaning and their destiny. Thou hast filled the earth with beauty and the air with music, so that we stand in the midst of revelation, and if we be not blind and deaf we must hear messages from God. We bless thee for all this setting of our life—it is helpful. We hear speech from many an unexpected quarter; we listen, and, lo, it is as if angels sung to us in the dark night-time; and even in the mighty wind there is a tone of tenderness, which means health and purity, renewed life and invigorated hope. Help us to read the symbols, to understand somewhat of the meaning of the types; then shall our mind be stored with sacred wisdom, and our heart shall be as an instrument of music on which divine fingers shall discourse. Enable us to see beyond nature to nature's God; give us that penetrating look which sees beyond the veil of the visible and beholds somewhat of the mystery and glory of that which is unseen. Thus may we be drawn upward by a gracious compulsion; thus may we be unwilling to tarry in a place too small for us. May we accept the hospitality of God, and move upward to the larger, brighter spaces, the wider liberties, the service without weariness, the worship without tedium. That we have such thoughts as these is of thy goodness; their very presence in the soul shows that we are not forsaken of Heaven; we are still in the land of the living and in the sphere of religious hope. Touch us as thou wilt and in what measure thou wilt, but let thy touch bring us nearer to thyself. May we be among those who grow upward and heavenward, from beholding external and natural beauties to beholding the mystic splendours of the inner heavens; and not of those who having looked upon thine handiwork are by reason of manifold and aggravated sin condemned to outer darkness. Let our lives continue to be precious to thee. Still think it worth thy while to water the earth and to send the warmth of the sun upon its smoking soil; still care for us, and send the seed-time and the summer and the harvest and the restful and nourishing winter with its blessed sleep; and thus help us by outward ministries, by natural appeals, by sustenance for the body and suggestions for the mind, to attain to higher heights and worship at the highest altar; and through all the way of the world, and sin and danger and death, may we be led to the Cross—the great Cross of sacrifice, the mystery of redemption, the problem of atonement by the shedding of blood. Lead us into this mystery—it appals us—it

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affrights us, and then it grows upon our attention and confidence and love, until we are enabled to say to the dying Christ,—my Lord and my God! Amen.

### THE PENTATEUCH AS A WHOLE.

HAVING studied the Pentateuch in detail, beginning at the beginning and concluding with the final word, it may be profitable to inquire somewhat into the teaching of the books in their unity. The five books of Moses—often called the Pentateuch—are placed in our hands, and if we have read them through we are at liberty to inquire into the meaning of the Pentateuch as a whole: to ask what impression it has made upon the mind; how far it has established any claim to be considered an inspired book; what are its supreme qualities and characteristics—qualities and characteristics which separate it from all other books and give it a unique place in the library of the world.

We cannot have run through the Pentateuch even hurriedly without having been in some measure struck by the simplicity of its theology. The Pentateuch is full of God. The Deity overflows the wondrous writing. God is so near his creatures: he speaks to them, as it were, face to face; he is familiar with them though always retaining the augustness of his Deity, and never relaxing the majesty proper to his being and duration; he comes down to earth, walks upon it, talks to men, tells them what his will is, elects them to service, enriches them with promises, points out their respective destinies. In the Pentateuch God is a God nigh at hand, and not afar off. The Pentateuch is a kind of nursery book: everything is written in such large letters; the pictures are innumerable, most vividly coloured, appealing to the eye with very broad claims to attention. Everything is upon a great scale, most vivid, most graphic; it is impossible to pass by without being arrested by noble figures, by marked events, by startling claims and appeals. We say sometimes that there are no children in the Pentateuch. Let us consider the thought and see whether in reality there were any thing but children in the five books of Moses. What else could there be? Adam was a child. The world was begun with a child-man; not with an

infant, so far as the beginning of biblical history enables us to judge. When man comes upon the page, he comes on in full stature, with the breath of God living in him, and so affecting his features as to make them shine with the subdued majesty of God. The book is adapted to the earliest ages of manhood. We repeat, it is a species of nursery-book, full of capitals, full of pictures, eventful, short in its statements, striking in its representations. Yet there is nothing shallow in all the matchless simplicity. It takes the sun in heaven and all the chemistry of earth to grow the tiniest flower that lifts up its head in the green mead. Nothing is thrown in as make-weight and as of no consideration. Were there only one little flower promised to grow upon the earth to the end of time, that very promise would involve the maintenance of the astronomy of the universe as we know it; so when even simplicity seems to be simplest in the striking records of Moses, the simplicity is the last expression of eternal power, eternal wisdom, eternal beneficence. It required God to take hold of the historian's hand when he wrote the very first verse in Genesis. No human fingers unaided by divine energy ever penned that most startling and bewildering of all sentences. Nor is mystery wanting in connection with simplicity. The word "God" assumes plural forms. It creates a kind of grammar all its own. Who can number the plural "US" as we find it in the expression, "Let us make man"? The word will stand for all energies; it will stand for all the creatures ever created through all the endless ages of eternal duration. An angel is promised—the Angel of the Covenant—the angel of the Lord. Anonymous ministries are operating all through and through the book. Mystery shadows simplicity. Great marvels are closely related to simple events. So the simplicity is not shallowness. The darkness is not without atmosphere, mediation, interception between the essential Deity and the creature of a day, unable to bear upon his eyeballs the unclouded splendour of essential flame.

Nor can we read the Pentateuch as a whole without being struck by the very close way in which it reproduces human nature as we know it. The Man of the Pentateuch stands next in mystery to its God. He is a wondrous man. He comes upon us suddenly; he comes straight from the hand of God. Yet his

coming is not without mystery. He was made of "the dust of the ground." But what is the dust of the ground? We read that expression as if we understood it—as if any child could give a sufficient reply. How was the dust made? Of what is it compounded? Who can read the stony and mouldering record? What is dust? Is it suspended life? Is it a new mode of being? When did it begin? Is it a symbolical or a literal term? The dust carries in it all the ages preceding. So we must not narrow or vulgarise the words by imagining that any one knows the meaning of the expression, "dust of the ground." When God took of that dust, he took of his own handiwork: he made the dust before he made the man. We are not to suppose that the dust is something wholly independent of God—something which God himself found in the world and made use of. The dust is his; the dust has a theology; the dust has a magnificent history. But we begin with the historian; and though we begin with the historian, we are not excluded from the society and inspiration of the poet. We cannot have even the dust of the ground treated with contempt; the augustness of its history must be acknowledged by every diligent student. But the "Man" stands before us historically upright, physically complete, responsible at once, beginning the very next day to obey or disobey. How did he act? His reproduction of human nature as we know it is perfect in its likeness. Man soon wanted more. He was told by an insidious and seductive voice that if he would adopt a certain course he would become "as God." Who ever resisted that temptation? It is the one temptation that besieges human life as an army might besiege a citadel. Examine life, and say if this be not the religious expression of the temptation that is supreme. It means: you shall have more, you shall have pleasure, you shall have delights heaped up; you shall advance: make progress your motto, write it upon your life-banner, and be not ashamed of the legend. This is what human nature is doing to-day. No sooner did humanity become social and assume family forms than family feuds succeeded. Cain murdered Abel—and Cain will murder Abel unto the end of time. It will require a redeeming rather than a creating God to stop the murder of Abel. Then came social deceptions: one man overreaching another; man telling lies to man, smiling with the lips, cursing with the heart;

offering friendship with the hand, vowing vengeance in a spirit dumb with determination. Is this human nature as we know it? We speak of old records, and primitive man, and pre-historic times, and times incalculably ancient;—where is all this antiquity? That it exists we cannot doubt; and we doubt it the less that we ourselves repeat and confirm it in every beating pulse we tell. So in the Pentateuch we have a marvellous theology—simple, profound, graphic, yet mystic; and in the Pentateuch we have human nature in its broadest lines and aspects, with a singular and incalculable origin—an origin so described that science can never either overtake it or outwit it: the terms that are there are awaiting final interpretation; and human life—individual, social, national—discloses itself before us as if reproducing our own experiences. Sometimes men say, on hearing startling statements,—Where did we hear these words before? Did we dream them? Is this the second time of hearing such terms? What is the meaning of this? So when we read the Pentateuch we seem to read our own biography. We take out proper names, we put in our own appellations, and still the history rolls on as if we were perfectly familiar with it and could ourselves annotate it with facts which have occurred within our own experience. This, as we have seen again and again is the great hold which the Bible gets upon human attention and confidence. It knows man; it explains man to himself: man brings the riddle, the Bible supplies the answer. We are not following in the lines of an unknown human nature—a nature that lived in other time and in other space, and of which we know nothing except by revelation; we know the man so well that what the book says of God would be made just as clear and positive could we follow that mystery to the inner places now invisible.

We cannot peruse the Pentateuch as a whole without remarking the fearlessness with which it sets forth the otherwise incredible circumstance of divine disappointment. Can disappointment follow Omniscience? Can God be surprised? Did he not see the end from the beginning? Is not the whole plan, in all its development and purpose, the outcome of his own mind? in a sense, the answer must be—Certainly, unquestionably. All

things express in some way the intent of the moral will, or the regal will : God will have it so for a time, or he will have it so for ever, either in the form of moral purpose or of a sovereign fiat. All things must be traced to God. : “Can there be evil in a city, and the Lord have not done it?” Can there be a hell in the universe, and God not have dug it? Can there be any devil in creation who cannot trace his origin to God? “The Lord reigneth.” We must take this larger view, for by it alone are certain moral mysteries lifted into adequate light, that they may receive at least tips of illumination, glints of glory, which help us to believe that the full enlightenment will come by-and-by. God was disappointed :—“It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth.” He wept over the Jerusalem of the ancient world, as his Son wept over another Jerusalem. The speech of the heavenly Father was, in effect :—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not !” How otherwise could he have sent a flood upon the earth? Make of the flood what we may—universal, partial, literal, symbolic—there remains the fact of a flood—a display of judgment, in other words, a display of disappointment : because whenever God punishes he must have been disappointed before he could inflict the penalty. He made the world for virtue, uprightness, innocence, holiness ; so when criminal blackness came before him he must have felt the pang of disappointment, which he has never failed to express :—“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth : for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” How otherwise could he have sent fire upon cities splendidly situated, well-watered, in fruitful plains, beautiful for situation? Why the fire? Why the brimstone? Why these smoking, smouldering heaps? The answer is—Sin, apostasy, wickedness, disobedience ; and could God look upon these forms or expressions of evil without corresponding disappointment? The words, “It repented the Lord that he had made man,” express a real not a dramatic emotion. The disappointment continues. There is nothing surprising in flood and fire being sent down in judgment ; the surprise is that they are withheld to-day. Sodom and Gomorrah could not have been so wicked as the cities of the

present time can be. Modern cities have larger opportunities, broader civilisations, multiplied resources; and the devil never alters, never repents, never prays: he will fight out the battle so long as one glint of light remains in the western sky; he will not die unless by compulsion. The cities of to-day are more wicked than the cities of any other time. The wickedness is more varied in form; it is often perpetrated with greater boldness; it is turned to commercial account. It so grows upon the wicked man himself that he loses all feeling, all sense of dignity, all consciousness of shame; nothing is sacred to him: the grave has no protection from his violation; childhood is not too young for his defilement, nothing too fair to be smitten and wrecked by his violent hand. We know this as matter of fact, not as matter of poetry; and it is matter of fact not outside us but within us. Other men do the deeds of which we conceive the thoughts: other men may be but the executioners, whilst all men may be the thinkers and dreamers. Herein divine judgment alone can be right. He who made us must judge us. We must not suppose that all things of an evil kind are open and known and avowed; nor must any man attempt to sit in judgment beyond a given point. There is a line within which society may judge, ought to judge, and must judge; but there is a further line towards which human judgment cannot even move: God only can be Judge there. When the prophet was ordered to dig down he found a wall going very deeply into the ground; he was told to dig more deeply still: he dug, and at length came to a door; he was told to open the door and pass in; and there, under the roots of things, under the foundations of cities, he found what is called the chamber of imagery, and there in that hidden place he saw the symbols of indescribable dissolution. It is so with the human mind. There is an aspect in which all is public and open and about which there can be no doubt; but there is a chamber of imagery—a mind with painted walls, an inner life full of unholy symbolism, and crowded with secret worship—a hole within a hole, concerning which God must be Judge.

So then, we have a simple theology, a human nature which we can recognise, and a divine government that is stung by disappointment; these things we have in the book called the Pentateuch, or, in other words, the five books of Moses. We



ought to beware lest in discussing the comparatively trivial question—Who wrote the Pentateuch? that we miss the purpose of the fivefold writing. Comparatively unimportant—what, then, is the supremely important point? Evidently it is to know what is written rather than who wrote it. That there may have been more hands than one in the composition of the Pentateuch is perfectly possible; in some few instances indeed, it cannot be otherwise than real and indisputable. That the books of the Pentateuch might be differently arranged is not beyond the bounds of possibility. That the supposed dates of the five books might be modified or readjusted is also within the limits of possibility. But we are not called to the consideration of such questions. The one inquiry we have to make is—What is the moral purpose of the book? What is its spiritual tone? What is its religious claim? What are its great theological and anthropological doctrines? What is its God, and what is its man? Mythology presents us with innumerable impossibilities: we know them to exceed all likelihood and to offend every conception of order and probability; but the Pentateuch presents us with nothing that is improbable, so far as our own experience extends. We can comprehend most of it, and where we do touch it we feel how firm is the association between the ancient writing and the modern experience. Coming upon antiquities in this fashion, corroborating them one after another, we feel that where one or two may seem to fall out of the line of corroboration in other instances the coincidence is so striking and so vital that we need have no fear as to an explanation coming by-and-by even in reference to mysteries at present hidden in sevenfold darkness. We must stand by Moses. Our study of his character has given us profound confidence in his spirit and in his purpose. He has suffered for his convictions. What critic ever suffered for his sneers? What annotator of to-day ever lost position or opportunity of advancement of so broad a kind as that which Moses lost when he “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?” When men confirm their theology by acts of sacrifice so plain, clear, and complete, they deserve consideration; they appeal, though unconsciously, to the reverence of mankind. In what sense, then

is the Pentateuch old? Only in a temporal sense. There is nothing that is old in the Pentateuch if we regard it spiritually, symbolically, alphabetically. The root is not old so long as there is fruit on the uppermost branches. The New Testament is the outcome of the Old: the Gospels are the Pentateuch in full bloom—in all its spiritual culmination and sublimest meaning. Read the Pentateuch thus, straight through, without asking minor questions, without pausing intermediately; read it as a whole, from end to end, and then ask what are the impressions it makes upon the mind; and first will be the impression that God is near, direct in his communication, interested in every action, holding every man of value; that God is Critic of all time, Judge of all action, never afraid after having blessed the world to drown it, to burn it, for human wickedness may be greater than divine blessing. The impression made upon the mind will be that human nature is a mystery, not to be judged here and now, not to be summed up and valued within given and measurable limits, but to be regarded as a continual mystery, a profound and insoluble problem, awaiting the judgment of God. Nor can we read the Pentateuch without being struck with the fact that though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished. "Be sure your sin will find you out." There is more water in the clouds, there is more fire in the throne of God; and God will not hesitate to drown the world or to burn the universe, if so be that man's sin exceed God's grace.

We cannot read the Pentateuch as a whole without being struck with the way in which it all grows up into the fortune of one man. At first there is quite a number of men. The number grows and multiplies exceedingly, so that the whole earth seems to be covered with an active population. Page by page we turn over the record, and one name comes up above another; then we come to a period when a special name takes precedence and stands royally aloft above all other names, as if the whole history had been evolved and consolidated for the manifestation of that one name. The one name is that of Moses. Having concluded the Pentateuch, the mind seems to have before it but that resplendent name. It is the name of ruler, leader, shepherd, and friend of unnumbered hosts. The name is a symbol of

strength, light, leading, sustenance of a spiritual and moral kind. True leadership seems to begin with Moses. He is a kind of father-mother, a shepherd-friend, a legislator with a Gospel voice, —a man accustomed to interpret thunders and lightnings, and to pluck from the midst of the tempest the still small Voice of divine solicitude and divine commandment, and to interpret that Voice to all the host in a language which they can understand. Is not this like all human history? Are there not even in the annals of common civilisation names that gather up into themselves all that was typical of the age, all that was purest in its morality, ripest in its wisdom, and most benign in its influence? Do these things stand for nothing in history? Is there not behind them a suggestion? Is there coming a Name that shall be above every name? Shall even Moses be forgotten in the splendours of a nobler title? As the Pentateuch has led up to the coronation of Moses, do not all the books of both Testaments lead up to the enthronement of him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and before whom all living powers bow in profoundest homage, and to whom they look with most expectant hope? There is a genius in history of this kind. This is not a novel arrangement on the part of the Bible—that a name here and there shall be a dominant name of that particular time and place. We find the same idea through all history. There is a king everywhere, in all society a leader, in all organisation a throbbing heart, a beating pulse, an eye with accent in it, a point of light; and to that man, that influence, that eye, all other men for the time being look for sustenance, guidance, stimulus, and inspiration. So the pages are turned over; so history rises, falls, recombines, and amplifies, and at the last there is one Name that swallows up all other names—JESUS, the Name to sinners dear. And Jesus is not ashamed to be associated with Moses. When the great song rolls in the heavenly places, like thunder upon thunder, it is the song of Moses and the Lamb—as if these two names touched the extreme points of history and gathered up into themselves all the elements of human education, human progress, and human salvation. See if this be not so. This cannot be seen unless the revelation is read from beginning to end—so read that the mind is cleared of every other thought and recollection, and the grand Biblical purpose engraves itself

upon the intellect and the heart, the understanding and the imagination. To believe in the Bible, read it. No man who ever *read* the Bible, with body, soul, and spirit, disbelieved it. Readers have come in here and there in a violent and wanton way that would be rebuked as indecent were they treating a human poem so, and have said severe and foolish things about the Bible; but wherever the Bible has been fairly treated, read as a whole, understood in its parts and relations, apprehended in all its moral relations and all its moral issues, it has been received and adopted and worshipped as the book of God.

We cannot read the Pentateuch as a whole without being struck with the fact that all the human movement in it is a movement towards one land. After a certain time we are conscious that a great procession is taking place. There is a loud trampling of feet, there is a tumultuous sensation everywhere: men are moving, standards are pitched, tents are struck, and travelling begins on a mighty and unprecedented scale. Whither goes the host? What is the name of your country, O pilgrims in the desert? Know ye to what destination ye hasten?—tell us the name. To the land flowing with milk and honey, to the land sworn to be given to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, to a land of green things and plentifulness, and singing birds; to that land we go, and every night we pitch our camp a day's march nearer home. Are you all bound for one land? All—men, women, and children, the mightiest and the feeblest. Is it a hospitable land? It flows with milk and honey. Do you take any people up with you on the road? Yes: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." So everything is forgotten in the presence of the all-constraining Canaan. It is the magnet-land; it is the all-drawing cord. Men must have something ahead. You cannot destroy this element of purpose and hope, without making a tremendous reduction in the volume, and deterioration in the quality, of the human mind. All men are travelling to *some* land. Many a poet who has never written rhymed lines sings to himself of some fair country where he will have Sabbath a week long—rest, peace, reconciliation, health, and the power of enjoying every

point of accessible and visible nature. Then there is nothing startlingly novel or simply romantic about all these people moving to a common country? Nothing whatever. This is the programme of all human life; this is purpose of every intelligent soul. To what land are we journeying? To a land flowing with milk and honey. Has any description of the land been handed to any traveller who can give us some notion of the country to which we are moving? Yes: the country has been discovered, and it is called a city—a city where they have no need of the sun, or of the moon; a land in which there is no night, no sin, no death, no sea. The describers of that land have often to portray it in striking negatives. Wherever we find any thing that is repellent, undesirable, uncomely—anything that is feared, avoided, disliked, the describers say,—The city to which you are going has nothing of that kind in it; cleanse your mind of all such fears: it is morning-land, it is summer-land; the light never fades, and the service is never accompanied by tedium or weariness. It is right to ask one another, To what country are you going? For what place are you bound? We are to that extent our brother's keeper; and it never can be an impertinent question, if not impertinently put, Brother, to what land do you hasten? We have been so trained by the Moses of the new covenant—the Son of God—that there is no land upon earth we could tolerate for a moment as a final resting-place. We could not tolerate the grave, if it were the end. We speak about it poetically as the end; sometimes the weary traveller longs for it: he says,—Oh that I could lay me down under the sod and enter into the peace of a long dreamless sleep!—but we are so trained to the estimation of values, to the estimation of time and space and all resource adapted to human necessity, that we despise time, space,—Lebanon, Bashan, and all the vineyards of the earth, and all the cattle upon a thousand hills, with the silver and the gold hidden there. When we are asked our destination, we say,—We seek a country out of sight, a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. A romantic reply to the untrained mind, but prose-poetry to the soul that has been educated, chastened, purified, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Poor is the life—poor to contemptibleness—that lives in any other direction, that goes

downwards in its desires, and that trains itself to dispositions that are grovelling. Herein is the glory and the joy of the Christian inspiration, that it fills the soul with discontent with regard to everything time and space can give as final medicaments and benedictions, and stirs in the soul that lofty desire which can only be satisfied with all that we know by the sweet name of heaven. So long as Christianity thus creates larger desires, nobler aspirations, discontentment with all things finite, it will maintain its place in human history and in human education. If it excited discontent only, men would become weary of it, and shake it off as a burden; but it only creates discontent that it may bring in a larger capacity and a more profound contentment.

We cannot read the Pentateuch as a whole without being struck as to the way by which that land is to be reached. We cannot reach it by desiring it, by talking about it merely, by dreaming of it in periods of sleep, or even in day-dreams of intellectual recreation. It is a land that must be walked to—a long, long walk, over stony places, up great hills, through winding and perilous valleys, where beasts of prey roam, and where pits are dug, and where dangers lie thick as the travellers' footprints; the way must be walked step by step, it is a way regulated by law. Men do not make paths for themselves. "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not,"—are the words which continually ring in the ear of the traveller. The wanderer sees a way he would like to take; it seems to be a way of greensward, and on the greensward there seem to be little quiet flowers, and the traveller says,—May I not walk by that green road?—and a voice says, "Thou shalt not." The way is over stony places; for days together there may be no water to drink, for weeks together no green thing can be seen;—this is the way: walk ye in it. Human life is based upon divine discipline. Human life is not a clever trick, a conjuror's art, an opportunity for displaying invention as to the discovery of roads. The roads were made before we were born; the paths have been laid from before the foundation of the world: the Lamb of God was slain before human sin was committed. We must therefore build back upon eternity, and look forward to eternity, and accept the chastisement, and say,—The thong is heavy and

cuts often to the bone, but it is wielded by a Father's hand : even so, for so it seemeth good in thy sight. We want to take near courses, short cuts ; and God will not allow us to do so. The true life is a life of obedience. He cannot rule who cannot obey. What every man has to ask is this : What wilt thou have me to do, thou Father of spirits ? Show me the way, tell me the law, keep me with thy right hand, guide me with thine eye, and afterward receive me to glory. This is not the surrender of reason, this is not the subjugation of intellect ; this is the finite accepting the infinite, this is ignorance asking for wisdom, this is the lamb pleading to be carried in the shepherd's arms. Such is the philosophy of revelation in the matter of human progress. No little suffering accompanies that progress : —“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” He beats us back sometimes. Now and then we would move too soon, and the Lord says we have yet to remain in the same place a day or two, or more. Thus is patience tried, thus is temper tested, thus is character consolidated, mellowed, ennobled. We should have been poor but for our suffering ; we should have been mere talkers of human dreams, if we had not lived in tragedy all the pain of this life. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” He has been with me in six troubles, and in the seventh he will not forsake me. As to the weapon that is being formed against me, it shall not prosper : it shall rust in the night-time, and in the morning have no handle, and shall only cut the man who seizes it. O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him ; and he shall give thee thine heart's desire.

Then, again, the whole Pentateuch is marked by its persistent religiousness. It is an intensely religious book. The religious service never ceases ; there is no intermission, no lifting away of the hand that presses : the sacrifice never ends, the fire is never put out, the blood never ceases to flow. There is no time for play, for privilege, for self-indulgence : one service is scarcely ended before another begins ; and so the ceremony rolls on in impetuous determination to subdue the human will and exhaust all that is poorest and meanest in human life. So must human life itself be. To be really grand, it must be supremely religious ; to be really useful, it must be continually

active in the service of God. We cease to live when we cease to pray. We cease to give when we cease to love. We lose the Sabbath day when we lose the resurrection. We can only lose Christian doctrine when we lose the Cross out of which it flows. We cannot do good from a motive that is not equal to the occasion without showing how shallow is the well out of which we have drawn. There is but one motive that will stand all weathers, all strains and tests: "the love of Christ constraineth us."

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# J O S H U A .

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## PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always thinking of us : all things are for our sake. Thy providence is the proof of thy redemption ; they are one and the same great thought of love. Thou didst make man in thine own image and likeness, and thou art continuing so to make him ; and thy great labour shall not cease until the similitude be perfected. This is thy work amongst us. We weary thee, and try thee, and bring the warm tears to thine eyes because of perverseness and self-will ; but thou dost not release thyself from the great task : the purpose of God standeth sure ; it is an eternal thought ; thou wilt not be wearied out. Yea, thou hast burned the world, or drowned it with great tempests of water ; yet thou hast preserved a root, a germ, so that thy process may go on and thy will may be made known ; and, behold, who can set himself so much against the purpose of heaven as finally to destroy the decree of the Almighty ? It is thine to work through all the ages. Eternity is thine. We know nothing of duration : we are a wind that cometh for a little time and bloweth away into forgetfulness ; we are a light quickly blown out ; we are a fading flower ; there is none that abideth : but the throne of the glorious God is for ever. We rejoice in this thought : it makes us steadfast and calm in the midst of storms and threats that would render our lives intolerable. Things are shaken that are meant to be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may reveal their solidity the more. We rest in God ; we would be one with God ; we would know no will but thine ; and thus ordering our life according to the music of thy commands, thy statutes shall become songs, and the darkest night but a time to sing in most loudly, sweetly, tenderly. We give one another to thee in continual prayer. To be in God is to be in one another ; to be in Christ Jesus the Lord is to have fellowship of soul one with another and to enter into the preliminary joy of blessed heaven. We come to the Cross of Christ ; we glory in that alone. We do not comprehend all its mystery : we cannot tell why the blood is so red, why it was poured out from an innocent, holy heart ; we can say nothing in words of all the great emotion which moves our hearts, but we believe that is thy revelation, thy way of saving the world ; Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief ! We are the better for this look towards the Cross. It is a look away from ourselves, away into eternity and heaven and mystery divine. We rejoice that thou

has appointed times when we may specially commune with thee, in open terms, in a common language, when the old, and the young, and the busy, and the suffering may all commune in open fellowship under the open sky of heaven, praising God with a common voice and with a loud song. We own our sinfulness, but we own thy might to destroy it. Thou wilt not forsake thine own seed, the work of thine own hands, the heart in which the Son of God is born. Reveal thy Son within us day by day. May we see his beauty, may we feel his touch, may we be assured of his love, and may we live and move in his eternal strength. Help us to live this little life wisely and well; may we not invent methods of our own whereby to make our life better, but, reading thy law, meditating on thy truth, we shall be enabled to deal wisely, to subdue every enemy and opposition, and to enter into the prepared rest. Hear us in these things, and let thy love be continued toward us as thou dost continue the light of the sun to warm and cheer the earth. Leave none unblessed! May the worst heart lift itself up in new strength; may the soul in which there has been desolation like the darkness of night know that the light of hope is shining upon it, and that the music of heavenly welcomes is addressed to its despair. Spoil every evil plan; thwart every mischievous purpose; sweeten every sour disposition, and make straight the will that is perverse. May we now enter into an oath of consecration, a solemn, noble vow to be better, to do better, to work more diligently, and construe each other's action more charitably, and all this in Christ, and by Christ, without whom we can do nothing. Continue thy pity toward us, for we are not yet strong enough to do without it: we still come to thy compassionate side; we dare not face thy righteousness, or challenge the burning light of thine honour and thy law, but we may come and say, at the Cross, and through its power, God be merciful to me a sinner! Amen.

### Joshua i. 1-9.

1. Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

2. Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

3. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

5. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.

6. Be strong and of good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

7. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

9. Have not I commanded thee ? Be strong and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed : for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

### THE MAN AND HIS CALL.

THE book of Joshua has been divided into three sections—namely, the conquest of Canaan, chapters i.–xii. ; the division of the land, chapters xiii.–xxii. ; while chapters xxiii., xxiv., are devoted to a statement concerning the closing days of the soldier Joshua. The main action of the book comprises a period of twenty-five years. The pedigree of Joshua is illustrious ; it may be seen in 1 Chronicles vii. 20-27, reaching back through generations to Joseph. His grandfather, Elishama, marched through the wilderness of Sinai at the head of his tribe, and probably he had special charge of the embalmed body of Joseph. The book is indirectly referred to in many places both in the Old Testament and the New ; for example in Judges xviii. 31 ; 1 Samuel i. 24 ; iii. 21 ; Isaiah xxviii. 21 ; Psalm xlv. 2-3 ; lxxviii. 12-14 ; lxxviii. 54-58 ; exiv. 1-8 ; Habakkuk iii. 8-13 ; Acts vii. 45 ; Hebrews iv. 8 ; xi. 31 ; xiii. 5 ; James ii. 25. These passages are collated to show that the references to the book of Joshua are not merely incidental or occasional, but that the book is certified by reference and endorsed by application throughout the most of the remainder of the sacred records. Joshua was a prince of the tribe of Ephraim, born in the land of Goshen, and trained as a soldier,—kept in repression during many years, because there was really nothing for a soldier-prophet to do. He was appointed to repel the attack of Amalek. He was honoured to accompany the great minister partly up his solitary way which lay towards the meeting-place on the summit of mount Sinai. He was one of the two spies who came back with a good heart and an inspiring word, saying that the work could be done and was worth doing. For a long time he was in the background : nothing was known of him during the years of weary wandering in the Arabian desert. A weird character altogether !—Speaking of his

house, but with a limitation ; without wife, or child, or heir ; standing, as it were, midway between Moses and Samuel—a period of four hundred years. A soldier always,—prompt, obedient, decisive, sharp in expression ; his attitude a challenge or a benediction. Great was his honour, too : into his much-meaning name there was inserted part of the name of the Eternal ; and Joshua in its Greek form is Jesus—the captain of our salvation—the name which is above every name. So may our names grow and blossom and fructify into great meanings ; they are trusts : we hold them as stewards ;—shall they vanish like blanks that can never be missed, or live on day after day,—a memory, a blessing, an inspiration ? Each man must answer the inquiry for himself.

Now let us turn to the book with religious attentiveness. “Now after the death of Moses—” (v. 1). Can there be any “after” under such a circumstance ? Does not all time seem to breathe for certain men ? And does it not seem as if there would be no need of time if their great figures and generous influence were removed ? Does not time seem to focus itself in some noble characters—as if all other life were tributary to those eminent personalities, as if all other influence circulated around them and had heaven enough in a subordinate relationship ? But God can bury any one of us, and continue the history as though we had never lived. We cannot make great gaps in God’s providence. His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither his ways our ways. He toucheth the mountains, and they smoke ; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and the nations are as a drop of a bucket—a poor trembling eye of dew—before Him. We cry over this opening line as if some great chasm had been dug in our little heaven. We forget that the man spoken of is only dead to us, not dead to the universe, or dead to God, or dead in any sense equivalent to extinction or destruction. The word is a cold one, and full of hideousness in some aspects ; we must use it ; no other term touches the reality of things so significantly, but we must, by living in a right course so look down upon all things as to account death as only a word—a mere term of expediency, a mark of punctuation, rather than an articulate term,—a point a printer might use, but really without any terror or sting or dread. Death is dead to every man who is himself

alive with the immortality of his soul. And some great names must be removed to make way for lesser names that have growing sap in them and real capability of beneficent expansion. Some great trees must be cut down to make room for lesser trees that mean to be great ones in their time. We owe much to the cutting-down power of death, the clearing power of the cruel scythe or axe. Death makes history as well as life. Of life death is the servant. The great thing to know about the dead is their character. That character in the case of Moses is indicated here explicitly—"the servant of the Lord." Is the term so definite as almost to amount to an indication or singularity—as if the Lord had but one servant? The expression is not "one of the servants," or "a" servant, but "the" servant. Nor is this an ancient term only; it is part of the speech of our day. There are men who are pre-eminently primates. We do not contest their primacy. It is not official. The greater the man the readier he is to own that Moses is above him: for in no domineering or tyrannous sense is the higher above the lower, but in the sense of wisdom, graciousness, fraternity of feeling, willingness to serve,—for what child is there, how naked and poor soever, that the sun will disdain to light him home? The greater man is the lesser man in proper form. The least brother has a right to look at the greatest and say—that is myself enlarged and glorified; that shining face is mine; that eloquent tongue is uttering my speech; that mighty form is carrying my burdens; so, then, there is no contentious rivalry, or clamour for place or honour. God makes every appointment, and makes it with infinite wisdom.

Whilst all this is true in regard to Moses, surely there is some painfulness of preference with regard to the man who must follow him? Yet who can tell how good God is even here? Men are prepared almost unconsciously: it is but one step that has to be taken. The men did not know all the time that they were waiting to take that upward step. The announcement of elevation may have come suddenly, but then there is an answering voice which says—I have heard this before; this but reads the riddle of a dream; now I feel that God is calling me. Let every man, therefore, be faithful in his own place; let every man watch, do his duty, carry his burdens, be ready for enlarging

opportunities and new disclosures of gracious providence. Do not force the gate that is closed: there is plenty to do upon this side of the way; in due time the gate will fall back as if an angel invisible had touched it, and by the falling back of the gate know of a surety your opportunity has come.

What is the duty of the Church when the announcement is made, "Moses my servant is dead"? The answer is sublime! The Lord addresses himself to the soldier-spirit of Joshua:—"Now, therefore"—stopping there for one moment and wondering what the next word can be—we think it must be: Bow down your heads in sorrow; weep all your tears, for the loss is irreparable. What is the following word? Take the sentence altogether:—"Now therefore arise"! Who can extinguish the animation of the divine word, or throw a shadow upon the divine hope, or discourage the heart of Heaven? Moses is dead: therefore—stand up! gird on thy sword, put on thy strength; be thy best self and noblest, for the sphere is large, and to follow Moses is to be created a new and greater man. What is Joshua to do? An epoch opens in reply to that inquiry. We turn over a new page in the world's history at this moment: we come upon words we have not seen before—words which abide in all their energy through the ages. Joshua is referred to written orders. Up to this time there has been no reference to writing in the sense in which that reference is made now. Behold, in all the outgoing of providence there is a book amongst us—a written thing—a silent scroll, burning with messages from heaven. Moses had no Bible; Moses lived on the spoken word: he heard the tone and translated it into the speech of the people, but there was nothing written in the sense in which the word is used in the eighth verse of this first chapter of Joshua. A new responsibility is imposed upon the Church. This is the difficulty with many men—namely, that there is a Book. The Book is so often in the way. We might build a thousand airy churches, and make their glittering pinnacles prick the clouds, but for the Book. There is a written law, a declared testimony, a quotable word,—something requiring attention, intelligence, sympathy, grammar. Thus liberty itself passes under the yoke. When there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was good in his own eyes: if there were no book, every one of us

might have his dream, his prophecy, his saying, his little pastoral staff and crook. But Joshua is told to begin to read :—"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein" (v. 8). An excellent thing this, too,—namely, to have a book ! The question admits of being put from two opposite points of view. An excellent reflection that there is a writing which may be consulted, and which must be perused if life is to seize the very highest treasures of wisdom. To the law and to the testimony then,—not that they are to be interpreted hardly, in some tone of domination that oppresses the soul, but a written word that is to be a living seed, growing its fruits in every clime, answering all the influences of heaven as revealed in civilisation, education, and progress of the broadest and noblest kind. The eighth verse is, however, noticeable in view of the fact that it puts a book into the hand of men. The book has never been changed. Jesus Christ did not change it : he said not a jot or tittle of it should be changed or taken away, unless by fulfilment, completion of purpose, when the meaning intended by the Almighty had been carried out,—then there might be a passing away of literal form, but even then veneration would bow down before pillars at which the ages had halted and refreshed themselves in prayer. Where then is liberty ? Again and again there comes upon the imagination the wondrous possibility of things under a liberty in which every man might write his own Bible. How we would change its spirit to suit the circumstances ! How we would temper its tone to meet the occasion ! A little manipulation would give its moralities release from their severest claims : a retrimming of the lamp would throw light in an unfamiliar direction ; but man is only allowed to interpret the law—to meditate therein day and night, to find out its meaning—for though it be so clear, so simple, it is the simplicity that is unfathomable, the simplicity that expresses the last result of divine processes in human education. So, then, we are called to be law students, Bible readers, inquirers into written revelation. Here comes in a great popular liberty. The law is published in our mother tongue : every man may take his own copy into his own sick-chamber, and there peruse it in the light of other history and personal consciousness

and experience, and test the book by individual necessities. This is the great answer to the tumult of the day. On the one hand we hear of men who long to resuscitate and reimpose stately theologies, formal creeds, endorsed by illustrious names,—and the age will not have them; it says that such theologies and creeds and men served their purpose in their own time, and within the limits of their operation they were good and useful, but the ages grow: the sun has not been sowing all this light upon the earth without an accompanying sowing of light having taken place in the fields of human inquiry and intelligence. On the other hand there are those who say—Our refuge must be in science, new discovery, in broad, generous progress;—and the age cannot receive that testimony either. The great human heart says—That of which you speak is good and noble and most useful, and we thank God for every discovery that makes life brighter, happier, easier to live; but you have not touched the innermost wound—the secret pulse of the soul,—that seems to lie beyond the reach of your finger. What then is our position in relation to these rival claims? Our position is: let the Bible speak for itself. We want Biblical teaching, thorough exposition, a reading of the word in the light of the present day;—not by theology of a formal kind, not by science of a domineering sort, but by the Bible itself is the kingdom of heaven to be advanced. Use Bible words. Do not be ashamed of Bible images and Bible doctrines. Do not make the Bible part of a library, but make it a library by itself. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” If you are controverting, arguing, disputing, setting one opinion against another, what can come of it but dust and noise? Our position as Christian thinkers and teachers is only strong in proportion to our intelligent and reverent study and appropriation of the law—meaning by that the whole written revelation of God. Here, again, we must beware of interpreters, and only accept them as friendly helpers. No man is authorised to say, to the exclusion of the opinion and learning of every other man,—This is the meaning, and there is none other. The Bible will bear looking at from every point of view. It rises to every occasion. Not a word of it need be changed. The word simply asks for a right utterance, a profound and appropriate exposition. It is wonderful that men can talk about theology and about science,



and never say a word about the Bible. Nor will it do to say, "Of course the existence of the Bible is assumed." The Bible asks for no such recognition: it asks to be *read*. Its voice would seem to be: Read me night and day; read me aloud; read me in tones appropriate to the occasion: whisper me to the sick and the dying; utter me with tunefulness and fascination of tone to little children and persons who are in the age of wonder or curiosity; read me rudely, stormily, if you will, in the hearing of tumult and the rage of the heathen and the people;—I only ask to be read—to be all read—to be read night and day, until there can be no mistake as to my purpose;—do this, and live! Surely this is the meaning of the divine promise made to Joshua: "for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." The word "prosperous" is not a literal translation. The word would read better thus: for then shalt thou deal wisely—or act wisely—in the spirit of wisdom, having understanding of the times, making allowances for the varieties of human mind and human character, and adapting me to the state of education which may be disclosed from time to time. He acts wisely who lives in the wise God—the only wise God, and our Saviour. We are not referred to our own wit, mental agility, intellectual brilliance or genius: the word in answer to temptation is in the law; the word explanatory of righteousness is in the law; the word which will keep us right in business is in the law; the word which will save us from sin is in the written book of God. So, whilst on the one hand men ask you to accept some great scroll of theology, and on the other ask you to accept some great scroll of science, whilst you are reverent and grateful to both of them according to their obvious merits, stand you upon the written law: it grows whilst we read it; it takes upon itself all the colour of the times; it has in it a central constancy and yet an eternal adaptation and variation. The Bible is never obsolete: when all other voices have ceased, its noble majestic tone creates attention for itself,—yea, men who do not bow down before it as a spiritual ministry refer us to it as to the noblest English that can be written,—the purest, simplest, grandest specimen of our mother tongue. It is so in every language. Wherever it undertakes to represent itself in any language it makes itself the chief specimen of that language. It speaks all the tongues of the world with

equal familiarity, grace, and dignity. It only asks to be translated into your mother tongue to lift that tongue up into unknown and unprecedented dignity. A book that asks no other favour can do without our patronage better than we can do without its counsel. Without changing a word, only asking for a broad and just interpretation, we stand upon the Bible, and to the Bible we go when the devil tempts us, when life is a heavy burden, when death is the last foe ; and so going we go to victory.

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The following is another treatment of the same passage :—

“Now, after the death of Moses . . . .” Yes, what after that? Can there be any “after” in such an event? Are there no great gaping vacancies in life which seem to foreclose history and to turn present events into an anticlimax and a humiliation? After the death of Moses—there can be no after. After the sun has gone down has God a lap of stars he can shower upon the darkness to alleviate it a little? Doth after vision seem to enlarge it and to mock our memory of a brighter present? Are there not some men who have no successors? Does not the poet say, “Only himself can be his parallel?” Why then do we come upon these mocking words in histories sacred and profane, “after the death of . . . .” as if the road were a common plain, an ordinary level, one milestone and another milestone ahead, the monotony of common-place, the common-place itself occasionally vigorous enough, yet still to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant in the way of human life and human power and human exaltation and majesty? Does history stand still because of the death of any one man? Are we not always reminded that God can do without the strongest and wisest of us? We remain here just long enough to think that we are needful to God, and when our pride has filled its little goblet, and made itself drunk with its own poison, he removes us, and history rolls on like a wave over a forgotten tomb. We are told that all the great men have gone, the age of miracles has gone, so has the age of inspiration, so has the age of speaking many and divers tongues in the Church, all healings, and marvels of signs and wonders have vanished from the sphere ecclesiastical.

You who make the objection are in your departments of life fellow-sufferers with ourselves. Your Shakespeare is dead, as well as our Moses—your Goethe and Dante are dead as well as our Isaiah and Ezekiel. All your great things have been done, your little miraculous *rôle* has been played out and shelved as well as ours—so let there be no mocking or undue and foolish triumphing the one over the other, but let there rather be sober and earnest meditation upon this question, whether all these things that appear so great in the past have not been displaced by things greater, only less sensuous and demonstrative. Why, the poorest of all time is always the present. When am I richest? When I go back upon my yesterdays, when I retrace my journeys without all the inconvenience of detail which is found in all voyagings and travellings. Seated in my quiet chair, in my pleasant solitude, with closed eyes I look back over all the yesterdays, reclimb the mountains and sail again on the silvery lakes, and move again with might and quiet serenity to the great sea. When I blow the trumpet of resurrection in the churchyard, and call up the dear lost ones, the old and the young, the bright and the sweet, the strong and the patient, then am I very rich. When are you, dear little one, richest? When you are telling me what you are *going* to do, *going* to see, *going* to be. It is the doll you are going to have that is to be the queen of all other dolls. It is the sight you are going to see that is to eclipse all other gaieties. Just now—nothing—a mere cobble-stone in a brook that may topple over. But all my wealth lies in the past, or glows in anticipation, and “just now” is always the poorest time in any history that is worth living.

“Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord.” Does God let his servants die? Was it the blame of Moses that he died, or is his death to be credited to his Lord? Is there an appointed time to men upon the earth—is there just a little length of thread that is long enough for the very strongest and wisest of us, and if an inch were added our past would be put in peril as well as our future? Are things set—are there fixed quantities in time, age, wealth, talent, power? Everything is weighed out and measured by the balances and standards of the Lord. He weighed the gold dust of the stars, and not a speck can be lost upon the wind. The very hairs of your head are

all numbered. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. He is a severe economist: like all great givers he is severely critical in his balances and results. Only the spendthrift keeps no note-book of his outgoings. God hath a book, yea, many a book hath God, for when he had opened book after book, the Apocalyptic writer says then he opened another book wherein was set down everything. Your time is known; you are his servant, yet he will call you into rest. He doth not let us die, he permits us to live. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. I heard this in no whisper; it was not a confidential communication made to me: I heard a great voice behind me, saying, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, . . . that they may rest;" I knew that word "rest," I had heard it before, it was one of Christ's very earliest, sweetest notes, for he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Dying ones, in his name, accept his hospitality, and go forward into his banqueting-house, quiet, at peace for evermore.

What will the Lord do, now that Moses has gone? He will be put to sore straits. What will Omnipotence do now that the staff in his hand is broken—can he make another, or find one more? Does he create a Moses? No, he elevates a Joshua. He means to elevate you next: be ready; do not be in the field when he calls for you in the house.

"The Lord spake unto Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' minister," Moses' servant. Moses was the servant of the Lord, Joshua was the servant of Moses, and thus we belong to one another. He has no higher title to give. Paul and Timotheus, slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, the servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. Joshua then had served well, and he was called to promotion. "Thou hast been faithful over few things, I will make thee ruler over many things," is God's rule. Thou hast been faithful at Jerusalem, thou shalt see Rome also. No metropolis shall shut its gates in thy face: if thou hast been faithful in the little villages and provincial towns and minor capitals, thou shalt surely see the greatest cities and the loftiest places. The first Napoleon was wont to say no man could rule well who could not serve well. If you are unable to serve, you

are unable to rule. We know nothing about service in some of its severer senses in our common civil life. Some of you have been under masters and tutors and governors: you know what discipline is—you have overgotten the infantile period of controversy and questioning and reasoning: you have learned not to reason why, but to do, and, if need be, die. You are going to make an excellent person, I believe, in the course of about seven years. I tell you you will not. Shall I explain my reason for that discouraging prediction? It is that you were never an obedient child. You cannot, therefore, unless God repeat his miracle of making you over again, be a good husband, or wife, or head of a business. There is a philosophy in these things that you cannot wriggle out of. To be unused to service, unaccustomed to obedience, is to be utterly unprepared for the responsibilities of the house, or of the place of commerce, the legislature, or the church.

Not a word is said in praise of Joshua. How then do we know that he was so excellent a man? Because of his promotion to succeed Moses. God studieth, to use a human phrase for the sake of our littleness, the proportion, measurement, relation, of one thing to another. He who put the stars in their places knows whom to call to high succession. To have called Joshua to this place is to have endorsed and accredited him as no merely formal testimonial could have done. My friend, young and wondering, anxious, impetuous—wait: there cannot be two men of the name of Moses, and of the weight and influence of Moses, at the same time. Give the first man his full opportunity—thy day will come by-and-by; be ready for it, enlarged with all the nobleness of divine inspiration and qualified by all the patience that comes of obedience to the discipline of Almighty love and wisdom.

“The Lord spake unto Joshua, the son of Nun, saying, Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore . . .” Why say, in so many words, that look cold in this dry ink, that Moses is dead? It needed to be said. Sometimes we need to have told us the very plainest things in life in simple strong prose. In the case of Moses, a declaration of this kind was particularly needful. Who knows what wonderings and speculations, what rash conjectures, foolish imaginings and vain hopings and dreamings, might have

come out of the disappearance of Moses, but for this plain and undeniable declaration of his decease? No man saw him die, no man closed those weary eyes with gentle fingers, no tender hand stretched out those poor worn limbs, no gentle woman or loving child planted a flower on that high mountain grave. God who took him comes back from Nebo to say, "He is dead; it is over, he is gone. Now therefore. . . ." At this point one's interest becomes intense. We say, "After Niagara?" Then do we put a huge mark of interrogation, as if we had put to the world a question which has no answer. So when I began by saying, "After the death of Moses, what?" I felt as if any reply given to that inquiry would be unworthy of the occasion, would fall flatly, and would utterly disappoint and discourage us. We have now come to the place wherein the answer is found. "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore—sit down; bemoan yourselves, take it so deeply to heart as utterly to disqualify your energies for making even the feeblest effort; it is no use your endeavouring to propagate a race of men after the withdrawal by death of that majestic leader who is now but a memory"—does the history read so? God says, "Moses my servant is dead, now therefore, arise"—in every sense of the word, arise—to nobler manhood, to diviner power, to higher conception, to nobler endeavour, to more devoted and solemn and holy attempt to do God's will.

That is what you have to do now that your dear little child is dead. I found you with handkerchief pressed to streaming eyes, sitting down as if your bones had melted like heated wax, and you could do no more, and I came to say to you, "Arise, the Master is come, and calleth for thee." That is what you have to do after your great loss in business. You thought to settle down into nobody. That is not God's law: the disaster has come, now arise. The loss has taken place, the table is clean swept, not a shadow of the golden coin can be found on the tessellated table—now therefore, arise. It is God's Gospel to the dejected, it is God's medicine for those who suppose themselves to be wounded incurably. Again and again God says, "Look up, arise, go forward." And he always does this in the presence of great loss, whether of life or property. This he always says. When poor Jacob called himself a worm, and took

up what he thought his appropriate place in the dust; when Zion stripped herself of her white mantle and sat down under the shady tree, and said, "God hath forgotten to be gracious"—when she held her fair head far down into the dust which she thought too good for one so dispossessed and disennobled, God found her so, and what said he? "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things." The straightening of the neck will do thee good—a walk out into the living air will help to heal thee. Looking down does no man good. Looking up and looking abroad, arising and going forward, elevating and arousing exertions, are God's answers to the dejection, the self-limitation of man.

"Arise and go over this Jordan." How seldom we are allowed to finish our work. It seems as if we could die more happily upon the other side of the river than upon this side. Only let me build my church, finish my house, complete my plan, lay out my grounds, see the youngest trees flourishing into maturity—only let me see my children all attaining the age of manhood and womanhood and settled in life, and then I can, I think, die comfortably. This our weak speech, this our staggering eloquence, this our halting argument, before him who carrieth us in his arms, who sets us down and takes us up as it pleaseth him, and who is unrestrained in the high heavens and in the deep places where the lake of fire is and where all darkness dwells.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." God quotes himself: whom else can he quote? As—so. History repeats itself, God repeats himself. I know not of any clearer and fuller vindication of himself as to his providential care and dealing than is to be found in this very expression. Observe to whom it was addressed. To a man who had actually seen God's way with Moses. He is not invited to meet a providence undeclared and mysterious, he is asked to accept a repetition of that which has passed before his own eyes, and impinged most closely upon his own consciousness and experience. Does God say, "I was but a little with Moses, I will be much with thee—I will do much more for Joshua than ever I did for Moses"? Does he tempt him by some unmeasured and enormous bribe? The expression is, "As—so." As was the past, so will be the future. God's repetitions are creations. Miracles of providence

never lose their fascination and their value. This is God's voice to us to-day—as he was with the fathers, so will he be with the children. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. The heavens become aged, and the stars stagger in their journeys, yea, the Lord doth fold up that great blue firmament like a garment outworn, and put it away, but he is the same, and his years fail not. A thousand years are in his sight as one day, and one day is as a thousand years. He says, "I am the Lord, I change not." So when he comes to speak to us he repeats himself. He quotes no other authority; he signs the same sign manual, stamps the book with the same great seal; his promises are yea and amen, repeating themselves like the seasons, constant, yet ever new; old as eternity, yet fresh as the morning just being born in the flush and hope of a new dawn.

We have then God's Book to guide us and show us precisely what he has for us, and what he can do for our life. Why dost thou dream, O poor mystic, why dost thou wonder what God will do on the morrow? Thou hast all his yesterdays in human history to go back upon, and his expression to thee is, "As—so. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." See him giving his omnipotence in pledge to a poor startled secretarial servant of the dead Moses; see him taking up in his great arms the garment of his own almightiness and covering with it the shoulders of this newly-appointed leader. That garment is large enough for us, that almightiness is sufficient to our daily distresses and perpetual wants. What time I am afraid I will trust in God, yea, when the enemy secretly pursueth me I will run into God's almightiness as into a great tower, and there will I sit down till the pursuer weary himself with beating the air. All God's promises are before men: he writes in no new ink: he asks for no new hand that he may dictate a new and ampler revelation. It is "As—so." Moses—Joshua. John—Paul. A repetition without weariness, a reduplication that startles by its originality.

That is all? No. "Be strong and of a good courage. . . . Only be thou strong and very courageous." There is something for man to do. God's almightiness is sent to us as a pledge, not that it may do everything for us, but that it may awaken our



strength and call up every energy we possess, and consecrate it to the high and solemn service of the great Lord. Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O thou beloved of the Lord. Only be thou strong and very courageous: do thy little best; if thou canst not fly, flutter; if thou canst not run, crawl. He will make it all up to thee, only do thy little share. It hath pleased God to adopt the great principle of co-operation in administering the affairs of the lower courts of his universe. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night. Man is not to trust to his own genius, nor is he thrown back upon his own resources in the high vocations of life. We are not allowed to live upon the empty pittance and miserable inheritance of our own wit. There is written for us a Word, deep, large, loving, clear, accessible, and we must continually meditate therein. Beautiful words, and full of meaning. Some of the print in God's book I can see best by day, other of the book I can read most clearly by night. Can I tell how this is? It is utterly impossible for me to explain it, but I see angels at night: they do not come out in the garish white light of the mid-day, but I have seen troops of them in the dusk—I have heard many a voice not otherwise articulate in the deep watches of the night. God does great wonders in the darkness: the darkness and the light are both alike unto him. You never knew the meaning of "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God" until you read those words in the night of your great loneliness. Then you saw what priest and presbyter never could explain, what had eluded the touch of the most diligent annotator: you saw God's meaning, yea, you saw his great outstretched gentle arms taking up the very thing he was blessing.

So it is through and through life. Every heart must make its own application of this great lesson: some part of the book is best read by day, some is most clearly seen by night. God's book is a book that cannot be exhausted either in the day or in the night. It needs the sun and the moon and every star of the firmament, candles of glory lighted by hands divine to see its deep, its infinite meaning. Poor, poor fool, thou didst say thou

hadst read the Bible through and through : rather thou didst mean, if thou wilt let wisdom speak and love interpret, that thou hast begun to read, and that thou art still stumbling over the first lines ; or if thou art at all restful, it is with a great amaze, a solemn and glad wonder, because the Paradise grows upon thee, and thou canst not move yet, because of the ever-deepening fascination of the immortal beauty.

Now, faint-hearted ones, let us repent and believe. If all the great men, as we think, are dead, it is that others may take their places. Whose place are you going to take ? Who will be baptised for the dead ? This may be an awakening time for aught I know : it is a solemn hour ; there is a stillness in it which may prelude a great resurrection of intellectual and spiritual energy and a great solemn consecration of personal powers and possessions to the service of the God of Moses. The great merchant in the city is dead : arise ! The great political leader is dead : arise ! The great preacher is dead : arise ! Whose place will you take ? There are a thousand vacancies to-day in the great gallery historical ; which of the places will you take ? Are you waiting until God has spoken to you ? He speaks to you now. What are you ready for ? Anything ? That is the right spirit. Any time ? That is the right answer. In whose strength will you come—in Christ's ? It is sufficient, even to redundance and infinite overflow. Hast thou set thyself to some part of God's work ?—only be strong and very courageous : keep close to the book : by day read it, by night spell it—close, close, close to the book ; and as for those who would stand before thee, they shall be melted like wax in the fire ; yea, as fences of stubble before the conflagration of the presence of God in the life.

Oh for a Church alive, with its beautiful garments on its shoulders, and all its powers throbbing like an eternal pulse ! Then our presence would be felt in the city, in the village, everywhere, and our presence would not be seen, because of the lustre of Him whose we are and whom we serve.

## PRAYER.

OH, how patient is the Lord ! how tender is his mercy ! how loving is his kindness ! We are amazed with a great amazement, and our hearts are filled with thankfulness. Our steps are guided by the Lord, and our hairs are numbered by him, and there is nothing that concerns us too little for his notice and his care. This is the faith in which we live, and it makes us strong and glad, and gives us brightness of hope and fulness of resort in all the difficulties and perils of life. This faith we have proved. We are ourselves living witnesses of this nearness of the divine hand and this interest of the divine eye. We have been low down, and we have been lifted up ; we have been in great distress and have not known which way to turn, but the Lord hath held a light before, and come close to us and said, This is the way : walk ye in it. We cannot contradict ourselves : we cannot put down the testimony of a lifetime ; the writing is thine, the voice is thine,—the praise be thine, thou glorious Christ ! We look back and see thee now as we did not see thee once. The cloud became a night, and in the night no star trembled : the burden was very heavy, and our eyes poured out rivers of tears, and in all the agony we caught the mocker's tone gibing us about our God and our faith ; but we see all now : it was well, it was best ; the grave was right, the burden was none too heavy, and the way, though often crooked and invisible, was leading on to Canaan, to rest, to motherland, where there is no night, no death. We delight to look back, for the prophets are there, and the minstrels who cheered us in the night-time. Our life, too, has its Old Testament,—its Pentateuch, its moving histories, its painful tragedies, its psalms so noble, its songs so tender, and its prophecy—the outlook and the forecast of faith ;—behold, we cannot give up these : they are thine, and the book is sealed by thine hand. So, too, has our life its New Testament : its birth in Bethlehem, its wondrous teacher, its worker of great miracles, its marvellous speaker—we wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth—and its cross, its priest, its redemption ;—wondrous is this life, and it is the writing of God. Help us to read well, to think deeply, to answer thee instantaneously with all the swiftness of eager love ; then when what we call the end comes, it shall be no end but a beginning, bright as morning, warm as summer. Amen.

### Joshua i. 10-15.

10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,
11. Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals ; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.

12. And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying,

13. Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land.

14. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour and help them;

15. Until the Lord have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the Lord your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the Lord's servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.

### ASPECTS OF HUMAN CHARACTER.

THESE opening paragraphs present Joshua in several interesting aspects, which we may profitably consider and personally apply: for there is nothing old in them, in the sense of outwornness; what is old in them is old in the sense of venerableness, ascertained reality, enduring energy and virtue. In that sense we must never give up what is old. Whatever is effete, exhausted, evidently done, you may shake off into forgetfulness, because however good it once was, it has served its time, and the age longs for some new inspiration, and clearer, broader, direction and guidance.

First of all, Joshua comes before us as a man with great official antecedents. He does not succeed a little man: he begins what, from the human point of view, is a rivalry that will strain his energy and test his quality. Men cannot go from a leader like Moses and follow some inferior personage, as if he filled up all the space and represented what was necessary to satisfy the heart's hunger. This web cannot be continued, as to the weaving of it, by an apprenticed and unskilled hand. Our call is precisely the same.

Every age succeeds an age marked by greatness peculiarly its own. We are born now into a grand civilisation; it admits of no indolence, or reluctance as to work, and it cannot be satisfied by what is petty, perfunctory, and inexpensive as to the strength which is laid out upon it. History brings its responsibilities. To be born immediately after such and such leaders have played their part in the world's theatre is itself to have a cross of no mean weight laid upon the

shoulder. We may close our eyes and think nothing about these things, but we do not thereby make them the less realities, nor do we thereby destroy the standard of judgment which they force upon us and by which our life will be tested. To close the eyes is to play a foolish part. Every man should say, Whom do I succeed? Whose are these foot-prints near the place whereon I stand? Has a giant been here—a great leader, a noble sufferer, a patient student, a father great in love, a mother greater still?—then my responsibility begins with their greatness and goodness; what I have to do—the soliloquist should say—is to go on: where they have been great, I must try to be greater still,—or if not along their line, along some line of my own,—so that the ages may not stagger backwards but with steadiness and majesty of strength advance from one degree to another as the light increases to the perfect day. Thus we honour our ancestors; thus we bury Moses—not in the grave of forgetfulness, but by turning his strength, wisdom, patience, foresight, and energy into elements which contribute to the sustenance and ennobling of our manhood. Now it has come to pass that every man is in a great historical succession. That succession may not localise itself in his particular family, but we do not live within the four corners of a measurable house: we are citizens of the world; whatever was done in the past was done for our sakes, upon whom the end of time has come—for every age has an end of time to itself: every age must look for the Lord and say—He will be here present at midnight—at the crowing of the cock, ere the dawn has time to whiten the east and purple the mist-shrouded hills. Be ready! watch! Let those who have wives be as if they had none; let those who have fields ready for reaping be as if they had none; his chariot-wheels are sounding: he will be here to-day—to-morrow: in that expectation we should live! It is in vain to say it is not realised in what we call localisation, or narrow fact: he comes when he moves our heart to an expectation of his coming; he descends upon us when he so ennobles our prayer as to make us feel more in heaven than on earth. So we have a great past; and that great past creates a solemn present, and forecasts a brilliant future, and clothes

all life with responsibility and honour. So far, there is nothing old in the story of the soldier-prophet: he followed a great man; we follow men also great.

In the next place, we find Joshua as a man with a definite purpose,—a purpose which Moses could not have carried out. One man completes the work of another. Moses was a legislator: Joshua was a soldier,—in every line of his story the soldier is evident. How he listens; how acute his attention; look at him—he is all ear! Nothing can miss the observation of a man who looks like that when a voice from heaven speaks to him. He asks no questions, raises no difficulties; he receives his marching-orders, and rises. The soldier is born in the man—not the petty fighter, not the pugnacious aggressor and self-promoter, but the valiant man, the heroic man, the man who sees only the purpose and hears only the command, who has no ear for objection, but a great capacity for inspiration. This is the secret of strength. Joshua did not attempt a hundred things: he consecrated his strength, for he had for the time being only one thing to do. What is there old in this state of affairs? Nothing that need awaken our contempt, or content us in our disregard. Why do not men succeed to-day? Often because they have no purpose, and not seldom because they have more purposes than one. To have a hundred purposes may be to have no purpose at all. Some men run away in multiplicity of vocation: they diffuse themselves, and by unwise attenuation their strength is gone, and when they strike they miss the object of their blow or smite it with a feeble hand. Every man should ask himself, what is my purpose in life? What have I to do? Am I prophet or soldier or minstrel? Am I commander or servant? Is it mine to create new heavens and a new earth, or mine to be diligent in heaven's light and make some corner of the earth greener and happier than it was before? That question may be put by every one, by the simplest and obscurest. Blessed is that servant who is found waiting, watching, doing the work of the moment, and satisfied with it because it is preparing him for some larger duty yet to be disclosed. How criminal it is to fritter away strength; how often we hear the moan of old age to the effect: Had I but pursued one definite line for the last

twenty years, had I but been constant to the thing I could do, without making experiments in things I could not do, how different would have been my lot to-day; but I was here and there and yonder; I ran with the crowd, I scattered my power, and to-day I have nothing to show; I have been a truant,—a runner after bubbles that gleamed in the air and which, had I caught them, would have fallen to nothingness in my grasp. Why not learn from that moan? Why not vow to be some one thing, to pursue that one thing steadily? And why not vow especially to keep within the line of your obvious talent?—along that line you will find honour and restfulness and gladness of heart: it is enough for you. Few are the men that can take up more lines than one. He who is faithful in the least shall be promoted to rulership, and shall be surprised that steady regard for one object in life has secretly and unconsciously prepared the industrious servant for the rulership of five cities, or ten. Power grows, capacity enlarges; thou knowest not how.

In the third place, Joshua comes before us as a man with a divine qualification. God “spake” to him. God promises not to “fail” him:—“As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee” (v. 5). What did God want in return? Cheerfulness:—“Be strong and of a good courage. . . . Only be thou strong and very courageous . . . turn not . . . to the right hand or to the left,”—be strong and of a good heart. So Joshua did not go to war at his own charges. Is there anything old and outworn in that happy reflection? Inspiration cannot cease until the Holy Ghost expires. It is the very function of the Holy Ghost to inspire; without that function he has, so to say, no mission amongst men; the very fact of his being the Spirit of God invests him with the continual prerogative to inspire and qualify his Church. We may all be divinely qualified; and unless we are so qualified our work ends in a cloud blown away by the veering wind. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” “If ye being evil”—broken-minded, dim of eye, and feeble altogether—“know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more”—what a challenge to the contemplation and measurement

of magnitude!—"how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him." "Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss." There is nothing that a man can do of his own strength. Inspiration must not be confined to what is too narrowly called the Church. No man can go forth to his labour to do it with real skill and with pureness of motive without being divinely qualified. He who handles the graving-tool handles it with fingers God made, and uses metal which God created in the earth. We must not have a Church God, a Sabbath deity, an altar available only one day in the week: we must live and move and have our being in God. The Lord inspires the letter-writer, the reader, the father, the merchant, the poorest labourer in the poorest sphere. Are the insects not regarded? Does a worm move in the mould apart from the eternal throne? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;" and if any man has arisen to mark off the world into "sacred" and "secular," "religious" and "profane," he has not studied geography in God's sanctuary. Let us, then, seek divine qualification that we may do our poorest work well and treat our one talent as if it were a thousand, for if the talents be few in number they determine the consequent responsibility,—only "be strong and of a good courage;" "only be thou strong"—we read again—"and very courageous,"—rise to the work, take pleasure in it; if you do the work as an addition to something else of a different quality, what wonder if it be a joyless task and if the reluctant heart has only one prayer—prayer for eventide and release from toil? The Church is lacking in courage: she allows every one who pleases to arise and insult her; she soon loses heart; she says—The enemy is too strong for me: I will keep within doors. So saying, what has she lost? A comprehensive and just sense of her mission;—she has lost God!

What does all this issue in but in divinely-promised and divinely-guaranteed success. "Thou shalt make thy way prosperous. . . . Thou shalt have good success. . . . Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed." . . . "Only be thou strong and very courageous." Let the youngest student hear this word and obey it. Take heart again. If you are weary for the moment, rest



awhile. Do not abandon the study: to-morrow you will come to it with a conqueror's heart; the pages will almost turn over of themselves, and he who wrote the difficult lines will annotate them and turn them into gracious simplicity,—“only be thou strong and very courageous.” The meaning is that you may rest, sit down awhile, recover strength: but whilst expending your energy you need not surrender your courage. Hope wins; gladness conquers; confidence in God beats down the mountains and lifts up the places that are below the valley. These are the guarantees of success. The issue will be good. Virtue, it is proverbially known, is its own reward. There is a mystery about this which the heart knows full well. Being busy in the right way, how the time flies! There is no time to the truly-inspired worker; he has but one complaint which he translates in some such words as—How short the day is! It is no sooner dawn than it is evening! How have the hours flown away! What is the voice of the sluggard in regard to this same matter of time?—a voice of complaint: the hours are leaden-footed: they will not move, they are a burden; and the heart dies for want of what is called excitement. True work brings its own heaven with it. The true toiler lifts up his head from his task, saying—I began it in God's strength, I have carried it on in divine energy, and I am only sorry that I cannot do more of it and do it better,—God permit that to-morrow may be as this day and more abundant. Christian workers all bear this testimony; there is no break or flaw in the massive and noble witness. All history testifies that to serve God is already to enter into rest.

Whilst Joshua comes before us so, there is an aspect or two in which the divine Being presents himself worthy of our notice. He comes before us in this record as removing men. He said unto Moses—Your work is done. It is for him to say when the tale has been completed. Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Is there not a dial by which the shadow makes known to men when the evening approacheth? We are all immortal until our work is done. Do not fret yourselves about the latter end,—let it come in God's time. To die now in the fulness of your strength and hope would be indeed a species of murder, but you will be led gently down the easy slope, step by

step, little by little, until you say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ; I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ ; I want to sleep,—I long to see the upper world." Do not be in bondage all your lifetime through fear of death. When death does come to the true Christian worker and waiter, it will come as a veiled angel ; and when you are shut up together in the chamber you will have sweet converse and call the interview the beginning of heaven.

God comes before us as explaining his own method towards man. Canaan was promised as a gift,—and now it must be fought for ! Long ago we heard that this land was to be presented,—and now as the history evolves we find that it is to be conquered ! This is the divine method in all things. "I will give thee," is the one word ; "rise and do battle," is the completing word. We value what we labour for ; we treat with contemptuous disregard that which costs us nothing. We enter into rest by the gate of labour. We enjoy Canaan because we have toiled after a divine manner for it. So with heaven : it will come as a kind of reward for industry and labour, faith and love, prayer and patience. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." It will seem as if the Lord had permitted us to fight our way to heaven and to have won it by dint of valour. Nor do we claim any merit herein, or look upon heaven as a prize for superior strength. It pleases the Lord to accommodate himself to our modes of expression : so we shall have as a reward what we could not have obtained as the result of labour : our faith will be credited with the miracles which were wrought solely by divine grace ; rulership will be given as a prize when it never could have been won as a reward. We need have no fear of corrupting the mind upon these questions, and so bedimming our vision as to lose full, clear sight of the divine glory. What we have to remember is this : God is king ; God is the source of inspiration ; God calls whom he will to such and such offices : the distribution of honour and place is with God, but he called all Israel to the land, to its possession and enjoyment ; they were not all equal to Moses, they were not all equal to Joshua, they were not all commanders and mighty men, but the wise wife and the

little ones and the whole host were all regarded by the divine love. So it is in the greater scheme of things divine which we call Providence, or by the nobler name of Redemption. We are not all called to bear the mantle of Elijah, or to play upon the harp of David, or to sing in the lofty strains of Isaiah, or to see the mystic symbolism of Ezekiel; we cannot argue like Paul, or love like John, or pray like Peter. Some are called to high places and to great honour, and are clothed with responsibility as with a garment, but, blessed be God, whilst there can be but few leaders, few commanders, few prophets and poets and legislators, the great call of God is to every man under heaven:—"He that believeth shall be saved;" "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." So, whilst we speak of sovereignty and appointment, and distribution of place and honour, we are not speaking of the great matter of human salvation,—for the Gospel is to be sounded unto all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. Wherever the Gospel is preached it is to signify love, welcome, offered pardon, offered heaven. For such a Gospel praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

All the after life of Joshua is the carrying out with a remarkable simplicity of unquestioning faith this first charge of his God. His obedience is immediate. . . . At once he assumes in all its breadth the office so committed to his hands, and as God's vicegerent "commands the officers of the people" (i. 10).

The first command was one which showed his great faith, and tested strongly the obedience of the people. The river Jordan lay between the camp and the land of their promised inheritance, and it must be passed over by them at the very outset of their march. But how could this be accomplished? Even if it were possible, with difficulty and risk, to transport over it a chosen handful of warriors, how could he possibly carry over the mixed multitude—the women and the children, and the flocks and the herds? Even over the fords of Jordan, under the most favourable circumstances of the river, this would have been almost impossible; and at this season of the year, when, from the melting of the snow upon the highlands, Jordan was greatly flooded (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest), it was more than ever impossible (iii. 15). Yet down to these threatening floods, on the hopeless errand of passing over them, all the people are ordered to march. Surely, it must have been a sore strain upon the simple faith of the young commander to issue such an order. But his faith was strong, and he commanded, and was obeyed.—SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

## PRAYER.

THY word is exceedingly comfortable to our souls, thou Father of spirits, thou God of eternity! We know thy words are good and full of power: they fill the necessity of our heart to overflow, yea, even to abundance, as of fulness upon fulness, until there is not room enough to receive thy gift. Thou dost speak from the sanctuary of eternity, and thy words come with all the infinite power of thy majesty; yet are they gentle, gracious, like the soft rain upon the tender herb: they come from a great height, but thou dost cause them to fall without burdensomeness, and they refresh and cheer and satisfy us as no other words have done. We bless thee for any measure of constancy in thy kingdom which we have been enabled to realise and to manifest. There have been many who have said, Turn to the right-hand; and others have said, Turn to the left-hand;—but because thou hast been with us, an abiding inspiration and a daily light, we find ourselves still in the sanctuary, standing upon the rock, clinging to the blessed Cross, looking to the Son of God for redemption and all the mystery of pardon. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. We would have no other delight; all other joys would we know in this lofty passion—to love the Saviour, to know him more intelligently, and to serve him with a profounder obedience. Thou wilt not decline our prayer, or cause a cloud to come between thy throne and this poor earth: when we so cry we know that we have the answer even whilst we are breathing the prayer: for this is the will of God, even our perfectness,—the completeness of our manhood, the subjugation of our will to right and truth and love. So we know that we have thy reply,—may we know it still more confidently, and rejoice in deepening peace, and in ever-increasing strength, and in continual delight which makes the heart young and the hand strong. As for our sin, take it up in thy mighty power and love, and bury it where no man can find it, and thou thyself forget where the burden has been laid. Amen.

### Joshua i. 16-18.

16. And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.

17. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

18. Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.

## UNANIMITY.

JOSHUA had commanded the officers of the people to pass through the host, saying, "Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it." A charge was delivered to the people, interpreting the divine will, and promising great blessedness, possession, and rest. The people having heard the appeal answered Joshua saying, "All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go." We see men occasionally at their best, and then the revelation of human nature is not without enchantment and great comfortableness. Men like to speak in crowds, to multiply their voices by a thousand and ten thousand; and then they imagine that they are revealing the strength and enjoying the confidence of what is termed unanimity. It is a beautiful thing to see forty thousand men all intent upon one purpose, and to hear them uttering one cry, and to know that their utterance is expressive of an obedient spirit. This is the answer which ought to have been given, and which ought now to be given to every divine appeal. We should answer love by love; we should answer music by music; when heaven descends to earth with some unusual blessing, earth should become almost heaven in its grateful appreciation and response. We see this sometimes in the sanctuary. A sublime revelation of divine care, providence, grace is made, and hearts are melted into one, and the final hymn becomes a pledge, a solemn vow, a great musical consecration of the heart. It is beautiful now and again to see what ought to be,—occasionally to see the ideal, now and again to hear a common sentiment uttered by an inspired heart;—surely such are sights and sounds which might do us good evermore! Herein is part of the benefit of the sanctuary: we become our best selves under its holy inspiration. We did not know altogether what was in us whilst we were outside the sanctuary, walking solitarily, brooding upon our own thoughts, and heaping up reproaches against society; when we came into the house of God and heard the universal language, something moved in us which claimed kinship with the speech, and we

longed to spring with a thousand men to our feet to sing our convictions and to utter our vow in solemn music. You do not see a man at any one moment; you see some aspect of him, but what he is as to his true spiritual bulk, value, scope, force, you do not see at any one observation: but you see most of him when under the sway of inexpressible emotion, when his prayer is interrupted with praise, when his supplication sobs itself into confession and humiliation, and when his hope rises into song and expresses itself in exclamations of loyalty and thankfulness to God. We never could have known human nature in its wholeness but for religious influences and Christian appeals. The divine appeal is a resurrection-trumpet: it awakes the dead within us, it makes the churchyard of the heart throb with new life. You lose inexpressibly by cutting off religious connections, by interrupting channels through which religious communications flow. It seems to be an easy thing to leave the church and to allow great voices and appeals to waste themselves upon the empty wind, but we cannot tell how much we lose by ceasing to mingle in the common emotion and reciprocate the universal sentiment of the church. To leave the altar is to forego the touch which connects us in a mysterious but wonderfully sensible manner with the eternal throne, the infinite power, the ineffable grace. So do not put away the blessing of an ideal answer. The people meant every word of it. They did not know what they said; still, they were excited to a nobler selfhood than perhaps they had ever realised before; and we do say things in prayer and hymn and religious speech the full scope of which we do not apprehend;—do not be literal with us and say that we lied in the hymn, that we committed treason in the prayer, and spoke falsely in the noble excitement; it is not so: another self, larger, better than we have ever known before, rose up within us and sang that grand hymn, uttered that heaven-moving prayer, and ennobled that sublime excitement.

This is an answer which experience has uniformly discredited. We have never lived this reply. The words are still ringing in the air, and the air seems to have a kind of pleasure in

retaining the tones and reproducing them, until they become not reminders only but reproaches and criticisms and appalling judgments. We remember the altar: we need no mocking spirit to remind us how far we have wandered from it. We remember the wedding-day when Christ and we became one,—and what a feast there was on that radiant morning; what vows were exchanged; what love was pledged; how the future was enriched with all the hospitality of inexhaustible bountifulness so that we would for ever dwell in the banqueting-house and for ever hear the flapping of the banner bearing the divinest name! We know what we said when we were young. Youth has a speech all its own—a flower language, a garden rhetoric, a beautiful efflorescence and poesy. Every word was meant, and by the help of God the soul now says, every word shall yet be redeemed! But what wandering we seem to have had; how wayward we are; how subtle are the influences which bear upon memory, and becloud the imagination, and pervert the heart, and enfeeble the will! Did Adam fall?—Certainly. There ought to be no more fully-attested truth in all the range of the theological judgment and imagination than the fall of every living man. Compare the speech of promise and its attempted excuses; compare yesterday and to-day; contrast the morning prayer with the evening recollection. No other man could fall for us. We seem to think there is a kind of substitutionary action in the Adamic apostasy,—as if Adam had mysteriously consented to fall on our account, or to represent us in a great tragedy. The truth is, every man falls himself, in himself, and for himself; and the experience of the world is lost upon every one of us: were it not so, the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes would save the world from all further practical mistake. But nobody believes those two chapters; they read fluently, the style is copious and urgent, the experience is full of colour, and it beats with a very strong pulse, and we would not like to give up the chapters as part of a literary treasure,—but who believes them? No living soul! Every man builds his own Jerusalem, gets around him his garden of delights, yields to his own serpent, and is damned on his own account. It is not for us to become the censors of antiquity, saying that Israel

failed to carry out in literal exactness the pledge which was made almost in song. Let us keep to our own experience; stand upon the facts which make up our own daily life, and through them we shall see how it was that antiquity sinned and that the first man fell. Were we to close here we should close under a great cold cloud; but this is not the stopping-place: there are points beyond.

This was an answer given without full consciousness of the motive which dictated it. We are not rapid, as we certainly are not exact, in the analysis of motive: we take the first explanation which comes to hand, and are content if other people will receive it. A mysterious action is this, which we have come to know by the name of motive,—that is to say, why we do certain things, or say them, fear them, or hope for them. It is not always convenient to descend into the secret place where motive lives and reigns. It is better sometimes not to know the deeper psychological reality. What was the case in this particular history? A great promise had been made; land was to be given; rest was to be assured: Sabbath was to dawn upon the world, and the desert was to be as a fruitful field; under this promise the command was given, and whilst the command and the promise mingled together in a common music, the people said—We are ready! Nor did they speak untrustfully or insincerely. We do not surely know by what motives we are moved. Motives are not simple, they are complex, mixed up with one another, now coinciding, now separating, again approaching,—and not to be expressed fitly in words. How far did the promise of the land tell upon the obedience of the men who answered Joshua? Who can tell how subtly the word “rest,” which occurs so often in this opening chapter, entered into weary lives, distracted hearts, and made men ready to say anything that lay in the direction of its immediate and complete realisation? Who can take himself out of himself? Who can die unto God? This is a miracle which lies beyond us just now; yet it is well to keep our eyes upon a plan—a position that must be attained—if we are to grow up into the measure of the stature of men in Christ Jesus; we are to have no self: when asked where our life is, we are to point to the Cross on which it has been nailed and on which it has expired.



Do we not find the operation of the same motive now in our spiritual experience? What is it that has been promised?—rest, release from the torment of conscience, the destruction of accusing recollection;—another promise has been made under a sweet name which no man has ever been able to define: we are to have heaven. We have placed heaven above the blue sky: we would not have it in the east or in the west, but straight up in the zenith of the visible firmament. We have thought of heaven as a place of pureness, rest, joy, song, recognition of one another, riddance of all evil, escape from death in every form; and whilst godly men have been making the soul these promises, what if the soul said—We accept the conditions; we will obey; for such a prize we are prepared to serve and suffer until life's last day? Having uttered the pledge, we have another step to go to get back to old lines, and perhaps the interposition of that one step may happily deter us from returning to our old pursuits. A prayer should be a thick wall through which it is difficult to get back to the old non-praying state; a day in church should separate us by a practical eternity from all evil and irreligious propensity and act. Are not many men Christians because they want to go to heaven? It is a poor reason, yet it may be better than none at all. It is full of selfishness: it is a little, narrow, unworthy reason. What we should aim to be enabled to say is this: If this life were all, it is better to live in the spirit of Christ than in any other spirit;—if so be God will it that we are but tributaries to a greater humanity and an enduring civilisation, it is enough that we have ever prayed and ever loved. Who can attain that spiritual sublimity? We cling to the promised Canaan; we long to escape the threatened perdition. Our reasoning may be in all such respects narrow, superficial, and selfish,—still, it is something to begin with: for the literary truth of Christianity cannot be urged upon us all at once: we have to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that every day brings not its new Bible but its new interpretation, its larger claim, its ennobled and brightened outlook.

This was an answer given before battle. The idea of the battle was not fully recognised. The Lord said, "I will give you,"—and scarcely, as we have seen, had "I will give you"

been uttered than the other words were, "Fight for it!" What land were they to possess?—the land whereon their feet trod. You must go the land to claim it: your footprint must be your title. We are not called to some land that lies in the unmeasured region of the fancy; the land shall be yours whereon soever you set the sole of your foot. Hence we read in the third verse,— "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses." That is the true idea of possession. Do not live in the imagination but in the realisation of spiritual truths. What have we fought for. Is there now a man who can stand up and say, "I have fought for my faith, and I hold it with a hand that has bled"? What wonder that we change our faiths easily if we took them into possession easily? We simply heard of them, and we desire to hear no more about them. Who has studied, pondered, prayed, corrected himself, modified his conclusions—readjusted them, and gone on from point to point as from conquest to conquest,—now and again chargeable with inconsistency, but only with the inconsistency of self-correction, profounder criticism, and using a broader light than was available yesterday? We want sturdy soldiers in the Church—men who say,—Though all is given to us, yet it has to be fought for, and our answer before battle shall be quiet, modest, religious. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Do not force us to answer just now. We have heard the sublime appeal; we know it has come down from infinite heights, it has about it the fragrance of other worlds,—thank God for it!—for its broad words, its grand challenges: they move the soul, they shake the spirit out of prison;—but as for the full reply, we ourselves will wait: every day we will add a syllable to the answer, secretly hoping that by the grace and comfort of the Holy Ghost we may be able at the end of the days to present a complete word, steady as a planet, bright as the sun, glorious with the purity of a good conscience; just now our answer must be hesitant, broken, confused, but, believe us, our meaning is right: we will pray ourselves into greater prayers, and transfer ourselves through the medium of action into higher sacrifice and higher expositions of holy mysteries. Do not judge any one by the one day. We

are aware that he replied ecstatically—"I will!"—and he meant it in the very secret places of his soul. We know that the day after he faltered and fell, but his faltering and falling did not destroy the purpose of his soul: the seed of God was in him; and he in whomsoever that seed is found must win Canaan, with all its light and rest, its everlasting morning and its surprising joys. Do not fix your mind upon your failures and slips and apostasies; they are a thousand in number and they are without defence, but you can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee." If you can say so honestly, the battle is won before it has begun; if you can say so sincerely, you need have no fear of the end;—only be strong and very courageous, and there shall not a man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. What are the appeals addressed us?—not to take a Jericho measurable, but to advance to positions remote but glorious. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, . . . and I will receive you." "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple." Who is on the Lord's side—side of righteousness, side of truth, side of pureness? These are the questions and propositions that are thundered upon our ears. Let us reply saying,—God helping us, we will endeavor to be true, constant, loyal.

## PRAYER.

How many there are whose life is a battle thou knowest, O Father of all living! They wonder why they should exist; all things are hard to them: the night is dark, every road is difficult of passage, every door is shut, every man is a foe. They wonder and can hardly pray; they are amazed, and struck down with astonishment. Yet sometimes a little shining of light makes them glad; then they foretell the time of peace and rest and joy. Thou hast set in the midst of the week a day on which there shall be proclamation from time to time of thy mercy and sympathy, and on which some hint of life's great meaning shall be given to the sons of men. Thou dost show us that all thy way is full of goodness, though we cannot now realise the significance of every event. When the grave is dug, thy meaning is pitiful and merciful and most compassionate; when thou dost send sorrow upon our life it is to chasten and refine that life and cleanse it of all defilement. Thou dost cause all things to work together for good to them that love thee; and thou dost surprise thy children by newness of revelation. We set to our seal that God is true; we will stand up and say in the hearing of men—God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever; he abideth through all the ages, and his love is an unchanging light. We are enabled to say this notwithstanding the battle, the bereavement, the great loss, the mortal disappointment; when we recover ourselves a little we say, Thou hast done all things well; thy will not mine be done; lead kindly Light. So we feel it worth while to fight all the battle and endure all the sorrow, that at the end we may see light as we never saw it before, and feel the very peacefulness of peace, the very restfulness of rest. We come to thee by a way that is living, the eternal way, the only way. We look unto Jesus, and are saved: we behold the Lamb of God, and in beholding him with the eyes of our faith we see our sins carried away. Was ever love like his? Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for a good man peradventure some would die; but thou dost magnify thy love towards us in that while we were yet sinners—neither righteous nor good—Christ died for us,—amazing love! Oh the depth of the wisdom and grace! We are amazed; we are made glad; we feel we are forgiven. Amen.

## Joshua ii.

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

2. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

3. And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house : for they be come to search out all the country.

4. And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were :

5. And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out : whither the men went I wot not : pursue after them quickly ; for ye shall overtake them.

6. But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

7. And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords : and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

8. And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof ;

9. And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt ; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you : for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token :

13. And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

14. And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

15. Then she let them down by a cord through the window : for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

16. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you ; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned : and afterward may ye go your way.

17. And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

18. Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by : and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

19. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless : and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

20. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

21. And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

22. And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

23. So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them.

24. And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

### THE SPIRIT AND PURPOSE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

**R**AHAB was a woman without social repute. She became, however, a considerable figure in history. She was the wife of Salmon, the son of Naason, by whom she became the mother of Boaz, the grandfather of Jesse, the father of David. in proof of this see Matthew i. 6; Ruth iv. 20, 21: and 1 Chronicles ii. 11, 54, 55. Thus there was Gentile blood in the lineage of the Son of man. These points, apparently incidental and even trivial, are not to be passed by without eager and devout attention. Jesus Christ was not what is commonly known as a Jew only: he was in very deed what he called himself—the Son of man. All the ages seemed to conspire and breathe in him. The city of Jericho was the key of Palestine. It lay about seven miles west of the Jordan and commanded the entrance of the main passes into the land of promise. The city was very old and strongly walled. On the west side it was shut in by craggy and inhospitable mountains; yet even in Jericho there were springs of water, and not far off, toward the river, lay a great grove of palm trees. How to take that city was the military problem of the time. I propose to regard the narrative given in this chapter as illustrating the spirit and purpose of divine Providence. By studying it with this view we may see the continuity of history, which, indeed, is the continuity of human nature, which also in one aspect is the continuity of God. Ancient Jericho is gone,—not a vestige of it remains;

why, then, should we turn our telescope in the direction of extinct planets? Why seek a river which no longer flows? Why drop our bucket into a well dried up? These inquiries show how superficial our thinking may be. There is an eternal spirit in history; we should always be in quest of that spirit: it carries with it the whole meaning of God.

From military wisdom we may learn the moral wisdom of always striking first at the right point. Everything turns upon the first stroke in many a controversy and in many an arduous battle. Why are there so many fruitless efforts in life? Simply because the beginning was wrong. Why do men come home at eventide, saying, the day has been wasted? Because their very first step in the morning was in the wrong direction, or the very first word they spoke was the word they ought not to have uttered. Why do ye spend your strength for nought? Why beat with your poor feeble hands at points which never can be taken, which are not the right points at all to begin at? With all thy getting, get understanding of how to begin life, where to strike first, what to do and when to do it, and exactly how much of it to do within given time. If you strike the wrong place you will waste your strength, and the walls of the city will remain unshaken. A blow delivered at the right place and at the right time will have tenfold effect over blows that are struck in the dark and at random: however energetic they may be, and however well-delivered, they fall upon the wrong place, and the result is nothing. That is what is meant by wasted lives. Men have been industrious, painstaking, even anxious in thoughtfulness, and the night has been encroached upon so that the time of rest might be turned into a time of labour; yet all has come to nothing: no city has been taken, no position has been established, no progress has been made. Why? Simply because they did not begin at the right point. In every place in which we may be situated there is one opportunity, and unless that be seized all other occasions will be but empty promises, fruitless and mocking chances. God hath set us thus in very critical positions. We are called upon to keenest vigilance: we are to watch night and day. When the chance may come none can tell with certainty. Watch always: it may come now:—"What I

say unto you I say unto all," said Christ, "Watch." It is in vain to tell how we toiled and laboured, and begrudged our sleep, and tried again and again, if we are working at the wrong point, walking in the wrong direction, or failing to seize the divinely-created opportunity. If any man lack wisdom herein, let him ask of God. Great courage may be required in extricating yourself from wrong positions. Great nobleness of mind may be required on the part of a man to say—I have begun at the wrong point : I ought not to have begun here at all ; I renounce this effort and begin anew. Blessed be God, every day is a new opportunity to the man whose eyes are in his head, and whose heart has as its determining purpose a desire to obey the will of God.

We cannot deny the marvellous coincidences which occur in life, nor the wonderful opportunities which such coincidences create. As the men went, they "came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there." Perhaps the only house they could have got into without exciting suspicion. The woman was in the way : the opportunity was created. We cannot understand how these things should be. We see how history has many a time been in great peril,—yes, the whole substance of what is known as human history has sometimes been within one thread of breaking up altogether. Sometimes that marvellous quantity of life—event, purpose, which we call history, has gone so close to the fire as nearly to be consumed. From great depths God has rescued history ; in infinite perils God has appeared to save the race alive. Into these matters none may enter with words ; they are to be dealt upon by the spiritual imagination, and they admit of being sanctified by the spiritual reason and faith of man. Who can follow the way of the Almighty, or find out to perfection the counsel of Heaven ? Along this same line what victories Christ himself has won ; the noblest things he ever said and did were in connection with the lineage of Rahab ! The story of the woman taken in adultery will stand above all our stories whilst the sun shall last. The answer made to Simon the Pharisee, when in his cruel heart he destroyed the Messiahship of Christ, will convert the world from its despair, when the maxims of moralists and the dreams of reason have been forgotten. "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee—" then came the



proposition about the two creditors, and then the story of forgiveness, and then the benediction upon the heart-broken, weeping woman. How the pulses of Rahab made his blood tingle! We cannot tell who it is in us that speaks now, or then, at this or that particular moment. No one man is one man only. Every man represents the whole line along which he has come. Who knows the inspiration of the tender speeches of Christ in relation to the very class which we have now particularly in view? Who has sounded all the mystery and subtlety of heredity? Now some honest, sturdy old ancestor speaks in us the firm, stern word—an answer like a bolt of iron, by which the approach of the enemy is driven away; now some poor, timid, halting soul that took part in our lineage speaks in us: our words are pithless, our tones are without soul, our life has in it no spark of fire; now arises some demon within us, opening a throat that can swallow rivers and not be cooled;—who can tell who it is that thus assumes the momentary domination of our life? We must not be superficial in our view of these things. One man is many men. Jesus was the Son of MAN, representing all humanity, knowing all its temptations and burdens and stresses: feeling in himself every fire that ever burned within the human breast, and every sigh of peace that ever lulled the tumult of life into momentary tranquillity. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are.” What, therefore, is the grand conclusion?—“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Nor can we deny the beginnings of new life in unexpected places. In conversation the woman appeared to have received very considerable spiritual enlightenment. But there is a woman within the woman—a man within the man. We are not made up altogether of mere circumstances a moment old, coming to-day, going to-morrow,—a shifting, fleeting environment; we are spiritual beings with a spiritual instinct and a spiritual history and outlook. Rahab was not a “harlot” only: she was really a student of history, and had pondered many serious things in her heart, and had put events together and construed their meaning, and the meaning which revealed itself to her was this:

A new age is coming ; the night is far spent ; I do not know what it is, but the air is moved by a new trouble ; I hear in it footfalls as of advancing men ; presently some great event will supervene ; what it is I know not,—I will hasten to my house and lie down to sleep. News had come to the city : people were hearing of an advancing host who never struck but to slay, whose progress nothing could stop ; expectation had been excited : events might occur at any moment which would give new direction and momentum to human history and social energy. So it is spiritually ; so it is to-day, and every day. There are always men who hear the signs of the coming age, who observe tokens and omens, and who, putting things together, say—The summer draweth nigh, the harvest cannot be long in whitening ; we hear footfalls, and they are firm yet soft, and we interpret the method of their coming peacefully and hopefully :—he is coming whose right it is to reign : new thought is coming, new speech, new prayer, new life :—even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! Human history is not all past and all future : there is a middle quantity—a period of transition, wonder, expectation, uncertainty : we know not what the meaning of signs may be. Persons who are caught in the enthusiasm of that transitional period may be called heretics, unorthodox, unsound, peculiar, or eccentric. They cannot help it : the spirit of the enlarging and descending heavens is upon them ; to-morrow they will be like ancient history. So quickly does time come and go that the men who are heretics to-day are called effete and behind the times to-morrow. Here, however, in this particular instance we see the working of this side of Providence. Even in Jericho the name of Israel has been heard ;—even within the walled city fear of Israel has been created.

The part which Rahab played in the transaction is not easy of explanation. She was plainly guilty of treachery and falsehood. Two or three things should be clearly remembered about this circumstance. Nowhere is the treachery or falsehood of Rahab commended in all the holy books. It has been sometimes thought that the falsehood of Rahab had been made matter of divine eulogium. Nothing of the kind ! We cannot too persistently urge this truth upon the minds of inquirers. Nowhere,

from end to end of the history, is treachery commended or is lying approved. Still, what marvellous faith the woman had! Her faith is spoken of with almost veneration. There are moments in life when we do not seem to belong to present things or things past: we talk as in a dream; some greater self rises within us, and we speak in the spirit and power of prophecy. We have seen already that the woman was at least *two* women. She was indeed a sinner, but she was endowed with great spiritual enlightenment, and like another historical woman she "pondered" human events and divine providences in her heart. Why not from her some great speech? Does not God proceed constantly by this plan? It is the *unexpected* voice that charms us; it is from quarters unlooked for that messages arise that cheer the heart;—it is in Bethlehem that Christ is born; it is from Nazareth that some "good thing" cometh. Life is not a straight line: it is a perplexity and a complexity which does not admit of being disentangled. We cannot tell all we say, all we are; nor can we give account of ourselves at the bar of man. Great is the mystery of humanity!

An appalling doctrine, however, has been founded upon such circumstances as are represented in the history of Rahab. Of that doctrine we ought to beware. It has been said again and again that there are circumstances under which people may tell lies and yet preserve a good conscience,—nay, but may even be regarded as doing the will of Heaven. I reply: God never said so, Christ never said so, Christ's apostles never said so; we cannot find our authority in the Bible, and any authority outside of it is not worthy an instant's consideration. It is worth while, however, to dwell upon the matter one moment, because there is a tendency in the human mind to create casuistical difficulty. The mind will ask, What ought to be done under such and such circumstances? The mind enfeebles itself by creating such foolish and almost impossible and romantic riddles. We ought not to try our ingenuity too far in inventing possibilities under which it may be right to tell lies. Casuistry may be the beginning of falsehood. A man may so engage his mind in the proposition and solution of riddles as to do fatal injury to his conscience. What we have to consider is the

reality of life, the circumstances under which we ourselves are placed. There is romance enough in real life without inventing romances of a merely speculative kind. Now the teaching of the Bible is this: that there are no possible circumstances in life in which it is right to do wrong, in which it is right to tell lies, in which it is right to be double-minded and double-tongued. On the other hand, whilst laying down this doctrine with all clearness and definiteness and absolutely without reserve, we cannot overlook the fact that some men are placed in real circumstances of great peril and difficulty. When a man is told that if he will not act so and so, either religiously or politically, his daily bread will be taken from him; and when he is asked to give a definite answer upon the matter, and when he knows that his answer would dispossess him of house and business and bread, and when he knows that he is not the only sufferer, but that wife and children and infirm and aged dependents are all involved in the issue, that man's position is not an easy one; nor is it to be treated flippantly: we are rather to gather around him sympathetically, prayerfully, and acknowledge that he is now about to make the decision of a lifetime. Say to him—The crisis is upon you: you are at the stake, the head is down upon the block, the axe is gleaming in the air,—God help you! The man may say, Had I but myself to consider, I would drive off with defiance and scorn all who assail my integrity, but the innocent will suffer: the little children will be brought under the pinch of hunger, and the old folks who live upon my bounty will have no bed to lay their weariness upon;—my God! what shall I do? Personally I have no patience with the flippant people who fling easy answers to such men—people who have never had to suffer under that tremendous wheel themselves. What, then, is the message from the sanctuary upon such a crisis? It is still: Fear God, and have no other fear; if ye suffer for well-doing, great is your reward in heaven; whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto men more than unto God, judge ye; “herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men;” you threaten me: I cannot reply to you in your own terms; you have the upper hand of me now, and you intend to use your position

tyrannously, but they that be for me are more than all that can be against me;—I will not lie: I will, in God's name and fear and strength, tell the truth! So the sanctuary sends no mitigated message, sets up no question of casuistry; nor does it deliver that message alone: it says—Taking all history into account, and judging the future by the past, they that do so shall have a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous judge, himself will give. Meanwhile, the case is a difficult one—that is to say, it is a hard and trying one, but the other side is not the side I dare adopt. Given that I have personally to choose to be on the one side or the other—on the side of the tyrant or on the side of the oppressed—it is better to be on the side of the suffering than on the side of those who inflict the pain. The tyrant seems to have it all his own way to-day: he quaffs his wine, sits down to his banquet, and laughs the loud laugh of folly, and all things seem to be under the manipulation of his skilful fingers; but the candle of the hypocrite is blown out, the day of the wicked is short:—"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found,"—his roots were torn up and burned with unquenchable fire. We shall never be truly influential, and never have real peace of heart, until we put ourselves under the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth. We must not trifle with words; we must not stain them with forbidden colours; nor must we impart into them suggestive tones. Who, then, can live?

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### SELECTED NOTE.

Some commentators, following Josephus, and the Chaldæan interpreters have endeavoured to make Rahab only a keeper of a house of entertainment for travellers; translating thus:—"The house of a woman an innkeeper." But in the face of the parallel passages (*e.g.* Lev. xxi. 7; Jer. v. 7), this rendering cannot be maintained: and it is a gloss in striking contrast with the simple straightforwardness of the writer of this book of Joshua, and inconsistent with the Apostolic phraseology (Heb. xi. 31; James ii. 25). Rahab had hitherto been, probably, but a common type of heathen morality, but she was faithful to the dawning convictions of a nobler creed, and hence is commended by Christ's Apostles for that which was meritorious in her conduct.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always doing wonders. This is the day of thy miracles more abundantly than any other day in all the history of man. Thou hast not ceased to work thy wonders before us : we know them, and cannot mistake them, for they bear thy signature, and are radiant with thy presence. Thou doest mighty wonders in every land every day, according as the people are able to bear thy revelation. Thy wonders are spiritual : thou dost regenerate the heart that was dead ; thou dost give light to them that sit in darkness, and as for those who were afar off, they have been brought nigh by the work of thy Son. We rejoice, therefore, that we live in daily expectation that to-morrow shall be greater than this day, and in the assurance that thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. This is our joy, our inspiration, our daily comfort and rest. The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save ; thy hand is still mighty, and it is outstretched in sign of blessing. Lord Jesus, come quickly ! Pardon our impatience. We know it takes away from the faith of our prayer, but thou knowest the yearning of our heart, the desire of our spirit, that the east may dawn with a new light, that the whole sky may be filled with glory, and that the western lands may dwell in the blessing of thy glorious truth. Comfort us whilst we gather around thy word : give it meanings suitable to our immediate necessities ; show us what Jordan we must cross, what cities we must take, and how we must wait for the Lord, and wait patiently for him, and confidently hope for his salvation. Thus do thou give us rest, give us assurance of thy presence, care, power, and beneficence of purpose ; and as we have seen all this realised in thy Son our Saviour, may we have in him the assurance that all lands shall be God's, all time shall be sanctified, and earth itself shall be, as it were, part of heaven. Amen.

### Joshua iii.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning ; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over” (v. 1).

## THE NEW SYMBOL.

**I**N this first verse we have a vivid and beautiful illustration of the method of Providence. The people were called upon to undertake a great and historical task. It is comforting to note how gently and graciously they are led to their work. There is

no sign of precipitateness ; there is no urgency indicative of impatience. A great and historical city is about to be thrown down to the very foundations, and a new page of human history is about to be turned over ; yet the Lord leads up the people to a lodging-place. " God's mill grinds slowly." We are impatient because we are little and ignorant. We have not the completeness of character which means calmness of disposition. We must hasten, we must be noisy ; we do not understand how it is that the planets burn without fury or rush or sign of tumult : it is their very speed that brings them to rest. God will, therefore, have no demonstration of impatience in the carrying out of his purposes. Sometimes the Church rests, as if afflicted with indifference. We are too much urged in some circumstances ; we have mistaken the place and happy effect of tranquillity. It is quite true that some may misunderstand this and sink into indifference, but they turn God's water of life into poison, and probably nothing that wisdom could say would restrain them in their infatuation. We must speak to the wise and the thoughtful and understanding, and reflect that there are times when we do most by doing nothing, and that we advance with the greatest pace when we stand still. Happy indeed, and often timely, is the exhortation which pricks us forward ; but we are not saved by works. This human urgency is often a misapplication of divine teaching and purpose.

" And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host " (v. 2).

In this verse we learn that something came to pass after " three days." A wonderful place that period of time occupies in history ! There seems to be some spiritual magic in that number. The words ought not to be read hastily, as if they but indicated an accidental period of time. There are no such periods as can be described as merely accidental or fortuitous. The whole feast of time is measured out ; every man has his portion in due season ; every life is started with a foreknown and fore-regulated dowry of days. There is an appointed time to man upon the earth in the deepest sense of the terms—a little period within which he may labour—the longest life but a flying shuttle. " Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." One thing is certain, amid all the dubitation and change

of this earthly scene : that life at its best is brief, and that no man can calculate its duration with a view to fixing its termination. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," to call up his servants to account, to hold judgment in his household. The great principle of individualism has not been surrendered by the Bible ; still it is true that every one of us must give an account of himself to God. Whilst, therefore, we are not unwilling to have the individual sometimes merged in the social, whilst it may be pleasant and profitable and useful that the unit should realise its relation to the whole number, it should never be forgotten that individuality is to be the law of responsibility and the law of judgment. We cannot rub ourselves out as individuals, or so merge ourselves into the common life as to cease to have a personal pulse and a personal destiny. The "three days" are passed with some of us : we ought now to be at work ; the rest was only for three days,—the work is of an immeasurable duration. Do not expend the rest thoughtlessly or unworthily, but make it a time of recuital of strength, so that youth may be renewed and every faculty may be reinvigorated.

In the third verse we find a command given :—

"And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it."

We must live by command. Even gentleness must often take upon itself the imperative tone. Whether the commandments be ten, or one, or ten thousand, there is the great principle that we are moving religiously in obedience to command. If we were moving in obedience to instinct, our movement would be irregular, and without pith or certainty ; but we are soldiers, we are under military discipline, we call our Saviour our captain, and we ask that we may fall into rank and order, and move together on many occasions, to show how individuality may become socialism, and yet how socialism does not impair the integrity and the responsibility of the individual soldier. What is to be seen now according to the command of the officers ? In what direction are the people to look ? We know how they have been looking these many years gone, and now the object of vision is changed in the third verse. It is most important and instructive to note all points of departure ; to see exactly where things become new in



their relations, though not in their substance and highest purpose. Up to this time we, as readers of the Holy Book, have been looking for the cloud. When we wished to know whether it was time to move, we looked for the rising of the cloud, and for its hovering; at night we looked for a pillar of fire that divided the sovereignty of the darkness. Has the cloud gone? Yes. Is the fire put out? Not in the sense of extinction, but in the sense of withdrawal. Thus we close the pages of history and thus we open the pages of prophecy. It seems as if, in our poor blind reading, we were always coming to some new place. God has come variously into the human movement, and touched in a thousand different ways the springs of thought and the fountains of life. Now the people are to look for the ark of the covenant. The cloud is taken up, the fire is withdrawn, the great cloud of the wilderness—so much like a spectre or a spirit—is no more to be looked for; the fire that burned like judgment against Egypt, the eye that smote off the iron wheels from the chariots of the oppressor, the fire that accommodated itself to the frailty of the bush,—these are no longer amongst us in the outworking of human history. What has taken their place? The Covenant, the written Book. We are coming thus nearer to Incarnation. This is the method of Providence—the Cloud, the Book, the Man, the Holy Ghost! The very development of Providence is a sublime argument in support of the history which records it. Fix the mind attentively upon this evolution, and see in it shape, meaning, beneficent purpose. First, nature will contribute her symbolism: the cloud, the fire, will be beautiful images of the mysterious, the energetic, the uncontrollable, the eternal; the Lord will build himself a house of cloud, the Lord will show that the universe is set upon pillars of flame. It is enough: it is adapted to the wilderness; such beauty will make us forget that we are in a desert;—let us steadily follow the cloud. But the Lord interferes with a monotony which might become oppressive. He will have a scroll written—a holy book—a statement that can be read, published, translated into every language,—a companion of every fireside, and a chart for every sea. Then will come the Man of whom the writing speaks; he will say: I am here that the Scriptures may be fulfilled; this is the meaning of the ark, this the meaning of the law hidden in it, this is the

meaning of the lid which set forth the divine conception of mercy—"Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Will he abide? No:—"It is expedient for you that I go away,"—but I will send the Paraclete, the Comforter—that living Cloud, that living Fire; and he shall abide with you for ever; being immeasurable, he can never become wearisome; being infinite, there can be in him no monotony; he will settle upon every man according to that man's psychology, and out of the individuality of man he will write all the meaning of God's love: the writing shall be manifold in colour and in shape, but the meaning shall be one. Thus let us always mark points of departure, critical junctures; and not hasten through history as if it were an unmappped desert—a sea without a shore.

The religious element was to prevail in that great military plan. We do not read altogether about soldiership, schemes and plans and maps, which indicate the warrior's genius. The controversy is religious; at the head of it goes the Covenant. Let us see to it that we take no part in any history that is not headed by the Book of God. Nothing is worth fighting for that is not symbolised by that book, and it will comfort us in days and nights of stress and hard weather to know that wherever we are, we have come up to that position on account of the leadership of the book. This is what we want: more Bible—the Bible in the people's tongue, the Bible open to every old man and every little child; we want to speak of Bible things in Bible terms; we require now to follow the Covenant. If the Book of God is not at the head of the procession in which we are moving, the procession is moving into darkness, disaster, and humiliation.

A space was to be between the marching host and the advancing ark. For what purpose? That every man in the procession might know his relation to the holy ark:—

"Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go" (v. 4).

There was to be order even in this arrangement. God has always been consulting the necessities of his believers and followers and children. He has fixed positions of every kind so

as to suit the army he has been leading. It is not enough that a few men at the head of the host should see the Covenant; it was needful that all the host should see the sacred symbol. So it should ever be. The poorest soul born into the world, without a single advantage of a social kind, should not be left without sight of the ark. Every man must look for himself. It is not enough to be looking where the next man is going to, and to be following him. Here the great principle of individuality again asserts itself. Every wounded man must give his own attention to the uplifted serpent,—every man must read the Bible for himself. And yet here comes the sublime possibility that every man may be looking in the same direction and the host, therefore, moving like an undivided and indissoluble phalanx. If the individual is right, the host will be right. You cannot deal with the host as a whole number; you must deal with the individual. When individuals are right nations cannot be wrong.

The reason given for this arrangement and this observance of the covenant is—

“. . . for ye have not passed this way heretofore” (v. 4).

This passage is often misunderstood, and therefore misapplied. It cannot simply mean, This is an unfamiliar path; or, This is new ground; or, This is a position which you have never occupied before; for then the same observation would apply to the whole course which the Israelites had been pursuing for many years. This is not a provision against the dangers that may arise from unfamiliar scenes. We have here indicated a new point of history. “Ye have not passed this way heretofore” means: Up to this time you have had cloud by day and fire by night; now there will be no cloud, there will be no fire; now you pass as obedient to a written and treasured Word; you have now become a great Bible school, a great army following a written inspiration. A great light shines upon the instruction now. Up to this time we have felt the words which conclude the fourth verse to be but a commonplace, which might have been applied to the history of Israel any time during almost half a century before; but now we see that a new method of travelling is adopted—a new object of vision is let down from heaven; and although the method of revelation may change,

nothing ever changes the Bible itself in the substance of its meaning. A revised version is not a new revelation. A new Bible is not a new testimony. It is because of the scholarship which has been lavished upon it a more sure word of prophecy, but the prophecy itself abideth for ever. What can we understand of this Covenant in the way in which it is too often read? Some men are calling for the restoration of theological systems, and others are calling for obedience to scientific discovery and law; without saying one word of deprecation in reference to either of the parties, we may again and again put in a word for Bible reading, Bible study; for giving the Bible an opportunity of speaking continuously, and thus argumentatively and persuasively. He would not be unjust to his age who charged it as a Bible-neglecting age. The Church itself does not always read the Bible aright. The Bible is read in texts. He would not be too bold a man who affirmed that isolated texts had done more to hinder the progress of truth than any assault that was ever made upon Christianity from the outside. Men should humble themselves in crying penitence before God because they have torn the seamless robe and given it away in rags. The Bible is one; the Bible is a stupendous whole. Could we hear its cry it would be, Read me; read me all; read me through in every page, line, word, and syllable. O earth, earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord! What is at the head of the armies of the day? What new programmes! what exciting propositions! what criminal promises! The Christian should insist that the Church at least should follow no leadership but the ark of the eternal testimony. Every college should rise up in the morning to do one thing—read the Bible. Every congress and conference should meet to do one thing—read the Bible. Every congregation should come together for one purpose—to read the Bible. This would absorb all the little rods of necromancers and wonder-workers, and would end in such practical mediums of expression as would suit the new life; and though many mistakes of an external and temporary kind might be made, the outcome would be as the flowing of the river of God. How can the Bible be read alone? This inquiry points to a sophism which is working great mischief in the Christian Church. A man will say, in some unworthy mood of sullenness or resentment, that he

will remain at home and read his Bible. He may remain at home, but he cannot read his Bible in that temper. Compelled to remain at home by stress of circumstances, by infirmity, by ill-health in himself or in others, he may read the Bible alone, and God will treat him as if he were the whole assembly of the blessed, withholding nothing from his loving attention and gentle touch. But there is a public reading of the Book—a common reading. Noble is the term—the Book of Common Prayer. That phrase is full of sacred import. There is common prayer, there is common reading, there is a public emphasis, there is a contagion of sympathy; there is given to the united perusal of the Bible answers which cannot be given to any solitary recluse who shuts himself away from the Church as if the Church were unworthy of his presence. Would we have the world cleansed, disinfected of all evil literature? Let the Bible be read interestingly, lovingly, with sympathy and with delight. Would we have great thoughts, noble purposes, sublime expectations which put out the little trials of the day? We must let the word of Christ dwell in us richly—an answer to every temptation, a light regularly as the night descends, a spring of water in a thirsty land. Stand up for the Bible! Do not stand up for it without first reading it and becoming imbued with its spirit. Defend the Bible in the spirit of the Bible, which is a spirit of sovereign power and redeeming love. Punctuate your reading with your tears, and then when you preach even the terror of the law, it will be to persuade men—fire used, not to burn but to enlighten, not to destroy but to cheer. My hope for the future of history is in the continuous, connected, and massive study of the Holy Scriptures.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou art round about us and within us, and thy nearness is an encouragement and a joy. Surely it is not wholly a judgment, a piercing and destructive criticism, but a help, a comfort, a sustenance infinite. So will we regard it in Jesus Christ thy Son our Saviour. We will not be afraid of thee: God is love; we will draw near unto thee, yea, with boldness we will come to the throne of grace, not that we may plead our righteousness, but that we may obtain thy mercy and grace to help in every time of need. We would live the wise life; we would that ours might be the life that is rooted in God, by consent as well as by necessity. We are in God, all things are embraced by thine infinity—all evil, all hell, all good, all heaven—the Lord reigneth. But we do not want it so wholly; we want to be in God by consent; we would fix our love upon God, and our faith and our hope should trim its daily lamp at the flame of thy glory. Thus would we live and move and have our being in God, returning to him, going out from him to speak his word, and coming again to him to hear his word that we may speak it still more simply and gladly. We have heard thy word, and we know it: it is no stranger's voice that speaks to us therein; we know the music. Imitators there can be none; we know the music of thy grace and the tunefulness of thy comfort. We cannot be deceived; for there is no voice like the eternal. May we hear it, receive it, and answer it with all loving obedience; then shall our joy be full, and our day shall have no night. Thou hast sent us into a mysterious life. Sometimes, by reason of our ignorance, it looks nothing: it is a mere trifle, a spasm, a flutter for one little moment, followed by eternal silence; but this is the fool's reasoning: whilst we look upon our life and muse upon it and study the divine purpose which lies under it, how solemn is life, how grand; how majestic in mystery; how glorious in possibility! Thou dost tear our hearts that our hearts may know themselves. When thou dost tantalise us it is that we may be taught the mystery of prayer; when thou dost disappoint us, it is not to mock us but to show us that things are larger than we thought—more mysterious, more awful. May we no longer live as those who have no centre, no altar, no God; but live the deep life and the true, feeding ourselves upon the bread sent down from heaven, lost in wonder, love, and praise as we gaze upon the truth of God; and thus may our life, being divinely nourished, express itself in human beneficence: may we go about doing good, knocking at doors that are shut upon us, that in opening them we may find an opportunity of preaching Christ and exemplifying the light of heaven. Pity us in our distresses—so acute, so many, so difficult to bear; save us from looking at those who seem to have no distresses, lest our faith be swallowed up in despair: may

we not look upon such, may we turn our eyes to the hills whence cometh our help; show us that every heart knoweth its own bitterness, that there may be no mourning or complaining against the supposed partiality of heaven. Thou dost give every day a night, every summer a winter, every life a burden to carry; thou hast thrown a shadow upon the sunniest way. Help us to know that these things are of God, and are under God's control, being meant in love, and at last will be shown to be parts of a divine and beneficent purpose. Look upon us according to our need: it is a great necessity, but thy fulness is more than our hunger, the riches of God are unsearchable, the river of God is full of water. We bless thee for *all* we have seen of thy hand: we still commit ourselves wholly to its protection and guidance; they win who fight under thy banner, thou Saviour-God; they that be for us are more than all that can be against us, and when thou dost press upon the enemy with the weight of thine eternity, behold he is crushed and cannot rise. Follow us about all the day as if thou hadst no other concern. We are so foolish, so unutterably inexperienced in all the deepest mysteries and ways of life: our record every eventide is full of crossing and blundering; still have patience with us, for by thy grace we will to-morrow do better. Pity the broken heart; give enlargement of thought and brightening of hope to the soul that repents and longs to do thy will more obediently and perfectly; establish, strengthen, settle every good word, thought, and purpose; and as for the counsel of the wicked one, turn it upside down, and by pouring darkness of sudden night upon him may he never be able to find his way again. The Lord pardon our sin. Come over our guilt as over a mountain, and by the touch of the mystery of the Cross may that mountain be dissolved and the union between God and the soul be for ever completed. Send upon us the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter; may he abide with us for ever; teach us with infinite patience, and sustain us with tenderest, sweetest solaces. Amen.

### Joshua iii.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, this day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (v. 7).

### UP TO THE BRINK.

"THIS DAY." It is pleasant to come upon the definite time. We are to be so blessed "to-morrow," but to-morrow never yet came to any human life: it is always the next day; no man has seen it; its shape no man can tell, its messages no man has heard;—it is the unborn time. In the instance before us we have the day and the blessing assigned to it, so that, as it were, the soul leaps into the immediate heaven, saying, Behold, that heaven is here and now! There are days of enlargement,

intellectual and spiritual and moral, in human life,—days that dawn upon the mind like an infinite summer; days in which we see the meaning of words, the relation of scattered things, the unity of what we supposed was but chaos. These are days of liberty; there falls from us, almost consciously and audibly, manacles and fetters that bound us in humiliating slavery, and we spring into great enlargement and are conscious of divine communion. Call these days birthdays! When were you born? is a limited question. Any birthday of the flesh is no birthday; it but gives a man a *chance* to be born. He is not born who is not conscious of the advent within him, bringing with it sense of responsibility and willingness to submit to sacrifice, and the hope that no sacrifice can kill him for more than three days. We may pray for the day of enlargement and ennoblement, but the best way of praying for that day is to work for it. If we work well to-day we may get the enlargement to-morrow. Work *is* prayer: hence the grand Lutheran motto—“to labour is to pray.”

“This day will I begin to magnify thee.” We can almost see the beginning of the magnifying of some lives. Although things do grow very subtly and all but invisibly, and often altogether invisibly as to process, yet we sometimes feel as if we saw the child become a man. It was in the darkness we saw it—the darkness of a trouble that seemed to come too soon. The boy was playing, laughing loudly, running merrily round the little circles of opening life,—a boy all laughter; and a great distress fell upon him, new responsibilities were instituted, he began to see the situation, and as it came upon him in great volumes of darkness, see how he stood up in a new stature and a new strength, and put out his arm as if he might tackle, with valour and hopefulness, the hardest task of time. There are times when we are magnified by the possession of conscious intellectual strength. At these times we can do anything. We hover above the world, and descend upon it, and rise again, and touch it with more than adequate strength, and retire from it in ease and majesty, and return with redoubled energy. So then, labour is rest, and endurance is the counterpart of heroism. Woe unto that life that is unconscious of being magnified, that does not go



in the upward direction. Are there not men who are no larger to-day, in mind, purpose, and outlook, than they were five-and-twenty years ago? They have had no dream, no vision; they have heard nothing unusual; they have not seen heaven opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. How dull that life, if not criminal! how monotonous, if not guilty!—pitiful everywhere—in the common school pitiful—but how infinitely more pitiful in the Christian Church than anywhere else! No burning bush, no startling voice, no conscious call to nobler service, no seizure of inheritances infinite in wealth; still the old life, the old monotony, repeating the old phrases and not knowing their meaning. All true magnifying, however, is from God. A man cannot make himself really great:—this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. But this we can do: we can be prepared for larger magnitude of personality and influence; we can be found waiting, watching, looking; we can use the one talent as if it were a thousand, and be as industrious about the little plot of ground as if it were an estate of countless acres. Whom does God magnify? The humble, the contrite, the broken-hearted, the faithful, the industrious. Does he grant the magnifying all at once? Not according to the observation of the text. He begins to magnify; he shows a new aspect of the mind: persons are surprised at a new development of power, a new tone in the voice, a new expression in the attitude; they say, something has occurred here—what is it? and by the end it will be discovered whether the magnifying is an inflation or a divine call and investiture.

Wonderful, too, is the way in which the word of chastening mingles with the word of encouragement:—"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee"—not more so. Moses is not dishonoured or thrown into any secondary place: he will abide until he comes whose right it is to reign. So Joshua must still peruse the life of Moses, look upon himself as a continuation of a grand beginning. He does not detach himself from his official ancestry and found a house of his own: he is but a golden link in a golden chain; and because we are but links none must magnify himself unduly, or suppose that he will start a new humanity in his vain and frail personality. And again, and

still more subtly, does the Lord show that all his manifestations in and through his officers are meant to reveal his own glory. Human greatness is a revelation of God's presence. Moses is not great except as God is with him; Joshua would be a little and unknown name if God did not burn in it and cause it to radiate throughout the whole circumference of immediate history: the Church is not great except for the purpose of showing that the great God is within her walls. We are to look through Moses to Jehovah; through Joshua to the great, all-inspiring, all-construing God; and through the Church, with all its ministries and instrumentalities, its white lights and glorious stars and great inheritances, to the all-giving God. From him is every donation. There is but one donor: we are the instruments in his hands. Do not look at Moses, do not look at Joshua, do not look at the institutions of the Church, except as mediums through which we may see the spiritual glory of the eternal God.

What was Joshua to do? You find the answer in the eighth verse:—

“And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.”

Go up “to the brink,”—that is the point we shrink from. Many will stay by the meadows, and under the shadowing trees, and in the gardens of flowers, but they will risk nothing. Jordan is pouring down from the north: it is the time of the swelling of the waters,—what are the priests to do?—To go up as if there were no waters, as if the bed of Jordan were dry:—go up to the brink, let your very feet touch the water, and then—stand still! This is difficult, and is not to be lightly esteemed by any who would hurriedly read the lines of providence and come to superficial conclusions regarding the mystery of life. This is divine boldness; this is religious prudence. We are to go up to every Jordan as if it had no existence. Everything will one day be under spiritual direction. All things shall obey the spiritual voice in the day of true glory. The day of miracles has only gone for a moment: it will return when faith returns:—if ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say to this

mountain, Be ye cast into the depths of the sea,—and it would fly from you like a thing affrighted. This is the great possibility, the daily and continual miracle of faith. We are content with small things; we are shut out by a door: we return saying, The door was shut,—as if any door ever made by finite skill and strength could stand against the sovereign will of the man who is one with God. We complain that there is danger coming down upon us—a great, rushing, flying, lightning train,—as if we could not split it in two and bury it by a word if we were in right relations to the Infinite. We are the children of fear; we say, There is a lion in the way,—as if the very glance of faith could not destroy it in every limb. To speak so is to speak to the ear of timidity that which is foolish and even absurd, but the Bible means this or it means nothing. Believe me, all things are or shall be under spiritual control: we shall command the beasts of the field to come to us; we shall call the fish of the sea to the shore or to the boat when we want them: we shall be like the Lord. It is in this direction we must grow; nor can we grow to it in one day, or perhaps in any measurable period of time; it is enough, meanwhile, to have the sublime ideal and the confident hope, and to be moving quietly in that direction. We are not called unto the spirit of bondage and fear, but unto the spirit of liberty and power and a sound mind.

What effect had this interview upon Joshua? Was he so magnified as to forget himself? You have the answer in the ninth verse:—

“And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God.”

So he is “but minister.” He does not attempt any crude originality. He will simply repeat what he has heard, but he will repeat it as a believer. The believer has an emphasis incommunicable to the hypocrite. There is about truth something that endures so well, that stands all friction so strongly, that responds to all necessity so abundantly, that it cannot long be counterfeited: there are masks sold for pence which seem to reproduce it with skill, but the masks become weather-stained, their very skin peels off, and their expression is lost.

Truth stands for ever, night and day, the same when the morsels of ice strike it in the face, or the sun blesses it with mid-day glory. Joshua would but repeat what he had heard. So must every preacher simply read the Bible. If he does not quote texts he must speak biblically—that is, in the spirit of the Bible; and he must never wander one inch from the Book: it is his shield and buckler; it is a strong tower to which he may continually resort; it is his authority and warrant.

Joshua thus pledges God to what he is about to say. We must not hesitate to risk the divine name. Joshua said:—

“Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and Gergashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites” (v. 10).

Joshua would make the march a religious one. The Christian Church ought to make every department of life a department of itself.

“Let us have no suggestion of possible divine help under such and such circumstances,”—that is the language of timidity, and timidity is sin in all such relations as are indicated by this history. We do not simply hope that God will be with us, or trust that God may in due time appear for us, or express the dubious desire that all things may turn out better than we might have ventured to expect. That is not religious talk, or if it is talk it is without soul, without emphasis. Risk the divine name,—that is to say, pledge it. This was the strength of the old prophets. If such and such things do not befall thee, then God hath not spoken by my mouth; “thus saith the Lord.” The prophets thus put God in the foreground, and made him true or false; they pledged his name: with reverent familiarity they put his signature upon every great promise and every grand prediction; they exposed God to criticism, so much so that the mocker availed himself of the opportunity and said, Ha, ha, where is now thy God? he called God his father, let him save him, if he will have him;—and the fool wagged his head, and the sneerer laughed over his own gibe. We have omitted the divine name from our speech; we have risked nothing; we have but contributed one more to the

endless number of suggestions made for the benefit and progress of the world. Let the good man not hesitate to say to the good-doer—God shall be with thee, and deliver thee in six troubles and in seven; and when the day is as the night and the night is sevenfold in blackness, his hand shall find thee and his counsel shall be thy strength. These are the great speeches,—not words that mothers might speak to children or fathers might whisper to sons, but the great speeches that pledge eternity, which, if not carried out, would sweep all the stars from heaven and make the universe an empty temple. To what are we now pledging God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost? it is possible whilst professing a religious faith to ignore it in its practical applications.

A very beautiful expression occurs in the twelfth verse :—

“Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.”

It was typical that the whole people were interested in this movement. What was typical then ought to be typical now. We want “out of every tribe a man.” Into how many tribes are we divided? We want the rich man’s representative; we do not want his gold only, but himself—his life, as pledged in some representative name. The poor man’s delegate, where is he? Let him stand up in his poor clothing, in his weather-worn and travelled-stained weakness, and say with bold timidity—Behold, I am here and ready to serve. And the young men’s tribe, where is the David sent by that multitudinous host as pledge and hostage? Let him stand up,—sunny-faced, bright-eyed, full of strength and hope, and it may be with a dash of imprudence in his chivalrous nature; and let him say—Behold, I am here in the city of God, and if there be stones to carry, or foes to fight, make what use you can of me. “Of every tribe a man,”—not that the whole tribe is to be satisfied with the one man, but the one man is to represent the unity and consecration of the tribe. Who then will be baptised for the dead? Who will come and take the place occupied by the rich deceased leader? Who will come forward and say—Poverty is not ashamed of God or Christ or the Bible, and it will do what its two little weak hands can do, and do it with hearty good-will,

and the Cross itself shall not deter it in its passion and enthusiasm? "Of every tribe a man." That must be the motto of the Church; that must be the motto of the family,—not any wicked theory of substitution or proxy, but the sublime theory of representative and symbolic service.

What was to come to pass when the whole instruction had been obeyed?

"And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap" (v. 13).

Mark the period: "As soon as the soles of the feet of the priests . . . shall rest in the waters of Jordan." The priests should go forward. We cannot have the priests—men of bright mind, daring courage, simple faith—lagging behind, or their practice will contradict their preaching. The preachers must be at the front, wherever there is danger challenging courage, wherever there is risk defying confidence. The preachers should be the great believers: they should be all faith. Whoever else is wanting, the Bible-teacher should be present; wherever there is peril, difficulty, hardship, the preacher should subscribe more than any other man in the whole Church. It is an infinite blasphemy for the preacher to write his name second on the list of endurance or in the records of hardship and sacrifice. There is no irony bitterer or guiltier than that the priests should send the people first to test the promises of God. He is not a priest who is anywhere behind. Listen not to his plea: he is a hireling and carcth not for the sheep. When Christians of the highest type advance the rest will follow. What I have thus said must, of course, be regarded as a matter of proportion. The widow gave more than all the rich men, though she gave nothing in comparison. Let no man attempt to escape on arithmetical grounds, setting so much on the one side and so much on the other. There is no such law. How hateful is the cant which says: I am waiting to see what other people will do. What right have you to wait? How long are you going to wait? On what authority are you about to wait? To wait!—why that is to usurp the prerogative of God! as if you had one moment of

time in which you could wait or could use! and by what right does any man, in the pulpit or out of it, stand up to say that he is waiting to see what other people will do? He is not bound by what they do; he is not the custodian of their consciences; he has nothing whatever to do in relation to them: he must obey the voice of God in the voice of conscience. When those—let it be repeated—who are Christians of the highest type are found at the front, others will follow. There is a contagion about example, there is a subtle influence about high courage. Without saying a word to the coward, you may shame him into action by the magnanimity of your own bravery. So then, this is the order of the divine movement: God calling the leading man; the leading man expressing the divine will to others; every tribe contributing its man, so that in symbol the whole tribe is pledged to the holy march. Are the priests going at the head, the preachers answering their own prayers, responding to their own challenges, living the results of their own appeals? And if any lag behind, who dare pray that God may have any pity upon them? There is a lagging behind which cannot be helped, but let us be careful how we claim its exemption from criticism: that must be left to the judgment of God. Some are “faint, yet pursuing;” some would go fast, but they cannot; in some instances “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;” where such is found to be the case, then God’s pity is hardly large enough for such frailty: God will “have compassion, making a difference.” But how can he waste compassion upon any truly Christian man who for a moment wavers when he ought to be at the head of the great procession, with nothing in front of him but Jordan, and Jordan not in the subsidence of its flow, but in the very anger and pride and scorn of its strength?

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we will think now of thy redemption wrought out for us in Christ Jesus thy Son, and for the moment we will not be cast down but lifted up as upon a great wave of gladness. We have been told that we are polluted and unholy, until the story has thrown us into despair: we know it to be true; but now we would turn our eyes unto the Cross set up for sinners, the mystery of eternity, the enigma of time: the angels cannot understand it, we are unable to comprehend all the wonders of its love and pity, but our hearts are glad whilst they gaze upon it: they see beyond the pain and the sorrow and the darkness, they behold great lights, opening heavens, expanding and assured liberties, and they are glad with a great joy. Sorrow endureth for a night; joy cometh in the morning. The night cannot be so long as the day. The night of sin is not thine; the bow of peace is thine, and high noon, all the firmament glowing with light-seeds, and is some faint type of thine infinite glory. The night shall be lost; it shall never come again; that cloud shall be broken up and dissolved and for ever forgotten. But the light of thy countenance shall be heaven, the glory of thy presence shall make the whole home of the saints. We will therefore be glad and rejoice, and find in thine house a place of banqueting and feasting, so that the soul may be made fat with the promises of God and our life be made strong by divine encouragement. We have come from many places into one house: is not this a hint of what shall be in the great future of promise and prediction? Shall we not come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sit down in our father's house? Shall not all alienations be forgotten, and all differences be absorbed, and all hearts be united in one common and everlasting loyalty? This is our prospect in Christ Jesus; to this end he came and taught and suffered and died and rose again; nor can he rest whilst one shadow of sin rests on the fair universe: behold, he is pledged to receive unto himself the very ends of the earth: all the heathen shall be his, all kings shall bow down before him, and gold and incense bring. May we enter into the spirit of this joy; may we feel that the slavery of the past is forgiven, forgotten, and that a great future of light and growth and liberty challenges and encourages the soul. Wherever a burden is too heavy for the strength, Lord, increase the power of endurance; wherever the tears cannot be explained, do thou speak a message to the heart in secret; wherever the perplexity is thick and defiant, persisting in its stubbornness notwithstanding all that human skill can do, come from thy sanctuary and help the perplexed; wherever sin is a spectre in the air, a touch in the darkness, a flash of fire in the conscience, show thy Cross, thou Saviour of the world, and save the creation of God. Thus come to us every one now and



at all times, and thy coming shall be like the dawning of the day, and like the opening of a great door which leads us into home and peace and plentifulness. Amen.

#### Joshua iv.

1. And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying,
2. Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man.
3. And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night.

#### MEMORIAL STONES.

**T**HUS a memorial was to be set up, commemorating the power and goodness of God. The way of life should be full of such cairns. But is it not early in the history to be setting up stones of memory? The battle has not begun. Israel did not march forth to cross a river but to overthrow a city well-walled and hoary with antiquity. Is it not, then, rather early in the day to be building altars and to be setting up signs of triumph? It is in putting such questions as these that we show the littleness of our faith. In all great spiritual controversy the beginning is the end. The whole history is in one sentence. The entire history of the human race is in the first few chapters of Genesis; all the rest has been translation, variation, rearrangement of particles and individualities and colours; but the soul of the history is all there. With God the end and the beginning are one. To have crossed Jordan is to have torn down all the Jerichos that opposed us. One step is the pledge of another. The first miracle is the pledge of the last. He who turns water into wine at the beginning will raise himself from the dead at the end. The miracles are one. One miracle carries with it all the host of wonders. So it is in all the departments of properly-regulated and disciplined life. It is so in any properly-graduated system of education. He who has conquered one book has conquered all books. The reason why men do not conquer the third book is that they have not conquered the first. No student can set himself heart and soul to the mastery of the First Book of Euclid without therein and thereby mastering the next and the next, until the very end. There must be no paltering, no half

and half work, no touching the labour with reluctant and dainty fingers, but a real tussle, a tremendous wrestling, at the first. Jordan passed, Jericho shall totter and fall. Why is the Church so hesitant and uncertain in its movement? Perhaps because it does nothing firmly and completely; it may not have mastered its first principles; it may have considered itself altogether too advanced in life to trouble itself with elementary theologies and considerations, but so considering it will never take any Jericho. The place of evil will have faces at every window smiling upon its furious feebleness. The devil will open his idol-temples shoulder by shoulder with any cathedral or minster we can build; he says—These people did not perform the first miracle: they never got through Jordan; they are still splashing in the waters that lave the brink of the channel; they are not complete students, they are not well-equipped thinkers; they have nothing in their hearts they are quite sure about; they are changing all the time,—now it is a great argument which none can comprehend, now it is a radiant cloud on which no man can satisfy his hunger, now it is an elaborate and pompous programme without a beginning and without an end and without any reason for its existence at all;—these people will never fight me; if they could but get hold of one thing and be perfectly certain of that my days would be numbered, but they have nothing in the possession of certitude; they call themselves “honest doubters” and “patient inquirers,” and whilst they are doubting and inquiring I am digging hell miles deeper. Could we but really read one book of the Bible, could we but hold one Gospel in our hearts, could we but get hold of something and say, This one thing I have and know and use,—all the rest would come in happy sequence. So it was not too early to set up a cairn on the one side of the bank and on the other side of the bank. We must have memorials in life. If we do not set up stony memorials we shall still leave footprints. Every man has his history, and every man has had his opportunity and has left behind him a record as to its use or abuse. Blessed is the life that is full of memorial stones! It ought never to be far back to the last one; and if whilst we are building the next one the enemy should suddenly come down upon us in some black suggestion, in some terrific temptation, we should flee back to the memorial last put up, and, under the

shadow of that Ebenezer, calmly await the future. Why this unbuilt life? Why this life without any pillar of stone or temple behind it? What wonder if in turning round and seeing nothing a great fear should seize us, and we should suppose that we had been given over to the enemy of souls? There should hardly be one step between one memorial stone and another, so that we may instantly retire for a moment to recruit our strength and renew our hope and confidence in God. How mean are some lives in this matter of erecting no memorial; no diary is kept, no journal is posted up, no entry written, it may be in a trembling hand, but yet setting forth the formula: The true God was with me to-day; he helped me to cross the river, he enabled me to run through a troop and to leap over a wall; and though I can scarcely read the words yet I will inscribe them every one and come back to them as to a Bible and to a revelation. Men who live in times of haste say they have no leisure for such enterings. The enterings need not be literal: we need not be talking about material paper and ink, but about the tablets of the heart, the records of the memory, always having a vivid recollection of the last deliverance, the last vision, the last mighty prayer, the last sublime victory. There is no other way in which to make life rich and thoughtful. When accused, we should be able to flee back to God's last record; when tempted to disbelieve him, we should go back to the last fact. Our life should not be a mysterious argument, in the processes of which we may be vexed and troubled by subtler intellects than our own: life should be its own fact, its own confirmation of spiritual truths, its own sanctuary, its own refuge. Have the witness in yourselves. Do not wait for posterity to build the cairns; build your own *mémoriaux*. Posterity will come and read them, but we might build our own altars, set up our own standards, and furl our own banners, and accept the responsibility, as we have received the reward, of our own religion. So building we should crowd out all unworthy houses. We should want every inch of land. The whole earth would be filled with the divine presence and glory. Every room in the house would be a church; every window in the dwelling would look towards the Jerusalem that is above; every chair would be an altar;—the whole dwelling would burn with unconsuming fire. We cannot, then, begin too soon. The

moment the first conviction is wrought in the mind, build a stone memorial; the moment you are conscious of having taken the first real step in advance, build; vow never to retire behind that building, for it begins your best history, it points towards your broadest, brightest future.

We have spoken of posterity. The cairn was to be a sign among the Israelites:—

“That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever” (vv. 6, 7)

Blessed indeed is he to whom such inquiries are put; they create for him a splendid opportunity of usefulness. What was the answer to be?—argumentative, controversial, suggestive? Was it to be a guess attached to a riddle very profound and difficult? Nothing of the kind: it was to be a recital of history:—This was done; on such and such a day this was accomplished. Are there questions and facts in our lives? Do we live in a troubled cloud, or in a house which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God? When children ask you questions about grey hairs, and wrinkles in the face, and sighs that have no words, and smiles too bright to be carved upon the radiant face by the hands of hypocrisy,—when they ask you about kneeling at the altar, speaking into the vacant air, and uttering words to an unseen and invisible Presence,—when they interrogate you about your great psalms and hymns and anthem-bursts of thankfulness, what is your reply to these? Do not be ashamed of the history. Keep steadily along the line of fact. Say what happened to *you*, and magnify God in the hearing of the inquirer. This every man can do. He may not be able to have a philosophy of history conceived and evolved by his own genius, but every man must know his own story, and be able to speak about his own experience, and to explain in some degree his indebtedness to the infinite power and goodness of God. Thus we shall have a building Church, a speaking Church, an explaining Church,—every man

keeping upon the rock of his own experience, and uttering the music of his own consciousness, and staggering the inquirer whose flippancy had supposed it had overflowed the mysteries of spiritual communion. More personality of reference, a deeper individuality of experience, perfectly consistent with the most beautiful modesty, is what we want in the affirmation of great truths and the illustration of great precepts. The children would ask, "What mean ye by these stones?" The stones were so shaped that they could not have put themselves into their positions. Walking along the common road we have stones enough, the desert is full of stones; nobody thinks of asking about the quality of the stones, who put them there, or what is meant by their being there; they are dumb stones, stones without sermons; they are stones astray; they are not in line, they are without related shape and colour; so they are passed by without heed on the part of the traveller. But when stones have actually taken shape, when one stone is upon another, and stone is added to stone until a wall is built, and when the wall turns the angle and becomes another wall on the other side, and again reverts and so completes the square, people know that the stones could not have put themselves in that relation. Here questioning becomes intelligent; here questioning may become necessary to every man who would master somewhat of human history and the significance of the great tragedy of human life. Is it so with us? Are the stones which we might have used still lying about the road, without being put together, related, or built up into any intelligible and useful shape?—stones enough, building material enough, but all lying without plan—a hideous chaos. Who would ask questions about such shapelessness, except as suggestive of amazement that men could have been so indolent, or unwise, or so insane? The very life-building should be so well put together that men ought and must ask questions about it, saying thus: What a character that is; what a noble life; what copious accommodation for all kinds of poverty, weakness, distress, friendlessness! what a summer outlook—how large, and how truly built for hospitality rather than for selfishness! Who built that house? Who owns it? What is the meaning of that life-edifice? It is possible, on the other hand, so to live that no man will ever ask a question

about us,—so commonplace, so poor, so wanting in all the higher suggestiveness, so selfish, isolated, and so utterly destitute of sweet philanthropies, that men pass us by as they might pass by ruins which have not even the advantage of antiquity. How shall it be with us? Blessed are they whose lives suggest questions!—more blessed still they whose explanations magnify the glory of God!

History should be matter of interest to all men, and in all history we should be able to identify Providence with the past and to speak of the wonders of the days of old. Here there ought to be no mystery and no doubt. The wonders of redemption may lie far from our intellectual grasp, but the goodness of providence should lie quite handy to every man. Every intelligent man should be able to say—Be the mysteries what they may, it is perfectly certain that this life of ours is bound, limited, directed: its ambitions are checked, its blood-thirstiness cannot go beyond a certain range; it is watched;—at all events that is the best explanation of life which we have yet discovered; it is so near being almighty, and yet so near being powerless: now it stands upon some eminence as if it would be lord of all, and presently it overreaches itself and falls down in utterest humiliation; we are watched, barred in, shut up. We go certain lengths as if we could go ten times farther, and, lo, in a moment, a great wall of darkness asserts the limit and defines the prison. On this matter of Providence there ought to be no uncertain sound. It is not supposable that any life amongst us has not within itself elements sufficient for the construction of a practical argument on behalf of a living, loving Providence. But are there not many broken lives, sad hearts, perplexed souls? Unquestionably there are; but there are men who have seen God even in darkness and have acknowledged his hand even amid the chastening of affliction; there are men who have said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” There was one singer so valiant in spiritual music that when all nature seemed to be given up to silence and despair he said, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom . . . I will joy in the God of my salvation;”—my religion

is not an affair of abundant herbs and plentiful harvests and green meadows : I live in the sanctuary of God's love, and as a child adopted into his family I will sing as loudly in winter as in summer : I will make up for the inhospitableness of the desert by the loudness and sweetness of my song. So we must not retire upon our desertions, difficulties, broken-heartednesses, and say, Whoever may have arguments, we have none. It is possible for ruins to be so shaped and so left as to excite inquiry, touch commiseration, and awaken reverence.

Thus miracles were to be brought within the lines of history : the time was to come when men would speak about miracles as they would speak about the commonplaces of life. The miracle is very startling at first, but there comes a time when men can write about the miracles with hands that do not tremble, with a certitude in which there is no flutter. At first they amazed and stupefied : we questioned their possibility ; but by living along that line, moving steadily step by step along that course, we come to a period when we can write about a miracle as if it were a common occurrence, when we can sing the sublimest poetry as if it were glorified prose, when our prayer gradually ascends into praise. Do not, therefore, be deterred by men who ask questions about the miracles, and especially by those men who have proved to their own satisfaction that miracles are impossible. There is nothing so impossible to my imagination as the existence of a man who can deny miracles. He indeed is an enigma in the course of my reading. How he can have unmade himself, choked the angel within him, suffocated the infant spirit, —how he can have been guilty of this infanticide I cannot tell : I must leave him to be expounded by-and-by. Meanwhile, my own life springs up into a daily miracle—a miracle every moment, a day crowned with wonders ; and the time comes when we speak about these things as if they were commonplaces —not in the sense of being unsuggestive or unworthy of heed, but in the sense of being so abundant that we have come to regard them with reverent familiarity, and to expect them as men expect the miracle of the harvest. Yes, the miracle of the harvest ! The seed is sown and left in the cold earth, but the whole chemic ministry of nature works upon it : the dew and the rain ; the morning does its work, and the evening continues

its labour; and by-and-by the seed springs up some thirty, some sixty, some an hundredfold, without a stain of earth upon it, pure as if it had grown downwards from the sky, —a great golden answer to the prayer of industry. Miracles! The air is full of them, life throbs with them. We have been so blind that we have not seen them, or so fond of doubt that we have questioned their possibility. If we were to live in God we would live *as* God, and the coming and the going of nature—the perpetual miracle—would be the perpetual rest. O that men were wise, that they understood these things! This was the Church of sacred romance. We have left romance out of the history of the Church now. It is a question of surface, of bulk, of statistics, of movable figures. Would God the day of sacred romance would return when great things were attempted and great things done in the name of the Almighty God!

There is a Jordan before every one of us. That Jordan must be passed. We call it Death. We speak of it as the black last river. We talk of it sometimes as in swelling indignation and fury, and ask what shall we do in the swellings of Jordan? To the Christian, Jordan is already past. In a material, physical, and limited sense the little conquest has yet to be won, but in all its spiritual significance and glory Jordan is dried up, and they who are in Christ Jesus, the great priest of the everlasting covenant, walk through the bed of the river as upon dry ground. This is our Christian confidence, this is our spiritual hope, this is our standing in life. Death is abolished. The miracles have been completed in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. All that follows will follow like a cadence, without effort,—a sweet necessity, the logic of poetry.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always drying up rivers before us, or Red Seas, or beating down mountains, or making straight that which is crooked. Thy love is a daily concern for us, leaving nothing untouched and unblessed, but covering the whole sphere of our life as with summer sunshine. We bless thee for thy love, for we live in it. Thy love encourages us, inspires and sustains us, and makes the wilderness into a fruitful field. We know thy love in providence: we see it everywhere every day; but we see thy love most of all in the Cross of Jesus Christ, thy Son, and looking upon the Cross we say, Herein is love; and we hear thy voice saying thou didst so love the world as to create and glorify this Cross. At the Cross we bow; at the Cross we wait; here is forgiveness and here alone. This is the beginning of a new life; this is a gate opening upon eternal blessedness. We therefore glory in the Cross of Christ, and have no other glory, by reason of its celestial majesty. It is the voice of God to the pleading of man, the answer of mercy to the demand of law. May we love the Cross more and more, dying upon it with Christ, with Christ buried, with Christ rising, crowned, and sharing his throne. May this be our life-word; may this be the speech of our tongue and the testimony of our conduct, that we live, yet not we, but that Christ liveth in us, and that the life which we now live in the flesh we live by faith on the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. As for rivers, thou didst make them flow, and thou canst make them cease; as for the desert, it is of thine own ordination, and thou canst turn it into a garden more beautiful than paradise. About these things we have no fear; we are in God's hands and God's love. What fear we have relates to sin, guiltiness of soul, forfeiture of sonship and standing in the family of God; and herein where our fear abounds, the glory of thy love abounds still more, so that we have yet hope in the prison-house, and are assured that our sins, which are many, are all forgiven us. In this faith we live; in this faith we serve; in this faith we would die. Amen.

### Joshua iv. 15-24.

15. And the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying,
16. Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.
17. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.
18. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles

of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

19. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho.

20. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.

21. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones ?

22. Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

23. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over :

24. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty : that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.

### COMING UP OUT OF JORDAN.

THE Canaanites might reasonably have looked upon the Jordan as one of their natural defences. This it was at all times, but it was to all human appearance more so at this season than at other periods of the year. Springing among the spurs of the Lebanon, at a great height above the level of the sea, becoming first Lake Merom, and then expanding into the Lake Tiberias, so large and important that it was called the Sea of Galilee, its impetuous course terminated in the Dead Sea. It would seem to have been made to roll just where it did that it might be a natural protection or defence for the people upon the side of the Canaanites. The time of this history was April or May. We know from another passage that it was the harvest of flax and barley ; all the snow upon Hermon had melted, and was pouring down into the valley through which the swollen torrent plunged and roared on its way to the Dead Sea. The time of the year is thus worth noticing ; it was a time at which the Jordan was in the very pride of its fulness and strength. It has been pointed out as a striking contrast that "when the Goths, in the fifth century, nearly a million of people, crossed the Danube to seek a home in the south of Europe, they had a fleet of vessels at their command ; yet the crossing of the Goths occupied many days, and many lives were lost in the passage." Be it observed, then, that the writers make no doubt as to the reality of this miracle. Fifty days later the wheat harvest would have set in,

and at the time of the wheat harvest Jordan had considerably subsided. Sceptical critics might therefore have said that the Israelites crossed at low water; there were many shallow places in the channel, and no doubt they took advantage of the subsidence of the river in order to cross. But the sacred historian makes it very clear that the Jordan was at its height: there was no mistake about its fulness and urgency; so we have to deal with the facts as we find them stated in the record. There is happily confirmatory evidence as to the time at which the Israelites passed, and that evidence tends to show that the river must have been at its fullest. Nature only *apparently* protects doomed men. We can imagine the Canaanites on their side of the river thinking that nature was in their interest, that nature was concerned for them, and had provided a defence inviolable; but nature is never on the side of the doomed man; certainly nature is never on the side of the bad man; even if apparently so, it is in appearance only, and not in reality; there is not a stone in the field that is not at enmity with him; there is not a beast browsing on any hill that does not count him a foe. This is the deep interpretation of things. Appearances notwithstanding, let us set it down as a very clear line in our book of serious reflection that the whole earth casts out the bad man, and would not give him accommodation or offer him hospitality, and at best would consent to the humiliation of providing him a grave. The strongest defences are worthless if our character be not sound and righteous in the sight of God; inroads can be made upon all securities, and will be made; and we shall be overthrown just in proportion to our guilt and corruptness. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." There is no doubt about the appearance; the security was to all human vision ample and complete, but when God is against a man what wall can build him out? When character is wrong and judgment is coming, what hand dare hold itself up to keep back the lightning of just penalty? It is in the time of fancied security that we are often overthrown. God delights to stain the pride of all glory. He would seem almost in his providence to wait until we have reached the very culmination of our strength; and when we say, Now we are safely lodged within walls which cannot be shaken or burned, then he shows the greatness of his strength, and puts

forth his arm to find us in our hidden securities. We cannot build out the lightning; we cannot build out God when he comes in judgment. We may withhold our consent when he makes propositions; we may reject his mercy and slay his Son; but in the time of judgment we have no will, no power, no answer to the infinite challenges of God.

Why dwell upon the merely local incidents connected with this narration when we know that there are crossings in life which our power did not accomplish? Strip the record of everything that appears to be romantic or unduly excited—all that touches what we may believe to be the incredible; yet there remains in our own history the fact that we have accomplished transitions and passages which we never completed in our own strength or by our own wisdom. We cannot tell how the difficulty was crossed, but that it is crossed we know well. Did we cross it in our sleep? Was it a dream-bridge that spanned the chasm? How did we get upon this side, where all is fertility and hopefulness and contentment? How did we come into this estate? We remember confusedly opposition, battle, natural difficulty—the natural difficulty being the worst of all: the disadvantage of birth, early life, a thousand oppositions that crowded upon us—far, far back in the morning of memory; yet here we are this day in a fruitful place, under a blue sky, and the morning comes without threatening, and the whole heaven seems to make way for the sun that he may show his splendours in unusual fulness. How was this transference completed? We cannot tell the process in detail, but that we are here is the supreme fact in our life. Why, then, send the memory back upon some critical but fruitless errand, to find fault with the process, to ask questions about the detail? Better and wiser to begin our life from this conscious deliverance, and date everything from this side the river. Thus the past may chasten the present: from the long-gone years there may come some voice of warning; but all our dating of experience and vowing and service is from this side the river—is from the stones which memorialise the deliverance. This is called the religious life and the religious construction of life; and this delivers us from memories which become tumultuous and confounding when not barred back by the boundary of definite consciousness of divine deliverance.

Are there not opportunities for crossing all rivers? And are not those opportunities of very brief duration? It is wonderful to mark how the door of opportunity swings back in life: it is even more wonderful to notice how it swings back again, as if to declare that mercy is not to be trifled with, and the hospitality of God is not an indiscriminate beneficence or munificence. Have not the poets told us that "there is a tide in the affairs of men"? Whilst we are reading words which we declare to be inspired and sacred, these very words are confirmed by experiences within our own knowledge, and they do but express in sacred colour what we ourselves have known to be true in daily life. The Gospel is itself a great opportunity; written upon it are the words, "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." Who can utter that word "Now" with tone sufficient in expressiveness and pathos? When is "now"?—always a dying term, always a new projection; a time limited by a moment, and yet true of every moment coming. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." These words define periods of time, exactness of opportunity; and we know them to be true by the broad facts and the daily experiences of life.

Reading of this passage of the river we find one great omission. The omission was purposed. *There was no way of retreat provided.* The river did not stand back until the Israelites saw what they could do with Jericho; no sooner were they over than the river came down as before, and Israel was locked up to his work. Thus God brings us into face-to-face conflicts; thus divine providence drives us into close quarters with the enemy. It is supposable that a host advancing to conquer a walled and ancient city might have had to bear the pressure of some sudden terror and might have desired to retire; but the river was rolling on to the Dead Sea, and there was no promise made that it should be cut in two again for the accommodation of timid or cowardly men. Some of us must be forced up to our work. We do not know what is in us or what we can do until there is no escape—battle, or death; battle, or victory. Let us bless God, I would again say, that we are sometimes scourged up to our work. To retreat is to be drowned; to advance is to achieve

at least possible victory. There must be no going back again. We are bound to this holy work—taking the devil's citadel. There can be no reconstruction as to the terms of service and loyalty. We are committed to the overthrow of this city or kingdom, this evil or corruption, as the case may be. If we do not advance we shall be slain; if we try to run away we shall be drowned. "Quit you like men." Better fight and die honourably than run away and be as drowned dogs in the sullen stream. We are men who are committed, and cannot go back.

"And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho" (v. 19).

What is that to us? These are forgotten dates? No, there is nothing forgotten. Great things took place upon this date long ago, and it ought to be familiar to us. In Exodus xii. 5, the people had been commanded to take them a lamb for an house that they might eat the Passover. When was that? "*On the tenth day of the first month.*" That was exactly to a moment forty years before. Coincidences of time are full of suggestion. History repeats itself in many ways in very subtle colourings and suggestions. So we seem to have been here before, and to have read this discourse, or to have heard this speech somewhere, long ago. Did we dream this scene? Who told us of it? There is a strange and even weird familiarity about the place, the man, the whole vision—what is it? It is but the revival of a date; it is but time set in a new relation, the old and the new strangely mingled; for God has always worked upon the plan of continuity, the continuity sometimes apparently lost, but suddenly reappearing and projecting itself through the ages. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord;" "I am the Lord, I change not." Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. To-morrow will bring up the memory of to-day. The world has lived long enough now to allow its days to double back upon one another, and to take from the impression some of the ink with which ancient history was written. The days are repetitions. Time is full of history. Forty years taken in the passage of the distance between the crossing of the Red Sea and entering into Canaan? Yes! Make of it what we may, here is the fact of

the present time, that men are hindered by their wickedness. The Israelites might have been sooner in Canaan but for their rebellion. We, ourselves, know that our sins have kept good things from us. Sin keeps back the millennium. Evil-doing keeps us digging in the earth when we might have been serving in heaven. There are men who are to-day suffering from what they did forty years ago. Things do not die. "Everlasting punishment" is written upon the whole scroll of life. Punishment has no end, except it be ended by some mysterious but loving action on the part of God. A man sentenced to prison for one day for an evil deed is in prison the remainder of his life; when he has left the jail he has not left the prison. Long ago we got wrong somehow, and we cannot get back into the right line. It was a mistake, or a misadventure, or an evil purpose, or a settled treason; it was a piece of selfishness, or miscalculation, or wrong-doing; we said the wrong word, we weré too late by one day, we mistook the right hand for the left—something it was; and the consequence is that we have been forty years in doing what might have been accomplished in one. See if this be not so by examining life carefully. It seems impossible to disentangle the knot; it is weary work at the best. We know we might have been so much further on, and yet to-day we are baffled and hindered and mocked by some spirit of the air which is without shape or name. The interference with the river is nothing compared with the subtle spiritual interferences which are always changing the route of life. We have set out upon a certain course, and said in specific terms,—this shall be our route towards the goal. Without any action upon our part which we can recall, and without any conscious relation to the action, the route has been changed, the course has been turned to the right hand or to the left. These interferences with life-routes are taking place every day. The young soul has its plan, and having mapped out the future with a hand that knew no trembling, and with a pencil incapable of feeling, the boy joyfully says: "I will go; and thus I will travel; here halt, and there remain a year, and buy and sell and get gain, and then proceed according to the record." This is the boast of folly. This is the utterance of men who have not

the key of to-morrow. The Lord suddenly changes the course, and they who thought they were going westwards at a rapid pace are awakened to the consciousness that they have been hastening eastwards, and knew it not. Why will not men consider these things and put facts together, so patiently and inductively as to find a law at the end of them? the law being that it is not in man that liveth to direct his way, and that it is the Lord who presides over the battle and directs the pace of the going of the world, and that there is but one God, reigning over all things and for ever blessed.

Israel might have penetrated into the Land of Promise when they were on the frontier at Kadesh-Barnea in the second year of the exodus. Think of it! they might have been in Canaan long ago—a generation since! What happened to prevent this penetration into the Land of Promise? Sin happened. Let us call it 'commonplace if we are prepared to lose the richest cream of historical instruction; but there is the fact: it was sin that hindered the early penetration into the Land of Promise. Say Edom was obstinate, and the king thereof said: "No, you shall not go through this land; you must find some other way;" the king of Edom did not speak words of his own, the descendant of Esau had a mission from God. Men do not always know whose ministers they are. We speak words that have upon them and around them the texture of eternity, and we say we knew not why we spoke them, but we could not resist the speech: the words flew to our lips and burned upon our tongue, and we must needs utter them. We cannot allow Israel to assume the character of an ill-used traveller, who, having suddenly come upon inhospitable provinces, was put to very serious inconvenience. Israel was not a white-robed saint in the wilderness—the pure, the patient, holy traveller; Israel had defied God, and murmured against his captain, and resisted the law; and rebellion must always be punished. It is not always punished in the same way, but punished it always is. Men think they have secured their purpose; they say that this time at all events they have been victorious; and now they will handle life just as they please—and behold, their very victory is the cruellest defeat! They may have had their desire granted, but leanness has been



sent into their souls. There is only one way of living rightly, and that is living in the sanctuary of God,—that is, in obedience to the eternal law which facts, as well as revelation, have established. If you are unwilling to believe that the eternal law has been revealed, and has been written down with pen and ink, and is to be referred to as an ancient document, then take some other course. Let this be your course: call for quietness in the mind; silence all tumult of thought; read history—centuries of it at a time; take in breadth and scope enough or you will be the victims of details; seize as with the mental vision great periods of time; and this you will find to be the law of fact, as well as the law of revelation, that only he who falls into the rhythm of the universe, who is part of the great whole, who is so individual as not to lose his sense of responsibility, and yet so social as to know that he is one of a great host—only they who have moved rhythmically to the beat of righteousness and the throb of justice have come into ultimate rest, and peace, and dignity. Revelation looks to facts for its commentary. It is willing to rest until history has had its say; and revelation and history are to be one in their final testimony. Observe what has been required in this contention: that sufficient time should be taken within the purview. These arbitrations are not to be settled by what occurred this day, or within the limits of that one hour. We must take in field enough if we could realise all the teaching of historical perspective and colour. So judged, the Bible has nothing to fear; it is a prophecy of facts, the forecasting of what we know ourselves has occurred and is evermore transpiring.

What, then, was the purpose of this memorialising of the crossing of Jordan? Why these stones? Why this religious consideration? The answer is given in the twenty-fourth verse:—

“That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.”

All providences are to have a religious effect upon others, even upon nations far away. We cannot put an end to this species of judgment. Observers look upon us and say: He lives well; there must be a force in that character we have underestimated; he prays even now, notwithstanding the storm which has fallen

upon him, the tempest which has desolated his fields, the scepticism which has assailed his faith; he has dug a dozen graves, yet he has made of them a dozen altars—how is this? Surely the hand of the Almighty is with him, and the Spirit of the Eternal is within his soul. It is the same also in nations. Mark how they stand in the world's esteem. One nation makes a proposition, and the proposal is hailed with universal derision, because the nation has lived itself into the infamy of a known liar. Another nation makes a proposal, and all the other nations of the world hasten to accept the terms. Why? The nation has acquired fame for honesty, uprightness, integrity; for being right in its supreme purpose, often making mistakes, often returning to correct its own miscalculations—yet, the soul of it is healthy; its word is its bond; it is a nation honourably known. So what we do as individuals and as nations has an effect upon observers near and far away. It is possible for us to live so that the atheist will be obliged to say: After all, there is a mystery about this I cannot make out. It is possible so to live that the mocker shall let the gibe die on his reluctant lips, saying even in his bad heart: It is a cruel thing to mock consistency so noble and beneficence so generous. It is possible for any nation under the influence of Christ so to live that other nations, whilst disputing Christian doctrine and contending against Christian metaphysics, shall say: The soul of that nation is honest, righteous, just; and what if in this concession there should be hidden an unexpressed avowal that the Lord is God, and Christ, his Son, come whence he may, mysteriously makes man better, sounder, grander? The critics who would be glad to discrown the Messiah may stop and wonder and think when they note the quality of character which his grace creates and sustains.

## PRAYER.

OH that we knew where we might find him! We would come even unto his seat and plead with him mightily and long. We bless thee that we need not repeat the words of thy servant of old, for we know where thou art: thou art not a God afar off but nigh at hand. Thou hast, in Christ Jesus thy Son, reconciled the world unto thyself. We meet thee at Bethlehem. We hear thee speaking to us in the wind. We watch thee in all thy daily course of humiliation and pain and redeeming love. We see thee in the Cross of Jesus Christ; we recognise in that Cross the highest revelation of thy righteousness and love. God forbid that we should glory save in the Cross! It touches our life when no other power can come near it; it charms our solitude without intrusion; it speaks to us when we could hear no other voice. It is the hope of the world; it is the way to pardon; it is the gate of heaven. Blessed Cross; infinite Cross; tender Cross! May we ourselves be daily crucified upon it, that, dying daily, we may know daily the power of Christ's resurrection, and become so accustomed to death that when the death of the flesh comes we shall not know it. We thank thee for all Christian hope and confidence, for all spiritual consolation, for all voices which address us from the skies; we need these in dark times, on cloudy days, when the sun is quite shut out; then do we know how great is thy love, how tender thy pity, how precious the dew of thy tears. Thou hast made our life so that no voice can truly speak to it but thine own. Other voices address us in parts, and upon given days, and under special circumstances; but thy voice is the same by night and by day, in winter and in summer; thou comest near us, and our weakness thou dost lift up by thine own almightiness; there is no touch like thine. Other hands hurt us even in their endeavours to help, but thy hands, omnipotent One, are full of mercy; they express thine heart. We thank thee for all love which makes life's burdens sit less heavily upon us; we thank thee for all home delights which make the world more bearable, we thank thee for all spiritual comfort which enables us to overcome material distresses; these are the gifts of God, these are messages from the eternal spheres, these are voices which the soul knows and which the heart lovingly answers. We cannot understand this religious nature with which thou hast endowed us; it is a great pain oftentimes,—eager to look into things which are at present sealed, and impetuous in inquiry rather than patient, troubling God with violent addresses rather than waiting patiently for his coming. Yet it is our life's highest life; it enables us to touch heaven, eternity, things infinite; by it we realise thy purpose in making all things that are round about us, so stupendous, so minute,—the great

heavens, the dying flowers. Thou hast made all these things, and filled them with meaning; if we were wise we could read that meaning easily and lovingly, and be comforted by the tender solaces of unspoken gospels. Anoint our eyes that we may see! Circumcise our ears that we may hear. Give us the understanding heart; and every place shall be the house of God, and every delight shall be as a gate of heaven. We bless thee for a sense of thy nearness: we can whisper to thee; we can call upon thee instantaneously, and thy reply can come before our friend can see we have prayed or have received answers from God. Direct us in all our way: it is sometimes so difficult: we shrink from it: we cannot bear the deep places and the rough; we do not know what may befall us along the perilous line: some ravenous beast may bestroy us, some hidden pit may engulf us, some sudden wind may be charged with death. But this is our ignorance: thou wilt pity it and forgive it. We would rather say, in our Christian faith—Father, let our hand be in thine, then nothing can come but peace and light and heaven. We mourn our sin: it is bitterer to thee than it can be to us; because thou art all holy; but thou hast grappled with this difficulty; thou didst meet sin before sin arose: the Cross is older than the crime, the grace more venerable than the sin. We trust in the living God; we cast ourselves upon Jesus Christ thy Son; we will not reason or understand in words this mystery of love, for who can grasp in his little palm all that is above him? Now we fall into thy hands, and evermore abide there, growing in wisdom, in confidence, in charity, in holiness, knowing Christ more thoroughly, comprehending him by our sympathy where we cannot follow him by our reason; and do thou enable us to die with him that with him we may rise again. Amen.

### Joshua v.

#### MEMORABLE EVENTS.

**T**HIS chapter is remarkable for two or three points which happily combine the miraculous and the experimental. Here and there we cannot touch the genius of the chapter at all, and then suddenly it descends upon familiar lines, so that we can interrogate it, and in a measure understand it, because it confirms our own personal experience. The foot of this ladder is upon the earth: the head of it is in the sky.

Take the first verse:—

“And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.”

The heathen kings did not disbelieve in miracles. It seems as if we had lost a good deal by our civilisation. We have come into a very complicated state of existence, and are so fretted by questions and scepticisms as to be almost divested at once of our dignity and our peace. It must have been wonderful living in the days when miracles seemed to be quite credible, quite near at hand, topics of common converse, instances which men had seen with their own eyes. We have lost *something* by this cessation of the outward miracle. What we have lost is faith—faith in human history, faith in the processes of human evolution and education: we have lived ourselves into the commonplace pointless. Lord Lytton says: “The man who has no faith in religion is often the man who has faith in a nightmare. Julius Cæsar publicly denounced a belief in hereafter, and rejected the idea of a soul and a deity, yet muttered a charm when he entered a chariot, and did not cross the Rubicon until he had consulted the omens. Lord Herbert, of Cherbourg, writes a book against revelation, and asks a sign from heaven to tell him if his book is approved by his Maker. The man who cannot believe in the miracles performed by the Saviour, gravely tells us of a miracle vouchsafed to himself.” Thus we measure everything by our own experience and consciousness. We have lost the power of projecting ourselves into the universal consciousness of ancient and contemporary spiritual history. The heathen kings drew inferences from what had occurred around them. They said—If the river has been crossed, the city is gone. They were not unreasoning or infantile minds. They saw somewhat of the logical issue of things. The power of following the seed to its fructification is what we have lost. Otherwise, we should all be prophets: we should know that as certainly as a man has told a lie he has dug a hell. We think the law will be modified, or turned aside, and that the thunderbolt of judgment will somehow be averted. We are not morally logical. We peddle about verbal sequences and account it cleverness to trace literary consequences, but what about moral concatenation and issue? Were we as bold in the matter of inference as were the heathen kings, we should know that the moment a man has given up self-control he is damned. It seems to be a great leap from the first step to the last, but

that is moral logic, that is spiritual sequence; as a question of logic there is no way of getting out of it. What then can be done? All men have surely been false, and all men have surely done that which is wrong. There comes the sublimity of divine revelation. God takes up the case: the great miracle is performed from above. There is no halting between falsehood and perdition; so far as the man is concerned, his first lie killed him. The first act of disobedience "brought death into our world and all our woe." Death is not the result of a series of actions; it is the result of a thought, a purpose, a deed. Whilst thus we contemplate with a kind of inexcusable dignity the kings and mighty men who lived long ages ago, and even begin to question whether they lived at all or not, they seized the great idea of process, development, and culmination: they knew that one miracle meant all miracles. They did not ask for another sign from heaven as the unbelieving Jews were always asking. Therein was the sophistry of the Jewish reasoning and the folly of the Jewish relation to the great Man of their day: they did not know that one miracle meant all miracles, one lie meant all the fire of eternity burning the liar. We, too, seem to suppose that only at the end of a series of offences can certain penal consequences arise. That may be well for mere social convenience, that may be a proper limit for human magistracy and imperfect power; but looking at things in the light of heaven and the light of eternity, to tell one lie is to go into everlasting punishment. Who, then, can be saved? None by himself. No man has the power to rub out a lie. You cannot expunge a falsehood; once done, it is done for ever, so far as the doer is concerned. If there be any balm in Gilead, if there be any physician there, if there be any undreamed of love and power in heaven, if it lie within the circuit of Almighty power and infinite wisdom to meet the case, so be it; but within the limits of the man's own life and responsibility and power, the lie means hell. Blessed be God, there is a gospel in relation to this—a Cross, a Saviour, a way out of it all,—not to be understood or reduced to words which always exactly fit the occasion, but to be seized by faith and appropriated by the hunger of the helpless heart. Heathen kings lost spiritual conviction, and therefore their arms fell

right down by their sides. It is when the heart "melts" that the arm gives in. Men fight with the heart; men live with the heart; men return to the battle because of the inspiration of the heart. What wonder, then, if the Christian teacher should come forward and say, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness"? Man does not lay a withered hand upon heaven's pillars and draw himself up by that palsied grasp. It is with the heart we live and suffer and return to the battle; it is the heart which says—To-morrow shall see victory; to-morrow we bury the enemy in the grave. The walls of Jericho were still standing; all the kings of the Amorites and all the kings of the Canaanites had their armies intact and all their resources at hand, but "their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more." And what is a man without heart, without spirit, without moral confidence? To know that righteousness is not with us is to have all the pith taken out of our muscles; to know that we are going into the garden to kiss an innocent Christ and thus betray him is, when we see him, to fall right back, blanched and dead. Be right in spiritual conviction. Know that the thing proposed to be done is right, wise, good; and then the rest will be peace, victory,—enduring, untainted honour.

Another interesting point occurs in the sixth verse:—

"For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord sware that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey."

Here we find what we are constantly seeing: a new generation but a permanent humanity. According to this statement all the people that were men of war which came out of Egypt were consumed. The Israel that entered Canaan was not the Israel that left Egypt, so far as detail was concerned. This is the mystery of human development or human progress. Men die—man lives. The generation passes away—humanity abides. God thus raises up a Church to himself. Much is apparently lost by the way: the leaves of a thousand years ago are all dead and buried, or have entered into chemic relations with the universe which we cannot follow, but the tree on which they grew

still stands, lifting itself up to the blue heavens, and waiting next year's inspiration and fruitfulness. Here lies a truth which many men dare not really put into words, which cannot be so put into words as to explain itself to everybody. We must grow up into some mysteries, pass into them subtly and come to their realisation suddenly; they are not to be explained or made matters of controversy; they are to be seized by the expanding and strengthening mind; they are to be appropriated by the refined and sanctified consciousness. The mocker might step in here and say, Where are they who left Egypt to come to a land of promise? They are dead; their carcasses are in the wilderness. That is historically, and as a matter of detail, true; but humanity is in man. The great human quantity is within the individual detail. The Church is within the sinner. Here are men who, like ourselves, were born in the wilderness but destined for Canaan. That is human life in a sentence. All these people were children of the wilderness, yet they were not meant for the wilderness as a final settlement; they knew it: the spirit of marching was in them; the angel of battle moved them to arms. Is it not so in our own consciousness? We were born in poverty, but never meant to remain there; we were born under great disadvantages, but had a soul given to us which said—We will beat them all down, stand upon them, and make use of them to heighten the very honour and dignity the Lord has enabled us to win. We are all wilderness-born: we have no right to remain in the wilderness or to die in it. The men died in the wilderness, "because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord"—and there cannot be two Lords, two Masters, two Sovereigns, two thrones. "Hear, O Israel,"—O humanity,—“the Lord our God is one Lord.” Do not let us set up our little will and whim and idea as against the eternal purpose, but fall down and resolutely and tenderly pray that we may know God's will and do it every syllable. That is “the whole duty of man.” God is disappointed with the individuals, but he will be pleased with the race. When God made Adam he did not make *an* Adam; he made what “Adam” signifies—man. The judgment of God does not lie as between himself and the one little creature we call a man. God is not set up as the centre of innumerable details any one of which may crush his purpose and render his decree a nullity.



God takes another view of man:—As I live, saith the Lord, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory. What part or lot are we about to play in this matter? Fool is he who thinks he can rule back the purpose of God or tear in twain the covenant of Heaven. It is one of two things: we fall upon the stone and are broken, or the stone falls upon us and we are ground to powder. Do not let us contend about terms or technicalities, or avail ourselves of all the suggestions offered by a crudely-formed and crudely-expressed theology. Here lies the infinite truth, confirmed by all life, that there can be but one will that is right, one God blessed for evermore. He will carry out his purpose. He has vowed as it were by his life, his eternity, that his word shall not return unto him void. He may be cast out, reviled, killed; but he will still have the whole earth for his inheritance and humanity for a gem in his crown. “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Every man has within himself the power—not the right—of self-damnation; but God’s word shall be fulfilled, though it take innumerable ages to accomplish it, that *man* shall stand in his image and likeness. He will never cease to work until the image is perfected. Whoever comes, whoever goes, though the wilderness be one infinite cemetery, God shall have a seed to serve him and to call Jesus blessed. We *can* fight, we *can* disobey, we *can* have our own poor way,—all that lies within the possibility of sin; but it comes to nothing, except dishonour and ruin and death.

The most interesting point of all is found in verses 11, 12:—

“And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.”

The manna had fallen in the wilderness thirty-nine years and eleven months, excepting on the Sabbath-day. A modern commentator says:—“The manna finally ceased or kept Sabbath on the very day afterwards marked by our Lord’s resurrection, which became the Lord’s day.” Now this is matter of simple arithmetical calculation. There is no possibility of so using figures and dates as to mislead the mind upon this particular; and here, by a process of rigid arithmetical demonstration, it is made clear that

the manna finally kept Sabbath on the very day afterwards marked by our Lord's resurrection; and our Lord replaced the manna of ancient teachers by himself saying:—I am the true Bread sent down from heaven: eat of me—eat of this old corn; other means of sustenance are done away, and I am the Bread sent down from heaven. Some very striking inferences immediately follow the perusal of this state of things. For example, here we have the reason for the cessation of miracles. When did the manna cease to fall?—Immediately that there was corn to be eaten. No sooner was it possible to live, as we should say naturally, than the supernatural method of existence was ended. This is God's method all through. There is no further need for manna, the manna will cease to be rained upon the wilderness. When we can find food for ourselves God will not find it for us otherwise than primarily, otherwise than by showing us how to discover and appropriate it. This is the beauty of righteousness: this is the very centre and soul of the divine discipline of mankind. When we are in the wilderness and cannot grow corn, we shall not die of hunger, for God will intervene and sustain the life of his servants. Have no fear; let your courage abide in God. When the times are so hard and cruel and difficult that it is impossible for any honest man to live by natural methods and ordinary customs, God will not see him lost for want of sustenance. No man can say how that sustenance will be found, but it will be supplied. We may speak sometimes of the method of its production almost flippantly, or regard it with some measure of indifference, but in our most serious moods we shall come to the conclusion that after all there is a hand, infinite in power and in tenderness, working amid the affairs of men. But the other lesson is just as true. When the times are not so hard and impracticable and inhospitable, when men can dig and sow and cut down and grind and bake their bread, God will allow natural processes to be resumed, and he will so far throw us upon them as to withdraw what may be termed the supernatural or unimaginable. This is the very way of life. It is the right way in the house; it is the right way in the culture and upbringing of little children; it is the very secret of Providence:—God always near to us if there is no meat in the wilderness; God always ready to train by labour when labour is possible. So we are called to

duty, to diligence. We are not to look for the supernatural so long as the natural is available. What do we want with the miracles when the whole land simply waits to be cultivated in order to answer our industry with abundant harvest? If any thing unrighteously stand in the way of this it must go down: it will inevitably go down, for God is with humanity—the whole, the sum-total quantity, with man, and for man all things shall be smoothed, and man shall pass on to the fulfilment of the divine idea. Not one word here can be spoken for indolence; not a single excuse can be set up for reluctance to labour. The light was made to work in. He who invented a jet that should break up the darkness invented a method of extending the sphere of industry. We are not to look to fathers and mothers to do for us what we can do for ourselves; it is unmanly, ignoble, unworthy. Depend upon it the fatherly and motherly spirit will see that the wilderness be turned into a fruitful field, if it be impossible for us to do anything by ourselves; but when that possibility is an open fact it is right that fatherly and motherly care should be withdrawn, and if not withdrawn its continuance becomes a crime.

A wonderful process we have seen in all these readings. We have seen the cloud by day displaced, giving way to the ark of the covenant. Hence the words, “Ye have not passed this way heretofore,”—that is, as we have seen, Ye have not heretofore had the ark of the covenant ahead of you, but only a symbolic cloud—now the cloud goes and you follow a written document. We have seen the manna displaced by the corn of Canaan: there is no more manna because the corn is plentiful, and nature will not do the work of the supernatural: the work of the supernatural is not indeed amid the bountifulness of nature. And, further than this, let us remind ourselves again and again, we know Christ no more after the flesh. Paul says, “He is risen.” He is vanished. There is no fleshly Christ now. The great dispensation of the Spirit has opened. Under that dispensation we live. How wondrously we have returned to the cloud period and the fire-by-night method of guiding the world!—for what is the Spirit but as it were a cloud without measure, impalpable,—a fire we cannot touch, yet whose radiance and warmth are always available? We live under the

dispensation of the Spirit, under the dispensation of new influences, new movements of the soul, daily inspirations from Heaven; and so living, it is not for this man or that man in his individuality to arise and set up any Church in his own name, saying, *I* have a special revelation from God. To-day it is humanity that is inspired, the whole Church that is a sacred priesthood. This, from my point of view, is the true philosophy of succession. It is folly to dispute that great principle. Whoever disputes it dissociates himself from organic history and from organic humanity. From the first the principle of succession has been asserted in the Scriptures; to the last things were committed from man to man—put in trust, so that they have been handed on from one generation to another. The only thing to insist upon now is this: that the Church is the great individual—the whole Church, not as broken up into communions, one having the partiality of Heaven and another living under the disapprobation of the skies, but the whole redeemed Church. There is a common sentiment, a common cry—a great, grand faith common to every soul in all the uncounted host. It is when we introduce our petty opinions, and one man sets up his inferences as against the inferences of some other man, that we lose touch and lose the altar, and lose God. From these verbal controversies we must retire, and know that the kingdom of heaven is not in contentions, in philosophies, in vain representations of self-will and self-opinion; but under all forms of worship, under all ecclesiasticisms, there is a spirit common to the whole redeemed Church. To realise the presence of that spirit is to enter into the very mystery of the work of Christ and to understand what he meant when he prayed that we might all be one, as he was in the Father and the Father in him.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou art writing thy signs upon the heavens and upon the earth, and upon all the flying days of time. Blessed is he who can read them and apply their lessons to his heart, and walk according to their meaning. We can discern the signs of the weather—how is it we cannot discern the signs of the times? We have quick vision in some directions, and yet we are quite blind in others. We are double men,—eloquent, yet dumb; bright of eye, yet dull of perception. We cannot tell what we are, we are so confused and bewildered within our own consciousness. Sometimes we think we see the dawning light: then we sing like birds that are glad; then the whole sky is a great cloud, unbroken, unblessed with a single star; and then we sink into silence and despair. We have no constancy of life, no steadfastness of faith; our souls as to their moods veer about like the incalculable wind. We pray that our faith may be established, that it may be broad, massive, not to be shaken, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Lord, increase our faith—especially in solidity, that we may be the same to-morrow as to-day, confidently hoping in God. We know what thy word is: we are ennobled as we read it; no man can utter such words as thou hast written without being enlarged by their very perusal: they are sublime, they are full of God. Still, we cannot see the application of thy words; we look upon life within some one day and say—Behold, the purpose of Heaven is frustrated, and the counsel of the Most High is turned upside down. We are impatient, because ignorant; we are furious, because weak. We would be calm with the peace of God. Help us to live every moment as if it were the last. May the spirit of solemnity touch our whole life; yet may we feel that the highest solemnity is consistent with the purest joy. The Lord grant unto us clear shining after rain. The Lord bless us with the sound of the turtle when the winter is over and gone. We love the summer: we long for things that are verdant and beautifully coloured, and we long to hear all nature sing. If the winter days must come, give us a brave heart, a true faith, and may we so live in Christ, God the Son, that the winter itself shall be but a variation of summer. We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. He is the mighty Saviour, he is the infinite Redeemer; there is none other who can save. He died for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. We know that we are the unjust; we would flee unto the living Christ and ask him to give us all he has; the very asking shall express a divine inspiration, the very desire shall bring its own answer and comfort: thou dost not excite such passions in the soul without gratifying them with a great content. Amen.

## Joshua v. 13-15.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.”

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

“WE have no such visions now” may be the easy comment of men who walk by sight and not by faith. Everything depends upon what you mean by “vision.” Jesus Christ said—How is it that ye cannot discern the signs of the times? Jesus Christ saw signs. All men whose eyes are set in their head see tokens, omens, and prefigurations of many kinds and full of urgent suggestion. We should see more if we looked more. He who looks sees. But there is a looking which is not seeing—a casual inspection, a hurried glance, a superficial regard scarcely to be distinguished from utter unconcern. We should put things together; we should follow facts until they become laws. This indeed is the only way of finding out laws—namely, to gather facts together from every quarter, facts of every quality and every degree; fearlessly bring together whatever has been established in the way of fact, and then when the evidence is thus as nearly complete as our time can make it, the inference which we draw from this collation will have of necessity the authority and force of a law. We must not judge by one fact, nor must we betake ourselves to any special field and say—all the facts we require are to be found within the four corners of this particular plot. All facts must be recognised, admitted into the great composition, and from the whole of them we must bring those inductions which settle themselves into law, until still larger facts are brought in to displace them or give them newness of accent and value. The “man” is still standing over against us. Nothing has been lost of all that is morally significant in this apocalypse. We have been looking in the wrong direction, or we have not been looking with sufficient eagerness, or we have

failed before the spirit of languor, having succumbed to its lull ; and so we have lost our hold upon the age and all its forces. There is a man (visible to the spiritual eye) standing in this day or in that day over the whole continent with a drawn sword. It is the day of war. We shall hear presently, when we see such signs, the clash of battle. All the uneasiness, restlessness, discontent, unholy ambition with which we are made familiar from time to time, being interpreted means that the war spirit is ahead, is animating the sentiment of nations, is troubling the peace of the world. Thus we can find out from the journals of the day what figure it is that presides over the fortunes of the hour ; but we must bring, let us repeat, steadily and fearlessly, facts from every quarter, and shape them into this man, that we may through facts know his name, his figure, and his purpose. Account for it as we may, "coming events cast their shadows before." There is a spirit regulating and directing all things, and we may see with considerable clearness of vision what the spirit of the age is if we will only open our eyes and look at events and chasten our hearts, and study them with religious constancy. Sometimes the figure changes into quite another expression. The man is the same, but he is bent on other work. The sword has gone. What has he in his hand now?—a plumb, square, balances, weights,—what means he? He says he will rectify things ; he will reform, and he will reconstruct ; he will have justice done ; he will apportion things on another principle : he will carry up justice to generosity, and regulate generosity by justice ; he counts the flock and says, There is one wanting, and that one must be found. He audits the accounts of the day and he says, Every man has not had his due ; some have worked and have not reaped the reward of their labour, and the cry of the labourer has entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, That is the image of reform, which has displaced the spectre of war. We can easily see that figure through all the agitations and sudden movements and violent and even spasmodic and disastrous efforts of the times. We must not construe such events too harshly or too narrowly. Within themselves and within easily given limits they are bad and they are only to be condemned ; but all these upheavals have a history, and we cannot judge of the immediate event except in the atmosphere

which is historical. We must know what happened generations ago. There is no event which belongs merely to the passing twenty-four hours: hence the rashness and imperfectness of our judgment. Now this spirit which is in the air from time to time, standing over against doomed cities and doomed institutions, can easily be distinguished if we ask the meaning of the things that are going on round about us. It will not do to shut our ears and say, We hear nothing; to close our eyes and to say, Behold, all is in peace. We must face the spectre; we must look at the image of the time; we must not fear the form which is standing over against a nation, or a continent, or the world. Blessed is he who can fearlessly ask the meaning of that presence and interrogate it as to its purpose. They are short-sighted men who hurry to their own houses, enclose themselves within their own quarters, and say, every fire is as bright as their own, every table is well-laden, and every house is well-cared for. How is it ye cannot discern the signs of the times? Rightly discerning them, you will be patient with many of their features. They are irritating, exasperating; they have about them at first sight an aspect of injustice, and in their assertion there may be more clamour than music; but we must see the reality within the appearance; we must penetrate the environment if we would understand the soul of the age. Now another spirit comes over the times. What is the man like who now holds dominion over the current thought of the age? He has no sword; he has in his hand,—books, written leaves, scrolls; his eyes are deeply set in his head, his head is bent in an attitude of study, perusal, meditation akin to worship. What means that man? He says—I will have all the people well-informed: every child on the face of the earth shall be taught to read and write and think; knowledge is power, knowledge is self-control,—I will not rest until the institution of ignorance is thrown down and the Jericho of superstition is destroyed; the people shall be taught, and when they are taught—well-taught and fully taught—all tyrannies will go down—priestly, social, imperial; and the Son of man shall come—the glorious and complete humanity: the very Christ of God shall be realised in the newly-constructed race. Are there not times when this is perfectly evident? We say, the day is given up to the work of education. That is too short



and superficial a way of accounting for things. The spirits do not come and go by some rule of mere whim or fancy. There is a purpose in the ages, a method in the infinite government of things. Now the man has a sword; now he weighs with the balances of the sanctuary; now he cries, Come, and be taught; come, and read and think, and chasten your life by the spirit of knowledge:—how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and ye fools hate knowledge? We must accept the spirit of the times, and work according to its inspirations. We cannot double one age over another, or turn the ages backward to catch some ancient spirit; every day has its dawn, its own particular meaning, its own special and definite opportunity; and blessed is he who can read the spectres in the air so as to make out the purpose of their coming and the end of their revelation. Who does not see in our own day another attitude and expression of the same spirit? What is the man doing now? He has no sword, no balance, no book, we can see: they are still within his reach; but now what does he? He weeps: he is in sorrow. He does not shed tears for himself but for others:—“Jesus wept.” What spirit is it that rules the age? A spirit of pity, compassion, tenderness; a spirit that has heard the sighing and crying of all earth’s weary trouble, and that bends over the suffering creation with infinite compassion. Now every one is trying to alleviate distress, to make homes glad, to bring in the erring and far-straying one. The great question is, What can be done to chase away poverty, to make the sad happy, to dry the tears of sorrow, to plant flowers on the tomb of mortality? “Can ye not discern the signs of the times?” Why should we attempt to change those signs when they are providential writing, every day having its own duty, and its own vocation, and its own opportunity? Blessed is that servant who can hear the footfall of his Lord’s coming, and understand somewhat of the signs of the times, and who is not trying to do something that was quite in place five hundred years ago, but who is answering the call of this very morning with instancy of obedience and with absolute consecration of love. Live in your own day; express the spirit of your own time; be fearless; “Quit you like men.”

The right reading of these signs brings us into a sure and blessed consciousness of a spiritual presence. We begin to

feel that things are ghostly, rather than material. There is matter enough on which the broad hand can lay itself, and about which there can be no dispute; but the more we put history together into shape and form, and watch it assuming its true colour, the more we begin to say, Surely God is in this history and I knew it not; this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. We have missed the spirit. We have thought things were all living according to some rule of their own, without relation, without responsibility one to the other; we looked upon things as constituting a kind of seething chaos; but the more patient, the more highly chastened we are in mind, the more sober in understanding, and the more fearless, the more do we see that—account for it as we may, or not account for it at all—there is a spirit that rules, and guides, and directs everything. The chariots of God are twenty thousand in number. In what chariot he will come to-morrow, none can tell. It is not for us to say whether this or that chariot is God's. The number baffles us; we cannot read a record of the whole. God will come into his own universe as it pleases him.

When we are in great religious moods, in sublime spiritual ecstasies, in immediate and vital touch with God, we are not afraid to adopt apparently impracticable measures in carrying out the purposes of righteousness and wisdom. What could be more ridiculous, from a purely military point of view, than the directions given for the capture and overthrow of Jericho? They had no relation to the event. On the face of them, from a military point of view, they were absurd:—the carrying an ark around the walls of the city, walking round the city day by day for seven days, blowing a loud blast of trumpets,—and the wall should fall, and the city should surrender! We are quite prepared for the mocker to enjoy himself over such an absurd proposition. But what is absurdity? The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. We cannot always judge things by appearances. We ourselves are often startled by the want—apparent, at least—of adaptation of means to ends. Life is carried by surprises; the whole scheme of things is made remarkable by sudden incomings and new interpretations and positions. To describe great historical events as in any

measure absurd, is to approach the danger of self-idolatry by exalting personal judgment above the occurrences of ancient or modern times. The religious method may always be called impracticable. It is very slow; it does not seem to work with any immediate effect. What can be duller, slower, than what is generally understood as teaching? Yet it is by teaching that the kingdom of heaven is to be prepared for,—sitting down with men and communicating ideas to them, endeavouring to touch their higher natures, to move their mental springs, to bring their whole mental life into relation to other and unfamiliar truths. It is a very slow method. One gleam from heaven's own midday would startle the world more surely! Why not this sudden outburst of intolerable glory? Because there is no lasting in it, no power of duration and sustenance. Men cannot live upon such visions. Men are so constituted that they can only live upon knowledge, truth, conviction, moral persuasions, ideas that vitalise and ennoble their whole nature. The apostle is said to have spoken of "the foolishness of preaching." That is a sentence very often misunderstood. The apostle was not speaking of the foolishness of preaching as an art and practice, because he was addressing himself to men who valued eloquence above all other gifts; he was speaking of the foolishness of *the thing that was preached*—the foolishness of the Cross: the idea that a dying man was to be king of the universe; that a slain victim was to sit upon the eternal throne, judging and directing all things in righteousness and love. The apostle represents in his epistle to the Corinthians the very picture which we have in relation to the capture of Jericho. Things that are not, are employed to bring to nought things that are. Foolish things, little things, contemptible things, are used by the hand almighty to shake down towers and walls and temples and capitals, and bring them to nought before the throne of righteousness. Thus religion is not afraid of the impracticable—at least, of what may appear to be impracticable to those who look only upon the surface. Religion has never been afraid to claim prayer as one of its very pillars—the signature of its very power. What can, from the outside, be more futile and ridiculous than to be speaking into the vacant air—to exclude all living things upon

the earth, and to speak to one we have never seen, and pour our heart's penitence, woe, hope, into an ear we cannot detect amid all the clouds which float through the heavens? Yet religion says, "Continue instant in prayer;" you have no other hope; there is a throne accessible; heed not the voices that mock you; you cannot pray without being the purer for the prayer; the words of prayer cleanse the mouth that uses them; the desire expressed in prayer purges the heart in which it burns,— "pray without ceasing." So religious men ought not to be deterred by apparent impracticableness; by the mocker, who has but two hands, and wants to use them both in great impetuosity; by the giber and sneerer, who wants all things done to-day. We are content to follow in the wake of Jesus Christ. If we had faith as a grain of mustard seed, we would exercise great sovereignties; we would kill the wolf of hunger long before he came to our door; we would be full of wealth within, without a coal in the grate, or a crust in the cupboard; we would have triumphed over death ere yet we had seen his ghostly figure. Besides, processes may be long, and results may be brought about in startling suddenness. We have read of a place not far from the city of New York which was called Hell's Gate, a dangerous place for navigators,—in fact, practically an impassable gate. What was to be done? It was to be attacked with the slowness of wisdom, with the calmness of science; men must go down into that great rocky region nine acres in extent; they must pierce the rock, and fill the cavities with dynamite. Month by month they must work at that and come slowly up, and still Hell's Gate defies the navigator. The year passed, and another year, and still the process goes on. Science says, Be calm, industrious; the process is very tedious; we do not wonder that men are weary with waiting; but continue the work, stroke by stroke, day by day. Now you are within a month of closing your labours,—now but one little week remains,—now to-morrow all you can do in that preparatory direction will be done. A strange hush falls upon the interested public. What is to be the issue? See, the rocky gate still remains; there it abides to mock the scientific engineer; facts are against him: the rock has been hammered, tunnelled, pierced, charged with dynamite; but it is still there, and not

a ship dare come near. The scientific engineer knows more than the ignorant public. He says, I think we are ready now, and tells his own little girl, far off, to touch a tiny knob and communicate an electric spark according to his directions. The spark is communicated, and the nine acres of rock, and all the water floating over them, are heaved two hundred feet into the air in the twinkling of an eye,—rent, torn, never to be put together again; and it will require some two years or more to take away the rent stones. So there is a period of waiting, a period of preparation, a period of clearing out; but who can tell what sudden things may occur anywhere—in cities, in states, in doomed laws? What we are doing now, if we are wise servants of the King, is to go down morning by morning to our work—preaching the gospel, teaching the young, standing up in living testimony for righteousness: and the Lord will suddenly come to his temple. Blessed is that servant who shall be found waiting, watching, working. We have nothing to do with the communication of the electric spark; that is in the hands of God. Hope on, work on; who can tell when the end may be? Yet now and again on the road we are blessed with visions which give us comfort and encouragement. In 1832 the most celebrated naturalist in the world, our illustrious countryman Charles Darwin, went round the world in a ship called the *Beagle*. The diary of that circumnavigation is full of abiding interest. The great naturalist called at Tierra del Fuego on the South American coast. His description of the people of that part of the world is full of horror; he says he never saw such people. They represented the very lowest type he had ever seen of humanity. They were savages of the worst degree and quality. No civilised man dare approach that awful place; the figures of the people were shocking to behold; their habits were not to be described in language. The naturalist left them, supposing them to be beyond the reach of civilisation. This is the testimony, not of a *missionary*, but of a *naturalist*—a man supposed to be without religious emotion. One day a little babe was found lying on the streets of Bristol, in very deed a foundling, without known father or mother, or friends, a little crying thing in all the wilderness of life—"Oh, it was pitiful!—near a whole cityful, home it had none." The day on which it was found, by a constable, was St. Thomas's Day; so the infant was called

by the name of the dead Thomas. The child was found in a place which lay between two bridges of the city, so was called Thomas Bridges. The little foundling was lodged in the workhouse, and brought up on the public bounty. Years came and went, and the boy, now a young man, longed to be a missionary. He offered his services to the Church Missionary Society; having special work in that part of the world which we have just described in the language of Darwin, he went out, not fearing what might befall him. The gospel is heroic; it has never been terrified. He went amongst the people, lived amongst them, heard their curious vocal tones, put them into shape, created a language for the people, interested them in these forms which he had traced with his own hand, taught them to read the forms and understand them,—every day living in peril of his life. He translated part of the story of the Saviour's life, and got the people to read it in the Yah-gan tongue. They read it, understood a little of it, were melted by it, and they wanted to read still further; and the missionary translated more of the Blessed Word into the tongue which he may be said to have created, and the people read, and were subdued and civilised and christianised; and the facts were brought before the great English naturalist, and he—honest, fearless soul, pure and noble in every instinct—instantly subscribed to the Missionary Society, one of whose agents had wrought, under God, this stupendous change. The English Admiralty had issued orders that that part of the coast was not to be approached by their ships; hearing of the change that had taken place, the orders were recalled, ships were allowed to go to visit and to trade there. What wrought that mighty, wondrous change? Let us be honest; let us be fearless. It was the Gospel of Christ. Agnosticism did not do it; Secularism did not do it; Rationalism did not do it: the heroic Cross did it; Christ did it. It was impracticable as to its mechanical arrangements, laughable, absurd, contemptible; but it was done.

“Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel,  
 Win and conquer, never cease;  
 May thy lasting, wide dominion  
 Multiply and still increase.  
 Sway thy sceptre,  
 Saviour, all the world around.”

Amen, amen!

The following is an extract from a graphic account of the destruction of Hell Gate Rock, which appeared in the *New York Times* the day after the explosion :—

Over nine acres of obstructing rock formed the barrier which was yesterday destroyed. Just 21,670 feet of tunnelling, in galleries whose floors lay from 50 to 64 feet below mean low tide, with walls from 10 to 24 feet thick between them, and supported by 467 columns of rock, each 15 feet square, had been charged with cartridges filled with explosives. In an instant the tremendous convulsion of an explosion reaching through those four miles of galleries tore the solid rocks asunder, and hurled them in broken masses into the waters of the river. And when those shattered pieces have been gathered up and taken away by the dredgers, Hell Gate will have lost its dangers, and the wrinkled front of navigation through the Sound will have been smoothed into an inviting smile. Ocean steamers will find 26 feet of good, clear water over the once treacherous bottom, and a new highway will be open for the commerce of the world.

People held their breath. Eyes were strained and riveted on the bare brown rock. There was a death-like silence. No one saw her, but over on the Astoria shore a young girl, the daughter of General Newton, was preparing to free the imprisoned forces. Nine years ago, when but a prattling babe, her tiny finger had performed the same office. Then she could not know what she did. But yesterday what did she think?

Away it flew, that viewless spark, to loose three hundred thousand chained demons buried in darkness and the cold, salt waves under the iron rocks. A deep rumble, then a dull boom, like the smothered bursting of a hundred mighty guns far away beyond the blue horizon, rolled across the yellow river. Up, up, and still up into the frightened air soared a great, ghastly, writhing wall of white and silver and grey. Fifty gigantic geysers, linked together by shivering, twisting masses of spray, soared upward, their shining pinnacles, with dome-like summits, looming like shattered floods of molten silver against the azure sky. Three magnificent monuments of solid water sprang far above the rest of the mass, the most westerly of them still rising after all else had begun to fall, till it towered nearly 200 feet in air. To east and west the waters rose, a long blinding sheet of white. Far and wide the great wall spread, defying the human eye to take in its breadth and height and thickness. The contortion of the wretched waters was like the dumb agony of some stricken thing.

For a trembling moment the sublime spectacle stood sharp against the sky, like a mighty vision of distant snow-capped mountains. Then down, down, and still down the enormous mass rushed with a wild hissing, as if ten thousand huge steam valves had been opened. The yellow waters of the river were riven and torn into immense boiling masses of white foam. Great waves, ten feet high, rolled outward. Big streaks and spots of deep brown mingled with the white and made ominous shadows under the silver lights. All around the rocks the river swirled and rolled and leaped upward, like the whirlpool of Niagara. A dazzling yellow cloud—the pent-up gases of that subterrene convulsion—spread over the spot. Then it widened and turned

to a brilliant green, then to a faint blue, and floated slowly away toward Astoria. Showers of spray fell like summer rain through the air, and returned to the river. The big hoisting apparatus over the shaft had toppled over and lay broken and smashed on its side. It had not risen into the air. Not a stone was seen to go upward. The wall of ghost-like waters was unbroken. And when the spray had sunk down, and the waters of the river, filled with brown mud, lay boiling around the site of the great explosion, there lay the old rock, torn into myriads of pieces and scattered with débris—a ragged, smoking, dun-brown mass. *Troja fuit* (Flood Rock was).

A hundred steam whistles broke into a shriek of triumph, and cheers were heard on every side. Then the oarsmen in the rowboats bowed their backs, and the steamers opened up their valves, and all hands on the water hastened to the scene of the explosion. All around the place the water was turned to a dirty brown by the upheaval of the bottom of the river. The foam was still bubbling, nearly ten minutes after the explosion. Thousands of pieces of wood, mingled with marine weeds and myriads of dead fish, killed by the shock, were floating down into the East River. Wide sheets of feathery scum, such as may be seen along the sea-shore after a gale, were lying on the surface of the water. It was all a dingy brown, tinted with the colour of the riven rock and earth. Among the foam and scum floated quantities of fine, yellowish powder, which looked like sawdust. It was the material of which the covering of the cartridges was made. As more than 75,000 of them had exploded, the quantity of this powder was not surprising.

“The survey,” says General John Newton, the engineer, “will occupy two or three weeks, and when that is completed, and the necessary advertisements can be published, the work of removing the broken rock will begin. This will occupy two or three years . . . and will probably cost \$500,000. . . . The channel is, to all intents and purposes, practically doubled, and, when the rock is removed, will be fully 1200 feet in width, as compared with 600 feet, its present dimensions. New York can get along very well without the removal of the other rocks and reefs in the Hell Gate basin, and, if necessary, a new entrance for ocean steamers is afforded. At certain stages of the tide they can come in through the new channel without any trouble whatever, and with very little trouble at any stage of the tide. The principal difficulty of Hell Gate Channel will hereafter not be on account of its width or depth, but will be due to the crowded nature of the thoroughfare. There will be fully 26 feet of water, and, when all the débris is removed, probably more.”

I reprint this account because of its suggestiveness in many spiritual directions.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would do everything according to thy will. Do thou settle everything for us, and simply entrust us with thy commandment. Not our will, but thine, be done. We would have no concern except with the dignity and sacredness of thy purpose, our hearts' desire being that thy will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. To this end do thou grant unto us daily the comforting ministry of thy Holy Spirit, that the spirit of disobedience may be cast out of us, and the spirit of loyalty may be established within us. Without thee we can do nothing; without thy Spirit we are blind, selfish, utterly ignorant, as well as helpless. We therefore cast ourselves upon God, and would be God's chosen servants, instruments in his hands, vessels to be used as he may direct or wish. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Whilst we were perverse and self-willed, we knew not what was right and what was best, and would listen to no voice, but would repel every advancing teacher. Now we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; we have seen our folly; we mourn our sin; we would now, through Jesus Christ, the Priest of the everlasting Covenant, be made one with the living God. We come always by the Cross of Christ; there we find the loving, compassionate, forgiving God; there we find law satisfied, righteousness exalted, compassion made possible, and pardon offered to the sons of guilt. Hear us, then, as we pray for more light, more truth, for deeper peace, for a sweeter consent to all the will of God. May we be enabled to say, by day and by night, in summer and in winter, on the birthday and the day of death, It is well, it is best, for God's holy will is done. Dry the tears of our sorrow, comfort us in our unspoken distresses, enter into our hearts and see what is wrong there, and if there be in us any wicked way, cast it out and make our hearts beautiful as thine own temples, holy as thine own sanctuaries. Direct us amid all perplexity, show us what is right, wise, just, and good; keep down within us all evil temper, all rebelliousness, all self-will; fill us with the spirit of charity, which is the Spirit of Christ, and under its blessed inspiration may we do our day's work and await the issue of the toil. Amen.

Joshua vi.

## DISCIPLINE.

WE have seen how, from a certain point of view, all the arrangements made for the capture of the walled city were obviously impracticable—from a military point of view,

simply absurd. We are now prepared to advance a step, and look at one or two of the almost hidden points of the narrative with a view to its illumination from incidental lights and references. Our object will be to find out how far these points are confirmed by our own experience and observation, how far they commend themselves as probably historical to our religious consciousness. The subject before us may well be described as the subject of Discipline. The men were held in severe check. The laws laid down for their marching and general conduct were laws marked by great rigour. Let us inquire whether those laws were merely arbitrary, expressing the will of one man, and limited as to their action to one locality or to one event. If we find that they were simply arbitrary, thus local, and thus limited, they can have no deep moral concern for us; if we find that they were not arbitrary, but were part of the gracious necessity of things, we may read another lesson on that sublime doctrine the continuity of man, the oneness of God, the infiniteness and unchangeableness of law.

Was it not of the nature of discipline that the men were to have arms, and yet were not to use them? Was not that a great lesson in the most difficult of all arts—the art of self-control? That the men were armed is clear from the ninth verse, which opens with the words, “And the armed men went before the priests.” Yet no arm was to be used. Had the men been without arms, they would not have felt the pressure of the discipline. Is it not a continual lesson in life that, having certain things capable of executing immediate effects, we are yet to let them fall as it were by our side, and to look in other directions, and to adopt other methods in view of deliverance and victory? It is hard to have the weapon, to see the thing that is to be done, and to know that the proposed thing could be done by the use of the weapon, and yet to allow it to remain in disuse. This is part of the continual discipline of life; this is what we are all called upon to do to-day. We do not use all our faculties; sometimes we have almost to strip ourselves of our distinctive faculties, or to let them lie in disuse, and to be doing everything by doing nothing. This is part of a deeply-planned scheme of education. The government that

has established this law in the great school of human culture moves in wide ranges, is apparently not careful about immediate effects, has contemplated the acquisition of issues upon a scheme and upon lines which transcend the impatient imagination of man. To see the stone which could be thrown at the enemy, and to know that our right hand has the power and skill to throw that stone, yet to walk past it, as if it were not discerned, is a lesson worth learning. To know that it lies easily within your power to blast an opponent with satire or bitterness which he could not endure, and yet to treat him with all courtesy and deference, is no small attainment in Christian education. To have the power, and yet not to use it—that is how we stand in the school of Christ. This is how Jesus Christ himself conducted his own life in the sight of men. He did not use all his faculties; he did not call into requisition all his resources; he was quiet when he might have been restless, calm when he might have excited a tumult which would have had all the effect of an unexpected and irresistible storm. When one offered to defend him, he said, Nay, not thus; thou dost not understand the spirit of the kingdom; thinkest thou that I could not now pray unto my Father, and he would send twelve legions of angels, which would look all these petty enemies into dismay? We must not use all our resources. We have the strength, but do not resort to the tyranny of using it. Some things are to be accomplished by submission, patience, meekness; knowing the righteousness of the cause, we await the issue with imperturbable calm. But what a lesson this is to those who are impatient! We want things done at once, and when asked as to the practicability of their accomplishment, we point to arms, and weapons, and stones, and faculties, and say, Why not put all these things instantaneously into action, and the issue is a matter of easy calculation? We admit all this with regard to military arrangements; and, so far as the proposition is kept within what may be termed abstract limits, we have no hesitation whatever in adopting it in some measure; but it is a proposition which touches every life. To be armed, and yet to be peaceful; to have weapons, and not to use them; to stand with a hand upon a gun, one discharge of which might shatter the walls of the enemy, and yet to fall down before that gun as if it were a sacred

altar, and there wait with bowed head and clasped hands the revelation of the divine will—that is religion. Anything short of that is vanity, self-will, impatience; the kind of thing which is valued by men who mistake the bubble for the river, the thunder for the lightning. Life without discipline is life without dignity.

Was it not, further, of the nature of discipline for the men to be in the midst of plenty, and yet not to touch it? Verses 18, 19 are very clear upon this point:—

“And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.”

This is the continual difficulty of life. To walk past bread that we could eat, and that we feel we need, and yet to say, We must not touch it, is a lesson not learned easily. Are we not all exposed to this very trial? Things we want lie so near. But a pane of glass between the needy man and the thing which is coveted! *Mine* and *thine* touch one another; which is mine?—which is thine? To keep men back from things which they could so easily use and so naturally appropriate, and to remain in comparative poverty in the very midst of abundance, is not easy. It cannot be a pleasant thing for the man who has not one foot of soil to be passing over acres to which he can lay no claim, and to be begging a brother of the earth to “give him leave to toil,” and for that brother to dismiss his petition with a sneer. It is at this point that our quality is tested. When we do not want the things, it is no trouble to let them alone; but when they are round about us, urging themselves upon us, and are almost clamorous in their appeal that we should appropriate them; to stand in their presence as with folded arms, and look upon them, not with contempt, but with a judgment that values them, yet with a conscience that will not appropriate them, is an attainment in religious manhood which we must not expect to secure without long training. This is part of the mystery of Providence. It enters into the whole history of human life. The person next door to you has all you want—but he *is* next door; and a deal partition an inch thick is an infinite separation where morality is concerned. What relates to property, relates to pleasure, enjoyment, gratification,—everything. When soldiers

enter the city, and have the whole place at their command, and yet behave themselves like honest men, they are greater soldiers in their abstinence than they were in their successful assault. Here it is that character discovers its quality. We are in reality what we are in critical circumstances. It is the exceptional hour that is the key to the lifetime. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We may be good in ninety-nine points in the hundred, but it is the hundredth point that tests the quality of the whole man. Herein we should be gracious and charitable in mutual judgment. Men "compound for sins they are inclined to, by damning things they have no mind to," we know well. It is easy religion; it is a game that needs no learning: the small skill of it seems to be born with us. When we see men falling before great temptations, we should sometimes reflect that they would not be temptations to us, and that therefore our virtue in their presence adds but another layer to the thick hypocrisy under which we conceal our real character. It may be better in some circumstances to be poor than to be rich; the wealth may be with poverty, and the poverty may be with wealth. There is a law of "Touch not, taste not, handle not," and in the not doing of some things, we do other things most worthily. Nor must any man take comfort from this. Who can boast that he does not care about things that partake of the nature of property and dignity, ease and honour? The careless man has no right to any comfort derived from this doctrine, but the man who is pressed by the fiend of covetousness, the man who is poisoned by the virus of that bite, the man who says in his soul, "I want it: I am almost afraid to be in its presence for fear I should seize it; God keep my fingers off it! God pity me! God save me!"—is the man who in his weakness is really strong; he has right to this comfort; abstention in his case is positive virtue; not to do, is to do. May God comfort him, and beat back the pursuing fiend, and give his child rest from torment!

Is it not in the nature of discipline to be in great excitement, and yet not to express it? Read verse 10:—

"And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout."

The instruction seems easy. Obedience under such circumstances would be most difficult. Who can keep down excitement—honest and honourable excitement? Who can say to his very voice, Be still? To shout under such circumstances as are described in the text is natural. We must not drag nature into the witness-box to testify for us when we are committing outrages upon her. People suppose that if a thing is natural, it is proper. It is proper under some circumstances, but we must have critical regard to those circumstances, because even nature may be outraged. Inborn instincts may be profaned, and the very voice of God within the soul may be mistaken, or have its touch perverted. Progress is kept back by shouting men. The whole kingdom of heaven is hindered in some instances because people will not hold their tongues. They are people who see a little part of a case, and rush out into the war as if they were fully-equipped soldiers; they are excitable, vehement, quick; they call themselves sensitive, but they are extremely disagreeable and hindering. Silence in the midst of great crises is simply invaluable, and there is a silence which is often misunderstood and attributed to timidity. People will say to public men, Why do you not speak on such and such subjects? The persons making the inquiry would speak! Of that we have no doubt! There is a time for silence. Then there is a speaking which really expresses silence. That may appear to be paradoxical, but we know it to be true. A man has spoken an hour, and yet he has in that one hour only shown how much more he could have said but for self-control, for regard of broader, deeper interests than are apparent to many who look on. We cannot have two captains in the army. There can only be one leader, if the discipline is to be complete, if the organisation is to move with the effect and precision of one soul. God knows when his children should shout, speak, pray, work; the distribution of parts, functions, duties, is with God. The one thing every Christian man has to do, is to say, Lord, I am in thine hands: make me a hewer of wood, drawer of water, captain, lowest man in the whole army; I have no voice in the matter, no wish; thy will, my God, thy will be done.

Here we clearly see that much detail must go before great results. The men must go out one day, and another day, and

even to six days, and on the seventh day rising early, "about the dawning of the day." Their impatience seems to betray itself a little. Things cannot go beyond the "seventh" day. There is no mention made of an eighth day. "Three days"—there may be a resurrection: "seven days"—Sabbath! Now the "seventh day" has come, and some very early risers are abroad. There is a faint whitening in the far east: the full day is coming:—

"And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city" (vv. 15, 16).

The order came and could not be mistaken. A soldier's blood was in its sacred fury. The critical moment had come, and Jericho must fall. So it shall be with all corruptions, all doomed institutions, all unholy adventures and enterprises, all causes that may have been useful in their day, but whose day is at an end: there must be walking round about them by armed men who will not use their weapons; there may be great excitement, but the very greatness of it necessitates its repression; there may be great loot and bounty, and much that might be appropriated, but it must be left for divine appropriation or divine distribution. It is not for us to take this work out of the Lord's hand. Be patient in the detail. It seems a long time since we began going round this awful hell. It seems to be encroaching upon us, rather than we seem to be encroaching upon its heat. Travel on! It is the fifth day; to-morrow is the sixth day; the day after is the seventh day. "The Lord shall suddenly come to his temple." "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." How quickly he falls! How useless is arithmetic in the computation of that velocity! What we have to do, is to hold on in prayer, keep to duty, and be Christ-like. As for the violent man: Put up thy sword into its sheath; we do not want such rude assistance as thine. As for those who are in great excitement, appear not unto men to fast; hide your turbulence in your heart; be cool in the very midst of tremendous excitement of soul; anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to be excited. Let it be a religious excitement, a chastened excitement, an excitement

not inspired by selfishness or the realisation of individual imaginations and proposals, but sweet, yet glowing, acquiescence in the divine will, the infinite purpose that broods over the ages and makes them in the end what it will. As for those who are longing for plunder, and booty, and prize : Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and forsake the contemplated spoil. Better be righteous than be rich ; better be morally noble than surrounded by things which were confiscated, and which you never worked for. But who can do the will of Christ ? Who can put up his sword into its sheath ? Who can refrain from appearing unto men to fast when the hunger is biting the very soul ? Who can seek first the invisible, the impalpable, the infinite, when things concrete are lying close at hand ? “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ” This man,—namely, who has the Spirit of Christ. Only he who has the Spirit of Christ can do the will of Christ. Such a man is called to the miracle of having arms, and yet not using them ; of being in the midst of plenty, and yet not touching it ; of being under intolerable excitement, and yet not expressing it. He has the Spirit of Christ who puts his sword into its sheath, saying, This is not a battle of steel ; this is not a question of one sword against another ; it is a question of eternal decree, divine righteousness, ineffable morality ; it must be left to the decision of God. Blessed be Heaven, a “ seventh day ” is promised ! It will not all be walking, waiting, toiling, suffering—only for a little while, quite a little space of time ; it will appear to be as nothing when it is all over, and the kingdom of God has come in all its white radiance and glowing summer. We shall forget the night in the joy of the morning, the cold seed-time in the joy of the harvest. Blessed Messiah, thou shalt reign ! Thou shalt have the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession ; kings shall bow down before thee, and gold and incense bring. In our impatience we say, Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Forgive the word *quickly* ! We have no ill-meaning in it ; it expresses our impatience : we pray that our impatience may never be used as a weapon with which to attack the solidity of thy throne and the beneficence of thy purpose.



## PRAYER.

WE have come to hear thy voice, O thou Saviour of the world! Thou art full of compassion. We live upon thy mercy, and therefore we are the witnesses of thy love. Jesus wept! Thou hast sanctified the tears of sorrow, and made sorrow itself a piety by thy shedding of sympathetic tears. Thou art always compassionating us. Thou dost not burn with anger against human weakness or human want; thou dost burn with anger only against human sin; and dost thou not treat human sin as it was never treated before? Dost thou not go far back into things, and show us darkness centuries old, and wickedness nearly as old as time? And dost thou not trace the progress of evil, and point out to us somewhat of the mystery of guilt? We are not individuals; we are links in a long chain. No man liveth unto himself; no man is himself alone: he is his father and his mother; he is in one life all the lives that went before him. Herein is mystery; herein is sorrow; herein is sin manifold and aggravated. We know not what to say. We ourselves are double men: when we do good, evil is present with us; the spirit says yes to God, and the flesh says no. Sometimes we wonder which answer will be uppermost at the last! The Lord help us, sending us strength daily from his sanctuary, and comforting us as he alone can comfort the struggling and weary sons of men. We bless thee for the ends we see, as well as for the beginnings we enjoy. We should be killed by an infinite monotony; but thou hast made the morning a beginning and the night a close, and by this symbol thou hast marked off all time and all the ways of men, so that no man knoweth even the day of his birth or the day of his death: he can but say, Born—died; and between these two points, what tumult urges itself, what sin defiles the little space, what prayer seeks to redeem it, and what divine love seeks to turn it into spiritual fruitfulness! Behold, we find ourselves pressed upon by mysteries, mocked by spectres, pursued by enemies; and yet, amid all this uproar and assault, we find the altar, the revelation of heaven, the Son of God, the Cross of Christ. Help us to be patient, careful, reverent; keep us steadfast in all holy faith, and may we cling to that which is good, that, having such in our hands, the rest will come, or such revelations will be granted as will cheer the desponding life. Thou hast appointed men to places as thou wilt; so far, all is good, for thou knowest what space each spirit wants, and what room each life can take up. But some men have appointed themselves to their own places, and brought disorder into the great social poem. Thou dost not crush their self-will and greed by violence, thou dost rather train men by long processes, showing light in new directions, sending deliverers from unexpected quarters, so that shepherds become captains, and mean men lead the army, and those

who were not known stand up in the infinite fame of manhood. We will put everything into thine hands; we will do nothing of ourselves; we will await the voice within, the light of the soul, the face at heaven's window beckoning us to further progress and service. We will talk of our sins to ourselves, and we only name them to thee that they may be destroyed in the confession: for Jesus Christ hath tasted death for every man. Help us to seize the truth as it is in Christ; give us clearness of vision to see horizons and not the arbitrary boundaries set up by men; give us a clear view into heaven's own blue arch, lest we mistake the roofs built by human hands for the heavens of God. The Lord grant unto us the quietness of heart which is essential to true education, the comfort of soul which enables the spirit to seize the prizes of God; and thus may we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and without knowing it of ourselves, as a merit due to ourselves, may we come into a great estate of wisdom and power. Be with all our loved ones who cannot be with us in the public sanctuary; they are with us in sympathy, in eager wonder as to what we are doing; they think they know the time of the song and of the prayer, of the sweet reading and the speech to the minds and souls of men; and they accompany us along the living line; the Lord give them comfort in solitude, hope in darkness, and a healing of soul in the time of bodily frailty. The Lord look upon the little child as if there were but one in all the universe, and so pet him with infinite love as to make him strong and wise. The Lord save young life from those who would devour it; the Lord save it from the jaws of hell. Help us to esteem one another very highly in love for Christ's sake—to live in confidence and affection, and in such union as will make the weakest feel that he enjoys the protection of the whole. God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us; and in the shining of that look we shall forget the sun. Amen

### Joshua vii.

#### HINDERED BY SIN.

AS a matter of fact, there are unexplained checks in human progress. We wonder why we do not advance more surely and quickly. Mystery comes upon us in great clouds. Every appointment is right, the direction unquestionably true, and all the conditions seem to be as they ought to be; but somehow there is an invisible wall through which we cannot pass, and over which we cannot climb: so progress comes to a standstill. Men are troubled, and can give no reason for their sorrow; they feel that they ought to be advancing, and yet progress is impossible. It is so in business. For months together the business goes swingingly; customers throng the threshold; everything that is done bears upon it the sign of prosperity. It was so easily done, that business became a kind

of play. Suddenly there is a dead stop in the machine. How is it to be accounted for? It cannot be accounted for at first sight. What a wonderful change has taken place!—everything has fallen off. The sun used to blister the windows with light, and now for days together not a gleam is seen. It is so in social honour. Men used to be able to go up and down social lines amid applause, and cordial recognition, and every symptom of genuine friendliness. What a change has taken place! Men look coldly; the very exchange of civilities is sobered down to the lowest possible point. No open fault can be found with anything, but still there is the fact that a change of social atmosphere has taken place; the climate is by no means so warm as it used to be; and men who had but a step to take to the very throne are unable to move a limb in the direction indicated by their ambition. It is also the same even in lawful enterprise. The business is morally sound, thoroughly respectable, honourable, useful; and yet it brings in no return: the principal is disheartened, the followers are all cowed, the whole organisation is out of gear and will not respond to the friendliest touch; the enterprise is practically dead. These are not matters of ancient history; they are matters of modern and immediate experience.

Such checks bring divine providence under criticism and suspicion. Even Joshua, hearing of the defeat of his people, “rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads,” and complained heavily against God (verses 6-9). This is an easy refuge for men. Providence has had to sustain many a slander. It seems the handiest of all things to blame the mysteriousness of the divine way. Who ever says, “The fault must be within the house itself; let every man in the house be examined, right away down to the youngest child in the whole home; somebody is to blame for this mystery—who is it? By inquiry, or by lot, or by some exhaustive process, let us find out the criminal and exculpate eternal Providence”? But it is easier to sit down under the supposedly comforting doctrine that all this is meant for our good; it is chastisement; it is part of the mysterious process of human education; it is God who arbitrarily says to

gold, Do not enter that house; to friends, Do not be so cordial to-day as you were yesterday; to lawful enterprise, Sit down, and terminate your progress disappointingly. That would be religious, if it were true; but whatever truth there may be in the mysteriousness of the divine action—and undoubtedly there is truth in it—we must not imagine that we ourselves are poor, innocent, guileless creatures who have done nothing to deserve the cloud or the famine. At the same time it must be remembered that the sufferer himself may not be personally guilty. Certainly Joshua was no criminal in this case; yet Joshua suffered more than any other man. *Here* we may find the mysteriousness of the divine action. Joshua had a larger capacity for suffering; he was spiritually sensitive, he was intimately allied with God, he felt as if he were representing the divinity of heaven to the heathen nations of his time; and that which others might hardly feel, would penetrate to his very soul, and throw a shadow upon the altar of his life. We suffer indirectly, yet not always so indirectly as we suppose. What is "indirectness" in this matter of suffering? Who can occupy an indirect relation to the human race? Again and again we are taught how true it is that we are one. Humanity is not a concourse of individual atoms; there is a solidarity of humanity—a holy and indissoluble unity: whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. This is the doctrine which has yet to be realised on the largest possible scale; and not until this doctrine is recognised shall we have the great problem of social inequality and hostility, struggle and suffering, permanently adjusted and determined. Human nature was never intended by its Creator to represent a battle as between the strong and the weak; humanity was meant to be a great commonwealth, a great family, a whole commune—not in some vulgar and debasing or selfish sense which may have been conceived here and there, but on a scale and according to an inspiration truly and eternally divine. The leader was hindered by the follower; in other words, Joshua was kept back by Achan—a man whose name had to be sought out; reference had to be made to the register to find who the man was, and not until after considerable searching was it found that he was "Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the

son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah." Our hindrances are often in obscurity, among the shadows of the hardily-remembered past. In every sense is this true. Many an appetite for which we are blamed was set burning within us by a man who has been dead five hundred years. We must view this whole subject therefore in high light and within broad spaces. Christ is hindered by his followers. The Son of God is kept back by some criminal unknown to fame. That criminal misrepresents Christ, travesties the holy character, plays impiously with the ineffable morality; and thus Christ in the very heavens is kept out of his throne by men who have no name, by obscure Achans, by sinners who within their own circle are exposing the Saviour to continual shame.

What, then, was to be done? Divine partiality was to be shown. Here comes a great problem in theology, What direction does the partiality of God always take? The doctrine is that the partiality of God is not for persons, but for character. "Therefore," reads the twelfth verse, which sums up the logic of the divine argument :—

"Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

This is righteous partiality. We must universally approve it. We are not affronted by this partiality as if it were arbitrary—the mere action of spiritual taste directed to a discrimination of persons on account of some incidental feature or hue of colour. The universe, hearing this judgment, must say, Content. This is necessary partiality, as well as righteous. The necessity comes out of the nature of God: the holy One will not identify himself with unholy people and unholy purposes. This is not an action of mere virtue, as it is socially understood and limited; it is the very necessity of God: he cannot touch "the accursed thing;" he cannot smile upon fraud; he will not even audit the books which are written by a thievish hand; he will only burn them with unquenchable fire. Having confidence in God, we are at peace. The army does not move because of human inspiration or military ambition: the army moves because God reigns, and God knows every soldier and the action of the whole army, and

from the heavens he troubles the earth when anything occurs that offends his purity. O, thou little, sin-loving earth! God's eye is upon thee, and he will pain thee, and vex thee, and hinder thee, until exasperation becomes agony, unless thou repent and forsake thy sins.

A new light is thus thrown upon sovereignty and God's elective laws. God elects righteousness, pureness, simplicity, nobleness. He will forsake Israel, if Israel forsake him. He will tear the covenant into pieces, and put the rags of it into heathen hands, that pagans may laugh at Israel dispossessed, rather than associate himself with a mere name, or carry out any covenant that is supposed to be conventionally binding. There is nothing binding upon God but character. Love God, and all the rest will follow; and by "the rest," we mean beauty of character, sweetness of soul, nobleness of conduct. The Lord gives the reason why we are stopped. We must go to Heaven to find out why we are not making more money, more progress, more solidity of position. We must ask heaven to explain how it is that it is not with us as it used to be in the olden time—the sweet, bright days of old, when roses sprang up in our foot-prints, and when rivers of water refreshed the desert; days when, before we began to pray in words, we had the answer stored in our hearts; brave days of old, memorable days of the Son of man upon the earth—Sabbath days. So rigid inquiry must be made into the cause or origin of failure.

Joshua, accepting the divine direction, arranged for this inquiry:—

"In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: [in the morning of scrutiny, that long-delayed day, to-morrow morning] and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man" (v. 14).

We must not attempt to teach the Lord how to scrutinise. All our examinations and inquests are modelled upon divine lines. There can be no escape. Whilst the whole tribe is in judgment, we may hope not to be detected; whilst the household is all there, we may think one will be nothing in a multitude: but when it comes to a question of "man by man," the quarters are very

close, and the result is inevitable. Why should we not anticipate the divine judgment by a sober and faithful judgment of our own? We can begin the scrutiny. We can write out a list of questions by which to cross-examine ourselves. Our eloquence would be punctuated by many an accusation. The questions would become spears; the words would be sharp as darts that strike through the liver. Have I broken a vow? My arm, once so strong, can hardly extend itself so as to allow its shadow to be thrown. Why? I have not violated any laws of health, yet my very muscle is flaccid and the bones are melted. Have I broken a vow? Let me read the past I will remind myself of myself. Have all the lines been carried out? Who can stand before the burning question? Dare I then lift a face of simulated innocence to heaven and say, This is thy rod, this is thy chastisement, this is thy doing, O God of the universe, and I must bear thy discipline as best thy grace may sustain me? That would be hypocrisy. Better keep to the truth known by the consciousness within. Have I kept back part of the price? It is so hard to give the whole,—can I not be let off by giving, say, most of what I sold the land for? To a certain extent I may, if I say it is only so much and only a large proportion. But have I not given it as if I were giving it all? If so, I must not turn eyes to heaven that counterfeit the aspect of injured innocence or delayed and affrighted righteousness. The money that I have kept back will burn my hand, and the seething of the blood shall be heard as an accusation against me. “When thou vowest a vow unto the Lord, defer not to pay it.” Have I fallen before a lewer motive? Once the motive approached purity: the thought was good, the intention was healthy; there was a genuineness about the whole action of the soul that almost challenged scrutiny and criticism. Has the motive changed? If the spiritual motive has changed, the spiritual ambition has gone down along with it, and the whole quality of the life-work partakes of the deterioration. When a man searches himself with questions in this way, he renders unnecessary the formal judgment of God, as if that judgment were required to dissolve a mystery. Let a man examine himself. Let every one be unsparing with his own life. When a man tells lies to himself, he cannot speak the truth to anybody else. There must be scrutiny and there must be penalty.

Achan was detected. Achan told the tale of fraud, and Joshua executed the judgment of Heaven. In those days the law maintained its sovereignty. Joshua himself would have been ground to pieces by it as certainly as the obscurest man in all the host. "God spared not the angels that sinned." He would grind the stars to powder, were they conscious, and did they sin against his throne. Not a planet but God can spare, if the planet has stained the universe. Do not imagine that men are held up because they are great, distinguished, sons of the morning, and have high social stewardship to maintain and justify. Be the man who he may, he goes down before the divine judgment. Achan, the son of Zerah, was taken, "and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had," and judgment fell upon him: "all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire . . . and they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day" (vv. 24-26). There is no heap big enough to hide the hinderer of the kingdom of heaven. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Sin is not to be apologised for, excused, compromised, allowed for; it must be extirpated, dragged out—every root and fibre; and not until that eradication has been completed can the kingdom go on, fair as the heavenly lights and terrible as a bannered army.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast set the day and the night closely together; the summer and the winter follow quickly. Behold, thou art always teaching us by things which differ from one another, so that by their contrast we may be brought to thoughtfulness and religious wonder. Life and death seem to go hand in hand: the tomb is in the garden. We are shocked by these conjunctions; we do not understand these contrasts: but thou wilt give unto us wisdom: then we shall see all their meaning and be thankful for their instruction, and shall be the better for looking into things contrary to all beauty and light and loveliness. What must thine own eyes behold! We ourselves see things so contrary to one another; yet we see hardly anything: what we look at is a transient vision. We do not know what thou seest, thou who knowest where the chamber of imagery is, thou who seest all heaven and all hell. Enable us to know that, notwithstanding these things, there is but one throne, one Lord, one Eternal Sovereign, righteous, wise, full of compassion, accepting the death of the Cross, rising to the throne of the universe. May we fix our minds upon these ultimate truths, which yet are first truths, embracing all other truths and making life noble even to sublimity. Reign thou whose right it is! reign, O Christ, until thine enemies are made thy footstool! Thou shalt have the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. We long to behold the light of that glad day. Others have been yearning to see it. If thou hast inflicted disappointment upon the generations, it is because thou seest what they could not behold, and understandest what was beyond their comprehension. We leave everything in thy hands: thou knowest what is right and best; thou dost keep the time of the universe; thou wilt come in thine own way and at thine own hour, and when we see thy coming and know thy presence, we shall bless thee even for the delay. Let thy mercy multiply itself towards us: let it be tender mercy; let thy kindness be loving kindness, so that it may not press upon us unduly, but may have sympathy with us, and patience with us, the very mercy of mercy, the very kindness of kindness. Amid all visions show us the blessed Cross of Christ, full of deepest meaning, pregnant with infinite love, the very door of pardon and of heaven. Amen.

## Joshua vii.

### CURIOUS CONJUNCTIONS.

**A** PART from the main course of this narrative, there are some conjunctions of names which are full of interest, and full also of spiritual instruction and comfort. We have to go in

search of some beautiful things : they do not always lie upon the broad and open surface. The loveliest parts of a country are not always seen by travellers who keep on the highway : they lie apart, they have to be sought for ; there are little dells, waterfalls, tarns, and natural gardens which only the pedestrian can see, and he only as the result of patient inquiry. It is so with the Scriptures. Almost every verse has its hidden jewel. We read perhaps too rapidly, or we have come under the mischievous operation of a familiarity which supposes it knows all about the Bible. "All about the Bible" it is impossible for any finite intellect to know. The deepest and most continuous readers of the holy record rise from their last perusal to assure us that they have hardly begun to spell out the initial meaning of God's written revelation.

What conjunction, then, strikes us first in reading this exciting narrative ? There is a remarkable one in the second verse :—"Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai"—where is that ?—"which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Bethel." The striking conjunction is in these two names—"Beth-aven" and "Bethel." For a long time they were supposed to be different names of the same place, but the latest and highest authorities have determined them to be two distinct places. Coming before us in these strange syllables, many may not be able to see the contrast or feel its force. "Beth-aven" means, "house of vanity," "house of idols ;" "Bethel" means, "house of God." Now read :—"Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, the house of vanity, on the east side of Bethel, the house of God." So we find it all through life. Contrarities face us every day, and make us wonder why they should be. It is possible to draw two totally different pictures of society, each of which shall be exactly done, and neither of which shall represent the reality of the whole case. There are people so constituted that they can see but in one direction : they can see only that which is good ; they multiply the sanctuary into a church which covers the whole earth, and they say, The millennium has come, if not in its fulness of splendour, yet in a dawn about which there can be no mistake ; they listen to the reports of gracious charity ; they hear the song of the worshipping multitude ; they see what is being done on the right hand and on the left—all of which is good, beneficent,

beautiful ; and they say, looking at these things alone, This is the Sabbath of the world, the great rest-period of time ; now is the day of God's salvation. There are others who can only see the darkness, the misery, the sin, and the sorrow—the fatal wound ; and they say, Churches have failed, ministries have come to nothing, evangels have sounded their silver trumpets and delivered their sweet messages, and all their sounding has died upon the air and nothing is left but emptiness. Neither of these statements, taken as a whole statement, is correct ; we must put them together if we would really understand the exact position of the world. But there are people who will not look upon Beth-aven—the house of vanity, the house of idols. They are singularly constituted—at least, in the sense that they will not look upon evil or believe in its existence. When evil is described, they follow the description with the criticism that it is an exaggeration. They are hopeful, buoyant, generous themselves, and most pure, and therefore they will not believe in the so-called revelations of the perdition of modern civilisation. There are others who will only look upon that side. The point to be kept in view is that there *are* two sides, and they must both be looked at fearlessly in a spirit of righteousness, with an intention to ascertain the truth, abide by righteous consequences, and make life-long reparation for life-long unrighteousness. The timid people who will not look upon Beth-aven are often most exasperating. Nothing can persuade them to look into certain cases : they prefer not to be shocked ; they pass Beth-aven in haste, and speed to the house of God. We recognise their goodness in a measure, and the sweetness of their disposition generally, but we must not take the key-note of progress and administration from people who are oppressed with such timidity. Beth-aven exists in every age, in every civilised land ; it stands next door to the house of God, and we must face the fact and all its consequences. Enter into what city we may, there is the house of wealth, and there is the hovel of poverty just behind. The city has its great thoroughfares aflame with gas, brilliant with decoration, astir with all the signs of modern activity and progress ; but, alas ! the city has its back streets, its out-of-the-way places ;—some of us dare not go through such portions of the city,—what wonder if we only see thoroughfare life, and say,

Behold the signs of wealth, and splendour, and power; this is the culmination of civilising influence? Who reflects that there are quarters in every metropolis in Europe into which decency dare not enter, and purity itself, except associated with the highest moral strength, shudders to think of? We find also in this city the house of piety and the house of profanity. How we deprive ourselves of many a stimulus to fuller labour by concealing from ourselves that there is a house of profanity! We do not destroy the house by ignoring it. We bless God that there are some brave spirits who do not ignore the existence of the house of profanity, but who go boldly up to it, and ask to walk through it, and leave a message to its owner, and ask its inhabitants to discuss great questions and submit themselves to the influence of new atmospheres. These are the apostles of the time—the brave pioneers of heaven's own King; they should be supported, honoured, and sustained by persons who have not their moral nerve or their spiritual dauntlessness. All this we may admit and yet forget that Beth-aven and Bethel are in the same man. Every man would seem to be two men. What contrasts there are in our own personal character! On one side how generous, noble, trustful, philanthropic; almost grand to a heroic point in our impulses and propositions and activities; and yet presently we come upon a vein of the purest selfishness that ever debased a character. We have public benevolence and private self-will: we will do anything for the masses, we begrudge everything expended upon our own family. Or contrariwise: the little personal house may have everything—every door-panel a picture, every window a garden, every floor a bed of flowers; but we care nothing for those who are outside, wasting, suffering, dying, hastening, for aught we know, to all the horrors of perdition. Let every man examine his own character, and he will be struck with the contrasts which it presents—the singular and instructive conjunctions which come together even in the individual spirit. One self speaks up in the name of right; another self says, Do not speak so loudly. Everything depends upon the self which is uppermost at the time. It is perfectly possible in a moral sense for the same fountain to pour sweet waters and bitter. The apostle asks the question in a sense which was not intended to exclude that possibility. There does not live a Christian man

who is not conscious of this dual movement in his own soul: within himself he says, I know not what to do; when I would do good, evil is present with me; when I would pray, the evil spirit will not allow me; when I would sing, I am suddenly choked; when I would give, my hand seems smitten and it falls by my side in helplessness. So everywhere the seeing eye beholds Beth-aven, the house of vanity, Bethel, the house of God; and the Christian teacher wants in some way to bring the influence of the latter to bear upon the action of the former.

What a curious conjunction is found in verse 24:—"Achan the son of Zerah." This does not strike us as a conjunction or contrast in English reading. "Achan" means "trouble;" "Zerah" means "the rising of light." "Achan the son of Zerah"—not immediately, for Achan was "the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah." But the division is most startling as seen in this twenty-fourth verse:—Achan—trouble; Zerah—the rising of light! How family histories vary! A praying father has a blaspheming son. The honestest man in the city lives to see his first-born expatriated as a felon. Heredity in virtue is exploded. Good men have not good sons by necessity. It is easy and pleasant talking to say, Given a good stock, and the branches will all be right; given an excellent father and mother, and the children need not be much looked after; they will come up in the way of righteousness and be ornaments in society. That sophism has been exploded in countless tragical instances. Zerah, representing the rising of light—quite a poetical name; the horizon widens as he gazes upon it, all heaven heightens as he looks the prayerful look towards its sublimity; how little he thinks that presently there will arise in his family a man who will be stoned to death as a thief! He could not help that. Abel is not responsible for Cain. We do not understand the working of many a mystery in Providence. Things are not to be explained by one reference, or two: the explanation lies far back in history. The dead live. Reproduction accompanies development. We cannot tell what virus stained our blood. But, on the other hand, heredity in vice is not fated. The blaspheming father has a praying son. The man who was never known for his goodness has a child who is a philanthropist, a missionary,—who dies with Christ

upon the cross, and counts the crucifixion coronation. So the law does not operate in one direction only: it is an impartial and comprehensive law. Let no man say, I am fated to do thus, and so. It would be a wicked criticism upon Providence. The answer is in every man's soul; and who does not know that he could if he chose be a better man, a larger man altogether? Let the soul itself answer the question in its own identity and in the solemnity of its own oath.

What a beautiful conjunction is found in verse 26, when connected with another passage of Scripture in a later book! In the twenty-sixth verse are these words:—"Wherefore the name of that place was called, the valley of Achor, unto this day"—that is, the "valley of trouble." The valley of Achor is said to be a pass leading from Gilgal towards the centre of the country, or, as it might be represented, from Jericho to Jerusalem,—that is, from the city of destruction to the city of God. Remember that "Achor" means what Achan also means, namely, *trouble*. Now read Hosea ii. 15, and see what is meant by the beauty of the conjunction:—"And I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope"—I will make the valley of trouble the door of hope. See the great power of God! He can accomplish even this miracle. "Thy dead men shall live." The desert shall blossom as the rose, and the wilderness shall become as a fruitful field. Where thou didst weep, thou shalt laugh in godly triumph; where thou didst fall, thou shalt rise: affliction shall become an altar; tears shall be turned into telescopes through which thou shalt see still further into the heights of God's astronomy—the mystery of heaven's blazing glories. God will not have valleys of trouble left in his earth. It is the purpose of Heaven to cleanse out all the stains and taints of sin and all the footprints of misery, and to grow a flower where poison grew before. "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope;" she will hope the more when she remembers the trouble. Our afflictions add to our enjoyments when sanctified and turned to their highest uses. Chastening lifts up victory to higher, if soberer, triumph. It is the contrast that arrests the soul. Had all been garden-land flowers, singing birds, summer air, we should not have known want or pain,

nor should we have been surprised by new revelations of God's goodness. We see the stars in the darkness. We know where home is, and think of it as the evening closes in. We left the house in the morning, it may have been thoughtlessly or carelessly, without highly-accented recognition of its security and plentifulness; but as the shadows gathered, and the wind grew colder, and people rose from labour and went away from the field, we too thought of home. The light scattered us, the darkness brought us together! "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope;" the background shall be adapted to the picture: she shall see the light thrown upon the darkness, and be astonished with great amazement when she beholds what can be done in unexpected or forsaken places. Our own experience confirms this. We know this sweet passage to be quite true. We are the better for the visit to the churchyard. We are the richer for the grave; it is to us a freehold worth more than a thousand acres, nay, it consecrates all other acres: it touches the whole land with religious suggestiveness and solemnity. Now we are the better and richer for the loss. Now we feel that we would not forego the advantages of the great sorrow. Let us find in our own experience a commentary upon Holy Scripture. If the Bible is a book far outside of us, without any vital relation to what we know and feel and handle, what wonder if it should fall into desuetude or become almost contemptuously neglected? But finding in the Bible our own history, a mirror in which we can see ourselves, reading in the Bible the universal language and not a provincial dialect, feeling that it touches life at every point, who can wonder if it should be the man of our counsel, the chief book in the house, our chart at sea, our confidence on land? Let us say again and again to ourselves, as if reciting heaven's own poetry, "I will make the valley of Achor a door of hope." The very repetition of such words discovers their music. Say it in your distresses, repeat it in the snowy winter-time, rehearse it when the fig tree doth not blossom, whisper it to your souls on the way to the graveyard; and in the time of personal despondency, of which you can only speak with reluctance even to your dearest friend, hold this soliloquy, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I

shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." The utterance of that word will break the spell of misery. To speak such a sentence to the soul will be to break the fetters which bind it in unholy and humiliating bondage. I will make the valley of Achor a door of hope. So though to-day we be in trouble and darkness and distress, wait awhile, and the valley shall be a door, and the door when it springs back will open heaven.

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### SELECTED NOTES.

"*The valley of Achor for a door of hope*" (Hosea ii. 15).—The Easterns prefer a figure that is suggestive but at the same time hazy and indistinct, and this passage belongs to such a class. The Valley of Achor runs up from Gilgal towards Bethel. There Achan was stoned, and the divine indignation removed. The word *Achor* means *trouble, affliction*; and it is just possible that from it we get our word *ache*. Thus the valley of affliction was the door through which Israel first entered the land of Canaan. And so again, by Hosea, the Lord promised to lead Israel to peace and rest through the valley of trouble. The very indistinctness makes this mode of speaking the more suggestive.

"*Achan . . . was taken*" (v. 18).—When Jericho was taken and devoted to destruction, Achan fell under the temptation of secreting an ingot of gold, a quantity of silver, and a costly Babylonish garment, which he buried in his tent, deeming that his sin was hid. For this which, as a violation of a vow made by the nation as one body, had involved the whole nation in his guilt, the Israelites were defeated with serious loss, in their first attack upon Ai; and as Joshua was well assured that this humiliation was designed as the punishment of a crime which had incupated the whole people, he took immediate measures to discover the criminal. As in other cases, the matter was referred to the Lord by the lot, and the lot ultimately indicated the actual criminal. The conscience-stricken offender then confessed his crime to Joshua; and his confession being verified by the production of his ill-gotten treasure, the people, actuated by the strong impulse with which men tear up, root and branch, a polluted thing, hurried away not only Achan but his tent, his goods, his spoil, his cattle, his children, to the valley (afterwards called) of Achor, north of Jericho, where they stoned him, and all that belonged to him; after which the whole was consumed with fire, and a cairn of stones raised over the ashes. The severity of this act, as regards the *family* of Achan, has provoked some remark. Instead of vindicating it, as is generally done, by the allegation that the members of Achan's family were probably accessories to his crime after the fact, we prefer the supposition that they were included in the doom by one of those sudden impulses of indiscriminate popular vengeance to which the Jewish people were exceedingly prone, and which, in this case, it would not have been in the power of Joshua to control by any authority which he could under such circumstances exercise. It is admitted that this is no more than a conjecture: but as such it is at least worth as much as, and assumes considerably less than, the conjectures which have been offered by others.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we ask for a clean heart and a right spirit, an obedient will, an unquestioning, restful faith. We would say the Lord's prayer, Not my will, but thine, be done. Who but the Lord could say this to thee? We can repeat the words; we can feel after the sentiment as blind men grope for what they want, but we cannot pray the prayer in all the fulness of its meaning, because of the infirmities which disable us, and because of the temptations which assail and weaken the soul. What we do not understand is God's will. If we knew that, we should wish it to be done. But we do not know it; we misunderstand it; we make it narrow, and empty it of all divinest thought and meaning: so how can we pray that it should be done? But even this miracle thou canst work within us; thou canst reveal thy will to our hearts, and make us know how good it is, how necessarily wise and beneficent, righteous and pitiful. Lord, do this great thing for us, and so deliver us from ourselves, and lead us into thy personality, that we may live and move and have our being in God, and be conscious of no other life, but have all the triumph and sense of security rising from the sure consciousness that we are in the Living One. We are blind, and would see afar off. Thou seest the end from the beginning. We mistake all things; we misplace them; we cannot follow all the drift of their meaning, or appreciate all the colour of their suggestion; we are poor, inapt scholars in the great school. Give us rest from ourselves by giving us deeper peace in God. Thus would we come to the Lord's prayer, which lay so near the Lord's Cross. If we can pray this prayer, the bitterness of death will be past, and the Cross we shall despise as to its shame. Help us to carry life's burdens with some measure of cheerfulness, and enable us to say, This also cometh forth from the Lord, even this great cross, this dark cloud, this large loss, this weakening infirmity. Thus we shall count the stones upon the road as jewels; the Cross will be a way to the crown; and all the discipline of life will have as its promise an exceeding great reward. As for our sin, we remember it only to mourn it, and we bring it to the Cross, and we nail it there: there it is borne away by the Lamb of God, in whom is our heart's trust, and from whom is our daily expectation. Love us every one, throw thine arms more closely and tenderly around us, give us a feeling of security, work within us a godly discontent with everything that is less than ourselves, and create in us that fierce hunger which only the infinite can satisfy. Pity us in our weaknesses and reckon not our infirmities against us until they aggravate thy righteousness and provoke thy law, and come over the mountain of our sin as one who travelleth in haste, and destroy the mountain as thou dost touch it in the passage. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray. Until he came, our prayers were poor, and narrow, and selfish; but he being in our hearts, by the Spirit, we can pray to have no will: we can say, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## Joshua vii. 18.

“And Achan . . . was taken.”

## ACHAN A REPRESENTATIVE MAN.

THERE is nothing old in these words. Achan is “taken” every day. Achan is sure to be “taken.” If we are practising the policy of Achan, the fate of Achan we can never avert; the detail will be different—the mere map and plan—but the issue will be the same, because God’s throne is the same, and there is no change in his righteousness. So this is not ancient history, but a line taken out of this day’s record—a line we would gladly not read; but why should we spoil our schooling because we are eclectic, reading a line here and there just as it may please us, instead of reading straight through, solemnly, minutely, and fearlessly? We do not like to look into perdition—we are afraid of being scorched! But whatever we find upon the way of life and in the discipline of life, it will be well to look at steadfastly and reverently, and ask God for that apt mind and interpreting faculty which can seize meanings and secure them and hold them as spiritual riches.

What a representative man is Achan! Does he not represent those, for example, who are continually taking great risks? What a life some men lead! They are always on the brink; an unforeseen pebble might topple them over in a moment. There is a kind of moral speculativeness about them. Their psychology is difficult to understand. They will take chances, they will run into dangerous places; their happiness appears to consist in the number and the quality of the risks they accept. It was very unlikely that any man would escape who took such a risk as Achan took. But we must not lightly dismiss the people who are taking risks. It would be easy to blame them, easy to chastise them with stinging words and bitter and just reproaches; but there is something in the making of a man: we cannot account for it; there is a tincture in the blood. Some men would seem to be almost born to risks and dangers, every laugh a concealment, every joke a new hypocrisy, every appearance of guilelessness an attainment in infernal skill. There is but a step between them and death. The partition which keeps

them from the prison and the gallows is almost transparent ; a wind of the gentlest kind might blow it down. What an excited life ! and not the less excited that it appears to be measured and quiet ; every tone is a calculation ; the whole life is constructed upon dramatic and poetic lines ; not a posture that is not also a confession, or an evasion, or a suggestion, if we had those keen eyes which can see below surfaces into meanings and purposes.

But the mystery of it is that Achan represents also men who have no need to take risks. They have plenty ; they have sweet homes ; they have gardens rich with all kinds of flowers ; and the very air is made musical by the birds which sing in it. They need not go out of their own doors for a single pleasure : their table is bounteously spread ; every corner of the house is built upon a rock, and every voice in the house is charged with some musical message. Yet they covet just a little more : it is only one acre to complete the estate ; it is only one thousand pounds more to make the odd figure into an even one—then all will go rhythmically in the matter of finance and property ; it is only one more slave that is needed, and then the enjoyment will be sphered off into completeness, and will roll and shine among a thousand globes, and be a source of daily joy. If they had need, there would be some excuse. When David ate the shewbread he was excused because of his hunger. So men may do many desperate things, and be excused in some degree for doing them, because of biting hunger and void necessity and tremendous urgency of circumstances. These are not defences, complete replies to righteous impeachments, but they may be construed into extenuations, and the just magistrate may take note of them when he has to pronounce his sentence ; they may throw a sob into the judge's speech ; they may be the means of suggesting even to the criminal that his punishment has mercy mingled with it. But when men have no need to take risks, and yet take them, it becomes a wonder whether they are so fated, crushed down by Heaven to do this thing, or whether they have attained a mental and moral perversity absolutely beyond the range of any chaste imagination. These things show us the critical nature of life, the awful difficulty of living, and the tremendous pressure that is put upon some men in certain directions. We must be charitable in all our judgments, especially

charitable towards those who are young and inexperienced, who do not understand the mischief they are beginning; and something must be set down to an imagination too buoyant to bow before the sober dictates of reason. Then allowance must also be made for men of a certain descent. We carry our fathers with us. We have seen again and again in these studies that no man liveth unto himself, and that no man is himself only. What can some men do who were born in darkness, born in slavery, born just outside hell; who have had no friends, no education, no chance in life, and who seem to think—and not unreasonably—that life is a battle in which the strongest wins, a race which is given to the swiftest, and that sometimes strength must be outwitted by cunning, and sometimes swiftness must be deceived by putting the time forward or backward so as to baffle calculation? Thank God we are not judges. We stand in the same dock: let God be judge.

Achan committed a sin which is common to us all, in so far that he felt it extremely difficult to subordinate the personal to the communal. He might have said—and in so saying he would have talked good, round English,—What can a wedge of gold matter in all this great heap of wealth? What is the difference one Babylonish garment more or less? Who will be the worse for my taking it? Nobody need know. I want a relic of this event, I want a keepsake; this has been a very wonderful miracle, and I want to keep in my house some memorial of it; I could turn these things into good, moral uses: I could preach sermons upon them, I could derive lessons from them. It cannot make any difference where thousands of men are concerned if I take one wedge of gold, two hundred shekels of silver, and a goodly Babylonish garment—they are all but a handful, and who will miss them? In fact, there will be no reckoning; things in connection with a battle are done so tumultuously and so irregularly that none will ever think of looking up such a handful of spoil as I may seize. That is the exaggeration of individualism; that is the lie which man is always telling to himself. It is the falsehood which enables him to cheat the body politic:—What can it matter if I do not vote? There are thousands of people who want to vote, let them enjoy themselves, and I will take mine ease. What can it matter if I do not keep the laws of the

company—the municipal or other company? The great majority of the neighbours will keep them, and as for any little infraction of them of which I may be guilty, it is mere pedantry to remark upon it. Who cares for the body politic—the body corporate? We are being taught to respect that so-called abstraction; but the lesson is a very difficult one to learn. What seems to belong to everybody, belongs to nobody. When shall we come to understand fully that there is a corporate humanity, a public virtue, a body politic, with its responsibilities, laws, duties,—a great training-school in which individualism is subordinated to the commonwealth? We talk to-day in this matter the language of Achan. Let him who is not guilty say so to himself, for no other hearer could well believe him.

Does not Achan represent those who create unnecessary mysteries in the course of divine Providence? It is the concealed man who could explain everything. It is the thief behind the screen who could relieve all our wonder, perplexity, and distress. We have to search him out by circumstantial evidence. If he would stand up and say, "Guilty!" he would relieve our minds of many a distressing thought even about the divine government. We wonder why the people are delayed, why the battle goes the wrong way, why the heathen pursues the chosen man, and beats him down, and scorns his assaults. We speak of God's mysterious way. It is a mistake on our part. The silent man, skulking behind the arras, could explain the whole affair, and relieve divine Providence of many a wonder which grows quickly into suspicion or distrust. There is such a thing, however, as circumstantial evidence: point after point is established, link after link is forged and added, and we watch the chain getting round a man, closing in upon him, beginning at the foot and coiling upwards until it strangles him! That is not a picture in romance; that is the reallest thing in all human affairs. There is a providence of time, circumstance, and the relation of the one to the other. Now the man escapes, and now he is swiftly brought back; at this moment circumstances favour him, and presently they close in upon him with tremendous certainty and awful pressure. So we have bye-circumstances, often so difficult to piece together and put into any meaning shape, to discover crimes which should be confessed openly, and the confession of

which would relieve the religious consciousness of men from many an unhappy and unwelcome thought about divine Providence. There can be no escape! The very stones of the field will fight against the criminal; the light will shine at the wrong time. The detection of God is unerring. We say this, but do not realise it. If we could realise it we should begin to consider, and repent, and return.

Look at the case in one or two remarkable aspects. Consider Achan, for example, as a *solitary* sinner. He was the only man in the host who had disobeyed the orders that were given. Only one! It is therefore incredible. It cannot be that one man would stand apart from the whole host, the solitary criminal. It is excusable, if not incredible. He was the only one. Why judge him? Why arrest a whole army on account of one traitor? Or if it is neither incredible nor excusable, it is trifling. Nothing smaller could have occurred. Let the host go on. So man would say. God will not have it so. He does not measure by our scale. One sin is a thousand. One uplifted arm is a universe in rebellion. How many sins has a man to commit before he is a sinner? God will not allow us to alter the relation of things. It is SIN that is abominable to him—not a thousand sins; it is the spirit—not the number of actions. This is the rule of the divine judgment, and this is the explanation of the divine movement in a redemptive and judicial direction.

Think of Achan as a *detected* sinner. For a time there was no prospect of the man being found out. But God has methods of sifting which we do not know of. He himself will say how the sifting process is to be conducted: the tribe, the house, the family, the man! To see the judgment coming, to see it a day nearer, to see it within an hour, to feel the inward fire burning into unquenchable self-accusation, to know that any one moment the arresting hand may fall,—that is punishment, that is everlasting punishment. Why this discussion about everlasting punishment? All punishment is everlasting. We have made the word "everlasting" the principal word in the argument, whereas it is merely incidental. The abiding word is *punishment*. And no punishment is for a day. A man once condemned has to bear the results of that condemnation for ever. The young

man commits a crime, and is punished fifty years after; a stone will be thrown at him on that very account. Only God can deal with this great mystery. The great evangelical theology says that it is possible now for God to be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly by the great mystery of sacrifice—the shedding of atoning blood. But it needed God to work the miracle. Nature never worked it. Conscience never worked it. Law never thought of it. This is God's doing, in love, in pity, in the justice which is inspired by compassion.

Then look at Achan as a *confessing* sinner. He did confess his sin, but not until he was discovered. And the confession was as selfish as the sin. That is a difficulty we must face. A man's religion may be the only thing really against him. Beware of irreligious religion! That is the explanation of your imprecatory psalms. That is the explanation of Pharisaism. That is the explanation of narrow and unworthy views of Providence and heaven. Men may pray selfishly, believe selfishly, attend to religious ordinances selfishly, confess their sin selfishly,—make an investment of their tears, and aggravate their original offence by an awful hypocrisy.

The picture of Achan as a *punished* sinner is appalling. Who punished the sinful man? The answer to that inquiry is given in the twenty-fifth verse, and is full of saddest, yet noblest meaning. Who punished the thief? "All Israel stoned him with stones,"—not one infuriated man, not one particularly interested individual, but "all Israel." The punishment is social. It is the universe that digs hell—the all rising against the one. A great mystery is here, yet a most holy and beautiful point. Society punishes the bad man. When the magistrate pronounces sentence, he does not speak in his own name: he is a representative man; he is Society delivering sentence upon the evil-doer. So it will be at last. There will be no one to arise and vindicate the sinner, no volunteer advocate, no man so left to himself as to stand up and say, "I defend the prisoner at the bar." Then things will be seen in their reality. Sin will be measured by the righteous standard, judgment will be meted by the righteous Ruler; and the sinner shall be stoned by the universe, buried by the universe, forgotten by the universe. My soul, come not thou into that secret!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, feed us with the bread sent down from heaven! This is the true bread, even thy Son Jesus Christ. He called himself the Bread of Life. He gave his flesh for us, and his blood, in mysterious and most holy sacrifice. He could not tell us all he had to tell because of our want of capacity and sympathy and nurture in the Lord; but we begin now to see somewhat of his deep meaning. He laid up words which time would explain: he gave hints which the ages would bring to perfectness of meaning. Now we hear the rising music; it sounds far off, a distant bell, but the sound thereof will grow, and all nature shall answer it, and all hearts shall be made glad by it, and heaven and earth shall melt into one another. We draw around thy Son Jesus, for he has the words of eternal life, and he speaks them as thou thyself wouldst speak them, with such fulness and depth and tenderness that our hearts know them to be true, and say, Of a truth this is a voice from heaven, a gospel from eternity. If we say otherwise, we condemn ourselves, and the truth is not in us. When we are under proper exultation of spirit we answer Christ in his own tongue: for we are taught of God, and being under the direction of the Spirit we understand Christ's language and speak it like our mother-tongue. Reveal to us the unsearchable riches of thy Son. Show us that if we are poor, it is not because the wealth of heaven has not been offered to us. If we are sitting in darkness, it is because we have wilfully shut our eyes. If our souls are not alive with God, it is because we have chosen death. Multiply thy grace unto us according to the need of the hour. Sometimes it is an hour of blackness, yea, of sevenfold night, of darkness gathered and heaped up into gloom that cannot be borne. Sometimes it is an hour of delight, of genial sunshine, of summer hopefulness; and then we think we shall never die, and wonder why we were ever sad. Save us even in hours of exultation, lest we become heedless and forget the littleness of our own strength. Visit us in the house and make the four corners thereof as four lamps, and the table thereof as a board of sacrament, and the fire thereof like an altar kindled from above; thus shall the house be a delightful place, full of holiest memories, enriched with noblest associations, every footprint marking a progress, every night a rest, every morning a grander vow. The Lord comfort us in sorrow, in affliction, in loss, in trial. Visit our dear ones in the sick-room and in the places of waiting, in the sanctuary of distress and in the places of wonder, sore expectancy, that kills the heart's life because of long and mocking delay. Lift up those who are bowed down, yea, straighten them into their first uprightness, and give them the joy of returning youth. The Lord be our strength when our poor life totters under some tremendous blow. The Lord clothe us for the battle, and bring us home after the war more than conquerors. Amen.



## Joshua viii.

**THE TAKING OF AI SPIRITUALISED.**

THE details of this chapter are certainly not in keeping with the spirit of the later revelations of the mind of God. We have nothing to do with the chapter locally and incidentally; in that respect it is a forgotten thing. Revelations are unquestionably matters of time. This is the solution of many difficulties which are supposed to be found in the Bible, where there are really no difficulties at all when the whole is measured by the right scale and examined in the true light. It must not be thought that the events recorded in the Bible took place one after another, just as quickly as they could occur. There may be ages between one book and another. The first chapter of Genesis may be a chapter stretching over countless epochs, rising and falling myriads of years. Between Malachi and Matthew there is but a page in the printed book, but between Malachi and Matthew as a matter of historical literature there is a span of four hundred years; in other words, Malachi having laid down his pen, that pen is not taken up in continuous history for four centuries. Keep this in view, and very much that is cloudy and perplexing will be dissolved and made luminous. What, therefore, shall we do with a chapter like this, so full of cunning, stratagem, military surprises, and what would be called sharp practice upon the unsuspecting inhabitants of Ai? We can spiritualise it in the best sense. There is a legitimate way of spiritualising ancient history, and this is the only way in which a history of this kind can be treated with modern pertinence, comfort, and edification.

With this precaution then, how does the striking story appear to us? It appears, in the first place, that in going out to battle with anything that is doomed we must have a right character and a right cause. This was insisted upon in the case of Ai. The Lord would not allow a blow to be struck at the city by a wicked hand; he will have judgment executed by righteousness; he will have the law proclaimed by lips that have been circumcised and anointed. Israel was all but innumerable in force.

In relation to the city of Ai, Israel was a torrent that could not be withstood. But Israel had committed sin. A goodly Babylonish garment and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold fifty shekels in weight had been stolen by an Israelitish soldier. The Lord will not have such warriors. His purpose has ever been to prove that right is might, that without character we cannot do his work—not spotless character, which may be impossible under present conditions, but character that is intensely in earnest, set in the right direction, aspiring after continual perfectness. Do not go to battle with a wrong cause, or your weakness will be assured before you begin. No man can be really eloquent upon a bad cause. He may be fluent, and may use many highly-coloured words, and use them with great skill; but earnestness of conviction is absolutely necessary to all-persuasive and all-enduring eloquence. So, before going to war, there must be an inquiry instituted into the character and into the quality of the thing that is proposed to be done. The first great inquiry of man is a moral inquiry, not an inquest about numbers, places, and possible issues—but, is this thing right? and am I right who attempt to do the work? That being the case, go forward. Do not be deterred by any man, by any man's threatening, or any man's inexcusable folly, but proceed steadily, prayerfully, confidently. This is the rule of the chapter. This is the rule of all ages. Do not take a step until that rule has been observed and realised. Nor must the term "right" be construed narrowly. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding about right. We have murdered right, or divided it into opinions and enumerated them, and accounted our individual opinions the sum-total of right. Let the spirit commune with the Spirit of God, and inspiration will not be withheld. It will be difficult to keep down selfishness, vanity, ambition, and all that brood, but it lies within the compass of the power of God even to crush the serpent's head.

The next great lesson of this incident is that we must *all* advance upon the doomed institution. When the idea of taking Ai was first broached, there were clever men in Israel who said, Let two or three thousand of us go up and take the city; the whole army has been perambulating round about the walls of

Jericho ; it is quite needless to put the entire army to this expense of time and strength ; depute some two or three thousand of us, and we will go up and smite Ai and burn it to ashes ; it is a pity to weary all the people when a handful of them might execute the design. There are always such meddling people in God's army, who will divide, and distribute, and cultivate what they call opinions. They will not allow the great laws of God to move on in massiveness and majesty ; they will meddle with God. Two or three thousand of the people of Israel went up against Ai, and we have seen the result. Now we must return, says the historian, in effect, to God's own appointed law in this matter : " I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city " (v. 5). That must be the rule of the Church in all its great moral wars. The battle is not to be handed over to a few persons, however skilful and zealous. The work of teaching the world and saving the world is a work committed to the whole Christian body. There are to be no laymen in this war. We must obliterate the official distinction between clergy and laity, pulpit and pew. The living Church of the living God is one. Forgetting this rule, what has come to pass ?—that destructive work and constructive work, acts of benevolence and charity, have devolved upon handfuls of men, and they have been left to do all that was needful in battle and in charity. They have been favoured with the *criticism* of those who have stayed at home. Criticism has never been a scarce article in human history ! Persons who have done nothing, sacrificed nothing, given nothing, are the very people who are able, by some vicious inspiration, to find fault with everybody else. When the Church realises its totality, when every man is part of an army and not an isolated warrior, then every Ai doomed of heaven shall reel under the battering-ram which the Church will employ. When all the people are at work, there can be no criticism : they are involved in the same strife and issue ; they are common patriots, fellow-soldiers, parts of the same great multitude, and there is no time for mutual exasperation and folly. The clever men, therefore, were in the second instance displaced. They supposed that they had realised quite a clever idea, that all the great body of Israel might remain at home and two or three thousand

young, sharp, clever, active men might go up and do all the work, and come galloping home at night conquerors rich with spoil. The Lord will not have it so. Joshua must himself go up, and all the people must go up with him. There are to be no mere critics; there are to be thousands of active soldiers.

This being so, the incident brings before us in a very suggestive and picturesque manner the fact that we must excel the enemy in shrewdness. A perusal of the chapter will show what military cunning was expended upon this particular situation. The idea is not to be taken in its literal sense as applicable to-day to anything with which the Church has to deal; but this is the eternal thought: that the Church is to be shrewder than the world, believers are to be keener of mind and more active in every energy than unbelievers. Who was to be "wise as serpents," "harmless as doves"? Who was called to realise that startling paradox? It is the law of true advancement and conquest in things moral and divine. But the Church can never learn this lesson. "Harmless as doves," in the sense of doing nothing, the Church is superhumanly able to be; but "wise as serpents"—silent, thoughtful, shrewd, far-sighted, patient,—who can realise this idea? Whatever the world does, the Church should show a nobler strength. The Church should buy up every institution which it cannot burn up. The Church should have all the thoroughfares and crowd back the evil—back, and further back still, till it reels into the river! The Church has not done this, but has taken up positions in quiet corners, and out-of-the-way places, and has lived a very inoffensive and peacefully obscure life. The Salvation Army is right, or Christianity is a mistake. Respectability, conventionally understood, in Christian service may be blasphemy. So long as men remain in obscure positions and show themselves to be so infantile that they would not even injure the devil if they saw him, the devil is perfectly willing that chapels without end should be put up; but where men are burning with godliness, mad with earnestness,—where the universe divides itself into heaven and hell, right and wrong, there can be no peace, there can be no truce, there can be no hand-shaking over the chasm. Would Heaven that all the quiet people were on the other side of this question! They could be well spared! Christianity in a fallen world is

not quietness. Herein is that wonderful word true :—"Think not that I came to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword"—I came to kindle a fire upon the earth, and to set a man against his fellow-man, and to make war in the house. We call these expressions "figurative" and escape the awful discipline !

It is evident, moreover, that if we are to do any real work in the world in the name of God and in the cause of Christ, we must be about our business night and day. In the tenth verse we read :—"And Joshua rose up early in the morning ;" in the thirteenth verse we read :—"Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley." That was a soldier's life ! We are, as Christians, supposed to be soldiers. How reads the old story ? "And Joshua rose up early in the morning . . . Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley." It is sad that we can appease our consciences by telling them that this is a piece of ancient history and related to very obscure incidents. It is not so. If men will subject themselves, the apostle says, to such processes of discipline to obtain a corruptible crown, what should we do whose aim is to secure an incorruptible ? The argument is a cumulative one, aggravating itself even into agony. If any will so discipline themselves to obtain an ivy or a parsley chaplet, what shall we do whose prize is the crown of life ? If we cannot attain this sublimity of heroism, we can at least set it before us, keep it as the continual idea of life.—We need not upbraid ourselves unreasonably if we do not attain it, for the apostle himself said he counted not himself to have apprehended, but he pressed toward the mark,—that is to say, he was always found pressing in one direction, never vacillating, halting, returning, but eternally set, like the needle to the pole. Who will join this great army ? How useful some men might be if they had the spirit of consecration : what time they have on hand ! They can rise early and sit up late, and order their affairs with comparative freedom. Would they give themselves to the Cross, would they be slaves of Christ, would they make up their minds to be either infidels or Christians ! The difficulty is with the tepid man, with the man who wants to walk upon both sides of the road,—to keep sacrament once a month and visit the devil between whiles.

We should miss one great lesson of this story if we did not note that we are bound to set fire to every devoted abomination. Ai was burned. The smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and Ai became, not *a* heap, but *the* heap,—as if it were the only heap. That was complete work. Is our work complete? Have we added fire to the sword? Is ignorance burned, or is it only labelled “wisdom”? Is slavery burned with unquenchable fire, or has it only changed its relation and its colour? We are called to a work of extirpation. We are not called to compromise, to paltering, to arranging, to expediency where ignorance is concerned, or slavery, or vice, or wrong. We must not omit the fire. Things must be so burned down that they can never grow again. Otherwise we shall have all the work to do over again, and the ages will be hindered in their highest progress.

And after destruction, what then? Positive religion comes next:—“Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in mount Ebal” (v. 30). It is no use building your altar until you have burned the abomination. A great destructive work is to be done first, and in the doing of it, there will be great outcry about change, and novelty, and reprisal, and revolution, and confiscation, and a number of terms very imperfectly understood. But we must not build where the altar itself will be burned down. Be sure about the foundation before you put up the building; know where you are going to set the altar. If you have not been faithful in the work of destruction, you cannot be faithful in the work of construction. It is lying unto the Holy Ghost to build an altar upon the basis of a rotten life. So we are called to thoroughness of work. There is to be no superficial action here. In doing this we may give great offence; we may have to part with friends. But our fathers did more than that. Read their history—indeed, read the history of all progress, and you will find it to be a history of loss on the one side and of gain on the other. Blessed are those workers in the field to whom no favour can be shown, because they want none, whom it would be impossible to patronise. They, having done the destructive work, may and will erect the altar.

And after the altar, what? The law—the law of righteousness, the law of God. Verse 32 reads:—“And Joshua wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he

wrote in the presence of the children of Israel." This is complete work—destruction, the erected altar, the inscribed law. This is healthy work. The surgeon has done his duty, and now nature will proceed to heal and comfort and bless. The enemy has been driven off the field! Now the altar is put up and the law is promulgated. Society without law is chaos. An altar without righteousness is evaporative sentiment. Prayer without duty may be a detachment of the wings from the bird they were intended to assist.

The picture is a right noble one. Omitting all that was local, incidental, and temporary, here stands the great law of spiritual conflict:—a right character, a right cause, a unanimous advance, a super-excellent shrewdness, a business that touches the early morning and the late night, fire set to the devoted abomination, an altar built upon the ashes, the law written upon the altar,—that is the programme; and any programme whose lines are not covered by this sublime delineation may be a clever invention, but it is not a revelation from heaven. We are thus called to energy, called to labour, called to sacrifice. We are *all* called. Merely to hear what the army has been doing is not patriotism. In the Church there is no place for indolence, there is no place for criticism, there is no place for mere sentiment. Has the world to be captured for Jesus Christ, or has it not? If you say it has not, then abandon the standard altogether; if you say it has, then never forsake the standard. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Take unto you the whole armour of God. Stand against the wiles of the devil. Never leave it an open question as to which side you are upon. Having done the destructive work, do not imagine that the whole programme is complete; now begin the construction of the altar. And having made a place for prayer, do not suppose that the whole duty of man has been perfected; next put up the law:—battle, prayer, law; law, prayer, battle. If there is aught else, it has not yet been to me revealed.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, the bitterness of death is past: the world's worst history has been lived; and now the latter days have come upon us—days of morning, beauteous and rich with light; the glory of hope is round about us, and heaven is near at hand. We will not sorrow as men who have no hope; this would be to offend thee grievously, for thy providence was never so near our life as it is at this moment. All things teach us the divine nearness. Our own life is a witness that the whole world has become a sanctuary because of the Cross of Christ, and the whole priesthood of the Son of God. We bless thee that the future is lighted up with ineffable glory: now we speak of abolished death, of descending heaven, of immortality, of life all purity, service all music, and hope that cannot fade away. This is the realisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ,—the very perfectness of love, the bringing to maturity of thine eternal thought concerning man. We will therefore dry our tears, and assure our hearts, and go forward like men inspired and made strong. May all tone of mourning be taken out of our voices, all colour suggestive of dismay and fear be wholly removed from the whole course of our being; may our life be a daily witness to the power and goodness of God. For thine open book we bless thee; for its most ancient history we thank thee; for everything that shows the unity of manhood and the human heart we cannot but be grateful to God. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. All time is thy clothing; yea, thou hast made a garment of the universe, and thou standest amongst us clothed with that glittering humiliation. Behold, for God to be, is to make all other being possible, and yet to distress it with a sense of infinite distance. Thou charest the angels with folly; the heavens are not clean in thy sight;—what can compare with the infinite pureness of God? Still, thou comest near to us, and thou diest upon a cross; thou settest forth a great mystery of sacrificial blood: we understand it not, but we know it to be the gospel which the heart most needs. Amen.

Joshua ix. 2-27.

## THE GIBEONITES.

IT would seem on reading this narrative that it can have no possible relation to our time and our circumstances. But God would never write a Bible which was to obliterate itself as the ages come and go. If he could have written such a Bible, surely some instruction might have been given as to



the excision of the parts whose meaning has been exhausted. But the book remains in its entirety. It must therefore contain meanings which were not merely local. All that can be required of us is to search the Scripture even in its oldest forms of history and parable; to penetrate it, to take it reverently to pieces, and examine it with devoutest scrutiny. We have undertaken to show that such an examination may be conducted with great profitableness. Again and again we have seen that the Bible is *within* the Bible,—that all letters, forms, representations are symbolic, or are so many doors through which we may pass into the inmost places, the awful sanctuaries, in which may be found eternal truth, celestial purity, supernal music. Flowers grow along the road traversed by the Bible story. The old wells are worth opening; water comes from deep rocks, and is refreshing to men and fertilising to the whole Church. Let us not be beguiled by the easy thought that the Bible is a self-exhausted book, that time obliterates its revelation, that the days impoverish it of heavenly energy. Be it ours rather to believe that it is the book which is daily inspired, daily written, and continually applicable to every variety of human circumstance and need.

The proof of this is upon the very face of the exciting narrative now before us. Do we not see here, first and foremost, the pitiable shifts to which all spiritual fear is driven? The fear of Israel came upon the Gibeonites, and the result was an invention, a false arrangement, an attempt to escape the inevitable. This is the story of to-day. Volumes might be written upon this one thought—namely, that spiritual fear is always and of necessity driven to the most pitiable shifts. Spiritual fear says, What can I do? I will undertake long pilgrimages; I will discharge severe and exhausting penances; I will set apart certain days for self-distress; I will pay great fines willingly; I will draw a mask over my face and obliterate my identity; I will create a system of lucky days and fortunate numbers, and enter into complex speculations and arrangements; I will build churches, and seem to worship; I will commingle with the people of God as if I were one of them when my heart is a thousand leagues away from the very poorest soul in all the sacred number. This is the very philosophy of

superstition. Great and solemn histories find their fount and origin in this one circumstance—how to baffle God, how to pray without praying, how to succeed by trick and lie and mean pretence. Who will say that the Bible is exhausted as to its inner meanings and its profound revelations? The trick of the Gibeonites is the game of to-day. Spiritual fear knows not the spirit of truth, and cannot of course know the spirit of joy. So long as we are in fear, we are not in God, we are not in love: “perfect love casteth out fear;” we are not in truth, for truth blinks not in the presence of the mid-day light,—it goes forth to a thousand lions, leaps over a wall, and runs through a troop as if through a film of air. Are we not always cursed by this spirit of fear? It leads us to misconstructions of God. He ceases to be God when he is looked at through the medium and under the base inspiration of servile fear. The man in whom the spirit of fear is, cannot read the Bible. It is a mere idol to him. He looks at it, pronounces its words, accepts its partial perusal as a task; but he never enters into the inner meaning, the divine thought, the eternal affection and redemptiveness of the book. What is the consequence? The consequence is that he can be frightened away from the book by any man who has a larger mind than his own, and who has a more inventive faculty in the region of destructive criticism and embarrassing remark. Hold the Bible with the timid hand of fear, and any thief may take it from our yielding grasp; hold it in our love and read it in the sunshine of joy derived from conscious sonship with God, and no man can pluck it out of our hand: it then becomes the *Bible* to us,—not a collection of letters, forms, but a breathing spirit, the Holy Ghost, proving its inspiration by inspiring others. We may make the house of God an idol temple. We may make the Bible itself a mere idol. We may dispossess the heart of love by almost welcoming the spirit of fear. Being under bondage to fear, we are always inventing religions, inventing methods of escape, trying to impose upon the world and the Church, and even upon God. We have therefore to pray that the spirit of fear may be cast out of us as an evil spirit darkening the soul, weaving impenetrable clouds around the horizon of the divine revelation, and making the stars—bright globes

of heaven—dim and murky, divesting them of all poetry and all religious suggestion. The spirit of fear must be driven out of the Church, or the young will not come near us. The spirit of the Church is a spirit of joy, truth, love, poetry, music,—these are the fruits of the Spirit!

The application of this narrative to modern states and needs is made evident by the very fact that the best of men are powerless without the divine Spirit. This is proved by the fourteenth verse :—

“And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.”

We know what came of it. We are beguiled and befooled by appearances. Some circumstances appear to be so very simple as not to require consideration. That is the moment of danger! Men say to themselves, Here is a case in which there is no complexity; the proof of the innocence of these men is patent; there cannot be two opinions about that; they are travel-stained, they are way-worn; the bread they carry is mouldy, the bottles in which they brought their wine are old and rent and useless; the evidence is perfectly complete; there can be no reason whatever for making this a religious problem or an occasion of prayer;—let us honour our own common-sense, pay tribute to our own reason, and act according to circumstances about which there can be no dispute. Thus the Church has always been ruined in some degree by its clever men! Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot manage the Church of the living God, even in the lowest ranges of its affairs. Do not attempt to lock the church door except as a religious act. When you light up the sanctuary for worship, do it as if it were a solemn act of prayer and sacrifice. In everything, the smallest and apparently clearest, consult God. This is the religious life, the joy life, the free life, to do nothing without the spirit of prayer. There need not be any affectation of mere posture and form of prayer: there is a spirit of fellowship, a continual realisation of the divine presence, a feeling after God; and then the uplifting of a hand is prayer, as is the falling of a tear. When our reason seems to be equal to the occasion, the temptation of the Evil One is heavy upon us. We practically dismiss God. We do not mean to do so. If the charge were made in words, we should repel it. But we are not

always right simply because of our willingness to repel charges that are made against us. Men do not always know when they are the subjects of envy, jealousy, evil passion; in the very paroxysms of jealousy of another man's repute or good position, men have denied that there is any burning of envy in their hearts. How is this? Because envy has a way of coming in disguise; it says, "I have come a long way; I am no enemy of yours, I am no enemy of any man's; I am really not envy or jealousy at all; I will do you good: I will prompt your righteousness to high indignation, but in all the flame of its wrath there shall be nothing that is not akin to the very fire of God's own feeling." Let us beware how we receive disguised spirits into the heart. "Brethren, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God;" and most try those spirits that look so perfectly simple and bring with them credentials written in large letters and signed by very conspicuous names. Truth requires no such introduction. Truth is fearless. Sometimes literally it may be discrepant and inconsistent with itself, so much so that a clever reader could mass all the discrepancies and make a case against the witness; but truth can afford to stumble, stammer, correct itself in the matter of mere memory; truth can apologise with dignity; truth can retract with candour. The great difficulty is that people will not make their reason a religious power; in other words, identify its action with religious prostration and inquiry of God. They say the case is so perfectly simple. Such simplicity is not to be found anywhere. God is in the smallest flower he ever made. Every atom that requires even a microscope to discover its existence has a distinct relation to the eternal throne; and reason in its proudest moments loses nothing, but gains everything by the prayer that ennobles its understanding and whets its penetration. Joshua and his men were beguiled by appearances, by a most evident and obvious case. They took not counsel at the mouth of the Lord, and what came of it is revealed in the narrative. How pitiful is the issue! How short is the life of the schemer!

"And it came to pass at the end of three days" (v. 16).

That is the life of a lie. It cannot go any longer practically; it may do so arithmetically, but "three days" is the measure of its

duration. The third sunset—the appointed time—sees the mask fall off and the liar stand—stand only to fall. When will men learn this? When will we lay this lesson to heart? Everything looks so successful, and the whole business is just approaching completion, or has actually passed the point of mechanical maturity, and the Gibeonites are about to settle down as men who have successfully perfected a trick; and, lo, at the end of “three days” their whole purpose is exposed and their cleverness is exhausted and at an end! Possibly some may be pursuing precisely the same policy. The circumstances are wholly different; but do not delude yourselves with the notion that circumstances make the reality of the case. What are we about now in commerce, in family life, in all the relations, personal and social, which we sustain? What about the trick, the mean device, the covered lie, the well-painted mask, the falsehood well got up? He would be no prophet of the Lord who did not ask the question so burningly as almost to force an answer from the perpetrator of the imposition. But men will not learn from history: every man must commit suicide. We see a thousand men before us in the very line we are taking, all dead, and yet we think *we* can pass the heap of ruin and successfully reach the final point of the line! It cannot be done. God is against it; and when God is against a man his reason is like a candle blown out, and his cleverness but adds to the aggravation of his guilt. Nothing will stand but truth, honour; truth will stand when all things fail. It lives in the open air all the days of the year; it can go out at midnight as safely as at midday; it speaks to a king, to a child, to a peasant, with all the simplicity of innocence and the beauteousness of a high and noble and valiant courage. But the man who is imposing upon others skulks, listens, wonders, is astonished at little sentences which people drop as if they were dropping them on purpose, is excited by an inquiry, is affrighted by an unexpected letter. He is a liar, and the liar has a bad time of it. O that men were wise, that they understood these things!

But the Gibeonites were spared. Yes, they were spared, but were made bondmen—servants for ever:—

\* “And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose” (v. 27).

The liar comes to humiliation. He cannot come to honour. If he came to honour, he dare not touch it. Everything turns to ashes in the bad man's hand. His children are not his: they disown him; without being able to explain it, they hate him; they represent to him the wrath of an indignant God; they would not touch him: his kiss blasts their young lips;—he is a liar, and should be kept a universe off virtue and beauty. Do not suppose a lie can be made permanently successful. Better eat the bread of poverty than the bread of falsehood. Better have the very lowest social position, hardly a foothold in the world at all, yet maintain it like an honest man, than have all the surface of the globe, and know that the air is full of anger, and that the judgment is gathering and will presently explode and destroy the victim. No counsel can prosper against God. The escape from one form of punishment is not an escape from all. A covenant had been made, and according to Eastern custom, when men had eaten salt with one another, the salt was to be as a perpetual protection between them. We have already seen how men spread salt upon a sword and took the salt, each of them: henceforth that sword was sheathed. So it was in this instance. The covenant had been made, and therefore was to be literally respected. So far as that covenant was concerned, it stood; but God has always one other thing he can do that we never imagined or suspected. We cannot escape God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Our God is a consuming fire. He never consumed that which was good: he has no fire that would burn it. Men have tried to burn the good, and have failed. Men have guillotined noble reformers and patriots, but the reform and the patriotism came up sevenfold greater than before. Great tyrants have issued orders that rebels should be slain and crushed, and crushed and slain they have been, but in so far as the rebels represented righteousness, justice, fair play, the guillotine failed, not the men who were decapitated by it. So there is honour reserved for the good man and the true, however much he may suffer; and there is judgment reserved for the bad man, however much he may succeed. Set it down as part of your very life's programme: God is with truth, God is with right, God is against falsehood, God is against wrong; and at the end of "three days"—that is, at the end of some measurable period—the liar shall

stand convicted, the bad man who carried his head so high shall find that head falling upon his breast, and the man whose cause was bad and who succeeded for a considerable period will be brought short up, God will look at him, and in that look there will be hell enough!

What is the cure for all this? What is the great answer of Heaven to all this falsehood and suffering upon earth? The answer of Heaven is the answer of the Cross. Always we come back to the Cross of Christ—the blood shed for the sins of the world. We have all been liars in the sight of God, though not to one another mayhap. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It comes to one of two things: to detection or confession. Detection means perdition. Confession means pardon!

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

Gibeon is a town celebrated in the Old Testament, but not mentioned in the New. It was “a great city,” as one of the royal cities; and to its jurisdiction originally belonged Beeroth, Chephirah, and Kirjath-jearim (Josh. ix. 17; x. 2). It is first mentioned in connection with the deception practised by the inhabitants upon Joshua, by which, although Canaanites (Hivites), they induced the Jewish leader not only to make a league with them, and to spare their lives and cities, but also, in their defence, to make war upon the five kings by whom they were besieged. It was in the great battle which followed, that “the sun stood still upon Gibeon” (Josh. x. 12, 1-14). The place afterwards fell to the lot of Benjamin, and became a Levitical city (Josh. xviii. 25; xxi. 17), where the tabernacle was set up for many years under David and Solomon (1 Chron. xvi. 39; xxi. 29; 2 Chron. i. 3), the ark being at the same time at Jerusalem (2 Chron. i. 4). It was here, as being the place of the altar, that the young Solomon offered a thousand burnt-offerings, and was rewarded by the vision which left him the wisest of men (1 Kings iii. 4-15; 2 Chron. i. 3-13). This was the place where Abner’s challenge to Joab brought defeat upon himself, and death upon his brother, Asahel (2 Sam. ii. 12-32), and where Amasa was afterwards slain by Joab (2 Sam. xx. 8-12). None of these passages mark the site of Gibeon; but there are indications of it in Josephus (*De Bell. Jud.* ii. 19, 1), who places it fifty stadia north-west from Jerusalem; and in Jerome (*Ep. 86 ad Eustoch.*): which leave little doubt that Gibeon is to be identified with the place which still bears the name of El-Jib; for Jib, in Arabic, is merely a contraction of the Hebrew Gibeon. The name *Gabaon* is indeed mentioned by writers of the time of the Crusades as existing at this spot, and among the Arabs it then already bore the name of El-Jib, under which it is mentioned by Bohaedin (*Vita Saladin*, p. 243). Afterwards it was overlooked by most travellers till the last century, when the attention of Pococke was again directed to it.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are exceedingly afraid of thy power : we dare not come nigh it ; we may not provoke it. Our God is a consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So we speak of thee, and so we feel that verily this is true. Yet, God is love ; God is our Father in heaven ; like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. This also is true ; this is the joy of our life, and its brightest hope ; this is the glorious gospel of the blessed God. This view have we of thee in Christ Jesus thy Son ; he revealed the Father unto us, and by him we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we are able to say, Abba, Father, with a new meaning and a new music in our voice, for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. Thou hast great resources of wrath, yet thy mercy endureth for ever. In wrath thou dost remember mercy. Power belongeth unto thee, and to thee also, O Lord, belongeth mercy. It is unto thy mercy that we come : God be merciful unto us, sinners ! Let thy mercy prevail, that our iniquities strike us not with the great hailstones from heaven, killing the creatures whom thou hast redeemed. Spare the lightning, and the hailstones, and the great rains, and the devastating tempests. Be pitiful unto us. We are as bruised reeds and smoking flax ; as a vapour that cometh for a little time and then passeth away. The Lord be pitiful unto us ; look upon us through the tears of his love and not through the anger of his righteousness. Comfort us according to our mourning : fill up the great vacancy in the heart ; establish that which is wanting in our faith, so that it may be long, constant, strong, quite majestic and noble because of its amplitude and its power. Lord, increase our faith ! Then we shall rejoice in tribulation also, finding in tribulation the beginning of patience and the pledge of final refinement and sanctification. The Lord send none unblest away. If it please thee to send upon us first a great fear, let thy love afterwards reveal itself unto us, and may we see the brightness the brighter because of the darkness which made us afraid. Carry on our little life a little longer. Desert us not when the day gets towards eventide and far-spent. Thou hast not brought us thus far along to cast us away into the pit or leave us in desert places. We will think of all thy goodness in the past, and out of it we will bring a holy confidence, through the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed and only Saviour, that thou wilt surely complete what thou hast begun. This is our strength in Christ ; this is our hope as we stand near the Cross. We know our sin is great, but where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound. We will say this to our hearts ; the Lord repeat the music to our listening expectancy and hope, and we shall yet be filled with a great gladness, and the eventide shall be brighter than the morning. Amen.



## Joshua x. 11.

"They were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword."

## THE LORD'S ARTILLERY.

WE have seen how Gibeon made peace with Joshua. Adoni-zedec, king of Jerusalem, was exceedingly displeased with the men of Gibeon for making peace with the enemy. He sent, therefore, unto the mountain kings of the Amorites, inviting them to smite Gibeon, saying, "It hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel." So the five kings of the Amorites went up; and the Lord said unto Joshua, "Fear them not . . . there shall not a man of them stand before thee." "So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour." And Joshua smote the enemy "with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makedah;" and when Joshua had done all that lay in his power, the Lord took up the case, and he hailed out of heaven upon the enemy, and "they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." The Lord never loses a battle. The picture of that fight is most vivid. It gleams with many colours, and as it stands in the gallery of ancient history, it seems to say, This is how it always is; study me, and see the providence of the Lord. We accept the invitation.

The divine cause has enemies. The miracle is upon our side. Why complain or utter wonders equal to complaints about miracles divine? The miracle is on the human side, and is expressed in the incredible fact that the divine cause has human enemies. Reason seems to be offended by the statement. A voice within us protests against the possibility of an anomaly so glaring and so violent. We should listen to the protest if we could shut our eyes to the facts. Show us something divine, and we will worship it. Men would say in certain moods, Show us the truly beautiful, and we will fall down before it in an attitude of adoration. Thus we exclaim. The common doctrine would seem to be: we have only to see the good, and we will accept it; to behold the beautiful, and we will worship it; to

know the right, and we will do it. It would be pleasant to believe this. We want to believe it for our own creed's sake. But facts are dead against us. We are witnesses against ourselves. We see the right, and yet the wrong pursue. We say openly, with frankness that will be turned against us some day, This is the right road. But we are going in an opposite direction, that is the miracle! When you have settled and determined that anomaly, then you may begin to challenge the possibility of miracles upon the upper or divine side. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." What do you make of facts? We sentimentalise, or dream, or speculate,—what is your answer to the awful mystery that a man, not only can say, but does say, This is right, but I decline to do it? If this were matter of speculation, you would put the speculation from your mind as unworthy of the dignity of human reason. If this were a charge laid against a distant nation, we should make some trifling remark upon the incident, describing it as romantic, if not impossible; but it is the great line of our own life, the broad line which marks our whole experience, action, and attitude; and we are continually face to face with the solemn charge, that we know the Lord's way and the Lord's cause, and we set ourselves in distinct disobedience to his law and claim.

But the enemies of the divine cause have both earth and heaven against them:—the sword of Israel, and the hail of God. The living God has two great forces; if you escape one, you fall under the power of the other. Men cannot do with the earth as they please. They think they can, but that is a deadly mistake. What can they do with the earth? Consider the case, and learn how little is human power in relation to those very things which seem to come easily within its sway. What can men do with the earth, which is under their feet, as if in sign of humiliation and unworthiness? Can they stop it? Can they reverse its motion? Can they illuminate it? What can these masters do with their nominal slave? They can smite it with iron, and make it grow what they please. No, they cannot! The dull earth, hoed into grooves, will not obey the iron pick, will not turn to the pluck of the bit and bridle given by violent hands. What, then, can we do with the earth? We are obliged to study

it,—to find out all its moods and whims and tempers. We are compelled to humour the old earth. We have to treat it very delicately and very kindly. At first we think we have only to smite it with iron, and it will be only too glad to respond in harvests : but the earth is a mystery ; the earth will not do what we want it to do. It openly says, I will not grow this crop ; this year you must change my food ; I am tired of this monotony, and I will not move again. We form associations to consider the earth, to report upon it, to take measurements and temperatures, and to arrange means to ends ; and there the old earth swings on in the darkness, now night, now day, and must be humoured like a living thing. How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. The stones of the field seem to have a mind, and the winds and the stars to be under a purpose, and to be expressing a design. Then the upper earth—if I may so call the atmosphere—for what is it but an upper and enlarged earth ? We may be able to do some little thing with spade and mattock, with plough and harrow, but what can we do up in the clouds ? There is a minister of wrath called the weather. We have never been able to bribe him, propitiate him, bring him within the circle of our influence. The weather has come down upon our navies, and broken them into wet chips. The weather has stopped our great steam-horses, and said, No further on this road just now ! If an earthquake had done it, there would have been some harmony between the process and the result ; but little flakes of snow have done it—white little wings, things that look like beautiful insects,—down they have come, and down, until that which in detail weighed nothing accumulated itself into millions of tons, and great steam-horses, challenging and thundering and roaring, have had to stand still before the white opponent, unable to move one inch. Why, our power is quite a nominal thing after all. We thought we were so great, and yet the earth beats us, or if we win a little success in the soil and report it, we can do nothing in the clouds ; we have no ladder a hundred feet long, or two hundred feet long, or five hundred feet long, and if we had, there is nothing to set it against. After all, our pride is shaken down, our vanity is cut in two ; and men who have discovered a new variety of crop for the soil have to say

parenthetically, almost religiously, "weather permitting"! When Christian men charge reformers and empirics with inability to touch the heart's deadly sore, they can illustrate their position and vindicate their fear by the littleness of the limit which binds in the power of all men even in matters terrestrial and confessedly material. Mend the weather before you mend human manners. Stop the rain before you attempt by merely human means to stop the torrent of human iniquity. When you have won triumphs in your own world, we will accept them as proofs that you may be able to do some mightier thing on broader lines.

All things fight for God. The hailstones are his friends and allies; the stars in their courses beat and throb according to his purpose and express his intent. The bad cause has no friends; it comes to an ignominious end; it is overwhelmed by hailstones. It is so humbling! If men could have shown on the forehead a great scar made by a gleaming sword swung by the arms of a Hercules—a very giant in stature and strength—we should have said, Well, you had a foeman worthy of your steel; it is equal to a victory to have been felled by that man. You come in under stress of weather. Hailstones! you beaten back by hailstones? Yes! Why then there is no glory in it, not a whit. Come back because of the weather? Yes. Well, that is very crushing. Exceedingly so. But you are a man; why didn't you "stand up like a man"? I did, but the hailstones knocked me down! Why is it so? All the world over. You cannot lock the hail up. You cannot find a shutter that will certainly keep the lightning on the outside: God takes the hasp off after we have shut up the front-door. Consider the ignominy of the end! To be slain with a sword is to meet a soldier's fate; to be killed with hailstones is to be treated as an inferior creature—is to feel the contempt of an invisible and infinite enemy.

These are the strongholds and grounds of the Christian attack. We are not speaking to men, you see, who can walk as if with the wings of the wind, and make the clouds the dust of their feet, and bring in the spring when they please, and detain the summer as long as they have a mind to detain that shining guest; we are speaking to men, however great or little,—to men who have to make careful parentheses and reservations in their boldest talk; to men whose triumphant essays are wetted through and

drenched by God's snow, so that they cannot read their own writing. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." There is only one safe motion, only one astronomic rhythm, and if you get out of beat and harmony with that, you are at war with God. A short fight is his who encounters gravitation. For a moment he may leap, but he will soon lie down; for a little while he may seem as if master of the situation, but the great serene law moves on and flattens whatever opposes its tranquil operation. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace."

The bad cause perishes in contempt. The five kings ran away and hid themselves in a cave, and Joshua said, Bring them out! and to the men of Israel, Put your feet upon their necks; and the men of Israel put their feet upon the necks of the kings; and he said, Now hang them upon trees; and the men of Israel hanged the five kings upon five trees, and at the evening hour cut them down and threw them into the very cave in which they had hidden themselves, and laid great stones against the mouth of the cave, and there they are until this day. The great life-lesson running out of all this ancient history is: it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." No hailstone ever ranked itself on the bad side. No rain ever offered itself to help the bad man. Though it may appear to have done so incidentally, it never did so finally; and the stones will be faithful unto the last. There shall come a day when men shall say to the rocks and to the mountains, "Fall on us," and rock and mountain will stand without a sign. "Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb!"—and the rock and the mountain will stand upon their foundations without a quiver or a spasm. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." This is science: we are invited into the astronomic movement. It is the call of gravitation, not of speculative theology. It is the music of the spheres, not some hymn of despicable sentiment. What say you? To be with Christ, with God, is to be in the laws of gravitation. Have you any objection to that? It is to be marching step for step. Have you any complaint to make against that appeal? Why try to go the other way when all the gates are locked and the keys are not to be found? Why not have on our side God, and all that God implies and involves—the whole mystery of power and grace,

righteousness and wisdom? Then we shall know what it is to triumph. We shall hear a voice behind us and within us say, "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." Who shall lay anything to the charge of those who are in rhythm with God? The appeal seems to me so based on all that is true in science, in nature, in the reality and necessity of things, that but for the miracle which we indicated at the outset, it would seem impossible but that every man should rise and say, I will be on the Lord's side, I will live by the divine movement, I will find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus Christ came to do. He found we were opposing the law of spiritual gravitation; trying to create a universe of our own, and only making a hell; trying to silence music by discord, and being lost in the tumult which we made. He is our peace. In him we are safe evermore. When the hail pours down, it will be upon the enemy, not upon the friend; and when the lightning gleams and blazes and burns, it shall not come nigh the heart that rests in the Cross—in the infinite mystery of the infinite atonement. Bad man, you can go on a while if you like, but not for long: the hail is against you. You can make yourself so trusted as to be allowed to go and change the securities and rob the strong-box, but not for long: nature has her eye upon you, the constables of the universe are on your track. You can succeed for a while, you can do wonders for a while, but only for a while; you will be hanged, cut down, ruthlessly and contemptuously flung into a cave, and be forgotten. Do not imagine that your course is quite run yet: you may have twenty-four hours more; but the hand from which there is no release is already groping for you. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. The triumphing of the wicked is short. Only righteousness is eternal; only honesty goes through the weather without getting wet; only the truth can put out to sea in any weather, plunging into the troughs, mounting up on the billows, swinging on the crest,—down again, up again, but all the time steering straight for the green summer shore. Oh, go not to sea in some paper boat of your own making! The vessel of God's righteousness and love is open to us all. Let us enter. It cannot be wrecked.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we are alive this day to praise thee. Thou canst call upon living men to bear witness to thy rule and thy care. Thou art not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; thou dost not refer to the ancient time beyond our memory, thou dost appeal unto ourselves, thou dost ask us to read the record of our own life and to consider all the way along which thou hast conducted us. This we will gladly do. Herein is our joy, secret and public. We love to commune with our own hearts, and to take note of all the care thou hast shown unto us day by day from the first; and we love in the open sanctuary to make public mention of thy goodness, and to sing a loud song unto God, and to make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. We have seen thy goodness, handled it, felt it, known it in the core of the heart; therefore we will not be silent, but will magnify thy name day by day, at the entering in of the city, in the place of public concourse, quietly at home, all but silently in the chamber of sickness; but we will not forget thy benefits, nor cease to remember the mercies of God. Thou hast led us by a way that we have not known. We have come upon strange names in the outworking of our history; unfamiliar places we have trodden; unfriendly tribes have accosted us and encountered us with stubborn resistance; we have looked round for water where there were no wells, and have gone out to pluck fruit where there were no trees; and, behold, thou hast not sent us back unrefreshed or empty-handed: thou hast created fountains in the wilderness, and trees thou hast planted on the rocks. Thou art a God of miracles, working wonders in light and in darkness. Thou dost send unto us messages in all the blowing winds, yea, in the cold and mighty tempest, and in the gentle summer breeze; and all the year long thou dost never forget us: we are graven upon the palms of thy hands. We will magnify thy name, and praise it. New mercies shall create new songs; new visions of truth shall touch the soul into nobler praise. Thus will we spend the few days of our life, a handful at the most, praying that the last may be brighter than the first, yea, that the last on earth may be the first in heaven. We pray that our own life may continue to be the object of thy care. We can only live in God. We can only live in God as we bear the fruit which is consistent with thy purpose in our creation. Every branch that beareth not fruit is cut down, and cast away, and burned in the fire. We would bear fruit unto thy glory: we would have living minds, clean hearts, responsive spirits, industrious hands, souls that live in prayer; the Lord grant unto us our heart's desire! For thy Book we daily bless thee: it is brighter than the morning; it is fuller of truth than the night is full of stars. Help us to read it patiently, sympathetically, devoutly; whilst we read, may the Writer himself be present, the inspiring Holy Spirit, that so the

inspired reader may peruse the inspired writing, and in thy light see light, and behold and wonder at the ever-expanding revelation of God. Be with us wherever we are in the twelve hours of the day and the twelve hours of the night. Make our bread pleasant to our eating; grant a blessing upon the water we drink from the streams which descend from heaven; give us the apt mind in business, the clear head, the eye that sees afar, the sensitiveness which men knowing not God cannot explain; be with us in all family darkness, trouble, bereavement: when sickness comes, or loss, or bare poverty, may we find room for them, because they may be angels in disguise. Direct us in all our path; give us the right word when a sudden answer is demanded; save us from mental perplexity when besieged by an unrighteous ability; the Lord give us steadfastness and love of truth in the soul, and the incorruptible sincerity which burns all evil and finds its way to God through storm and cloud, through rock and desert and difficulty. Send a plentiful rain upon thine inheritance; bless thy people with peace; crown their lives with forgiveness. Above all, make us like thy Son Jesus Christ, brightness of thy glory, express image of thy person; may we in our degree be beautiful as he: pure and noble and self-surrendering; may we know somewhat of the mystery of his Cross, the pathos of his suffering, the atonement which he wrought out in the mystery and passion of love. For his sake, hear us; for his sake, bless us; for his sake, withhold not any good thing from us. Amen.

### Joshua x. 12-43.

### FIVE MODERN KINGS.

WE are now travelling in the midst of wars and rumours of wars in our progress through these sacred pages. The reading is very exciting and distressing. Every page is a battle-field, and every sentence is like a stain of blood. Our distress can only be mitigated by taking in great breadths of time and viewing the course of Providence, not in detail, but in entirety, as a stupendous and well-composed unity. This is the law of just judgment in all life, so we are not creating a law for special application to exceptional circumstances. We do not fully know why this waste of human life was made. But why say "was" made, as if referring to an exhausted history? We need not speak in the past tense, but in the present, for this same waste of life is made, in some form or other, every day, and seems to be part of the very law of progress. We cannot understand it. We are not called upon to defend it. We must seriously stop and consider it. But there is the law: peace comes through battle, and life through death. Every garden is only a planted cemetery. Wherever you set your foot, you set it



upon death. Who can understand the philosophy of destruction, the apparent wastefulness of God? It is a mistake to suppose that destruction is unnecessary. Every day slays its countless thousands. War is not a term definable by one word, nor is it confined to one set of circumstances; it is at the very heart of all imperfect and yet developing things. Life lives upon life. Blood is renewed by blood. A great mystery this and a tragedy that expresses infinite pain. But such is the devouring rapacity of life. It cannot live upon dead things. Life must live upon life,—cannibalism, not regulated, directed, and brought under some law of sanctification,—a great fact, a solemn and terrible thing! What a hunger it is that gnaws our being; it would soon develop itself into cruelty if civilisation did not limit it, and supply it with what it wants. No fire could deter it; no force could restrain it; it must be appeased from heaven. Which is to be uppermost? is the question of all life. What is to be uppermost? is the question of Heaven, and God has declared for the righteous. So righteousness will win, and purity will sit upon the throne that is everlasting. We know all this, in part, without the Bible. There are many bibles upon this subject. Men have written revelations who never suspected what they were doing. They described their exercises by quite other and inferior terms, namely: they were observing, collating, laying down a basis of induction; but ~~do~~ what they may, they all end in law, and the law would seem to be: destruction necessary to life, the out-crowding of some by others,—“the survival of the fittest.” This is not the day of judgment upon which we can settle all these things, giving fully-matured opinions upon them and disposing of them decisively and finally. Thank God, we are permitted to speak as we think,—that is to say, God permits speech to relieve thinking; so men publish immature books, speakers deliver immature speeches; but their books and speeches are not to be regarded as final and unchangeable. Revelation is a growing quantity. Biblical interpretation is a progressive science. The observation of human life expands and clears and enlarges. Who, then, shall bind any man to his own punctuation, or search the foregone pages to charge him with inconsistency? No man thinks two days alike. To-morrow is not responsible for this day, forasmuch as it will bring its own evil and its own good,

its own light and its own darkness. It is needful to remember these things in reading the ancient books of Scripture, for they are full of terror and battle and cruelty and destruction and oppression and wrong, in many a detail, showing how easily the best men were tempted, how soon the noblest men fell into miserable humiliations, and how even women and children and innocent persons were borne down by a tremendous rush, as if the impulse were from heaven.

What use, then, can we make of these ancient instances? We can make great and profitable use of them if we be so minded. Before attempting to make some use of this incident, let us be thankful that the mystery of the sun standing still, and the moon being stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies, has been cleared up. What battles have been fought about these words! How astronomy has been subpœnaed as a witness, and all nature been forced into court! It was quite needless—as is much of the clamour and debate raging round strange things in the Bible. The writer himself asks, “Is not this written in the book of Jasher?—So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.” It was written in a poetical book as a grand instance of sublime imagining. It was as if it had been so. It appeared as if this battle must be fought out before eventide, and as if, strangely, men had so fought and so won that the great issue was completed before the setting of the sun. The instance is specially referred to even upon this page as a quotation from a poetical book; so there need not be any solemn summoning of astronomic science to contradict what has never been asserted.

Now we come to the slaying of the kings—the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. They were immured in a cave; they were kept for further uses: they were hanged upon a tree; they were burnt and condemned. Are there not five kings—yea, fifty, yea, countless hundreds—with whom we can do this very same thing—kill them, hang them, bury them? We have come to spiritual battlefields. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and spiritual powers—invisible, but tremendous in

strength, nor less tremendous in subtlety. We are not straining the instance by pausing to consider the meanings of the names of the places connected with the names of the king,—such as the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon. The names of the places may help us to consider the nature of their respective kings.

“The king of Jerusalem.” That such a king should have been slain works violently in our memory and whole thought, for “Jerusalem” means peace—the city of peace, the restful city, the sabbatic metropolis, the home of rest. But is there not a false peace? If we could not bring some good words into our use and qualify them by bad names, the case of the wicked man would be simply intolerable: the little truth he does tell, makes way for the much falsehood he wishes to propagate. Is there, then, not a false peace? Do we not hear men crying, Peace, peace, where there is no peace? Is it not possible to daub the wall with untempered mortar? Do we not create a wilderness, and call it peace? By banishing all anxieties, by stifling the voices within us that call to righteousness and truth and purity, by occupying the mind with other things, do we not suppose that we have entered into peace enough and realised all the rest we need? Have we not shut out the light, and said, There is none? Have we not given an opiate to conscience, and then said our life is going forward without rebuke? Have we not declined to discuss certain things, and therefore imagined that the things are not open to discussion? We have wronged our own souls in this matter. It is pitiful, yea, heart-rending, to mark how prone we are to close our eyes and consider that, because we have excluded the sense of danger, we have destroyed its presence. The king of false peace must be slain. He has ruled over some of us too long. He has lived upon us, plundered us with both hands, and all the while flattered us, until we have lost all power to criticise his baleful sovereignty. When men are not real with themselves, the case is hopeless. And who is real with himself? Who can take out his very heart, as it were, and analyse it, sift its motives, cross-examine its purposes, and test its half-spoken words? On all subjects of this kind we can but ask the piercing question; it lies with every man to return the honest answer.

“Hebron” means conjunction, joining, alliance. Is not the king of false fellowship to be killed? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Why these ill-assorted marriages in life,—not marriages of a merely human and social kind, but all kinds of unions, fellowships, alliances, partnerships, that are founded upon rottenness, and are meant to mislead and deceive? What fellowship hath light with darkness? Yet we are beguiled into such associations, and we enter into them so gradually and in some cases so unsuspectingly that we hardly realise our relation to the false and the abominable until it is completed and sealed. God has always been against unholy alliances. Many a man he has, so to say, arrested with the words, Why this conjunction? What right have you to be here, pledging your character to sustain a known dishonesty? Why do you throw your respectability over this rottenness? But who can be true to himself and to God in this matter? Because we unite at certain parts or points of character, therefore we imagine that we do not include the whole line, and we decline responsibility in proportion to the number or points which our closure does not include. This is trifling with life; this is making a fool of conscience; this is giving to the moral power within us a dread narcotic: and we know it, and to pray after it is to crown our profanity with a lie. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate,” saith the Lord. It is very difficult to be associated with some men merely for a temporary purpose, and then to leave them as if the association had never existed. Oftentimes that cannot be done. A certain contagion has operated, and although the formal association may be dissolved, the results of it may abide and express themselves in many insidious, but emphatic ways. Here, again, detail is out of the question. It is only possible to put the inquiry sharply, unflinchingly, and to leave every man to find out where he is, and why he is there. You may pay too much for high fellowships. A man may pay his soul as the price of being allowed to go into a saloon; he may pay his manhood, he may pay his conscience. To spend a giddy half-hour in the gas-lighted saloon, he may be compelled to leave himself outside, that he may emptily and self-renouncingly play the fool in what he calls Society. That rule applies to all life, to all business, to all social fellowships, to all temporary associations. Have nothing to do with bad men, even

though the purpose for which they seek your association is itself good. Do not believe any Scripture which the devil quotes to you. It ceases to be Scripture in his vile lips. He spoils all beauty, all loveliness, all honour. Take the same Scripture from the fountain, and carry it out; but do not say, He has quoted Scripture, and my relation to him is only that which ought to subsist between myself and a quoter of Scripture. We must have cleanness of conjunction, purity and reality of alliance, meeting on sympathetic ground. Even the Church of Christ, as constituted in some places, may be wrong in this particular.

And the king of Jarmuth. The word means high, that which is lifted up. And is not the king of false ambition to be slain and then hanged—to have contempt added to murder? Contempt is never so well expended as upon false ambition. This false ambition is killing many people. They do not see how foolish it is to be living under king Jarmuth. Why live a strained life—always trying to reach something that is just half an inch beyond your stretching power? If you were trying to seize the stars, men would simply smile upon you as imbeciles. It is the odd half-inch that deceives you, makes you think that, because it is only half an inch, surely you may reach it and use it. That is a false law of life. It means ruin. Whilst you are so stretching yourselves beyond your due proportion, men are robbing every pocket you have, and you do not know it; cutting the ground from under your feet, and you are not aware of it; and you yourselves are losing power to do the simple, real, needy business of life with both hands and undivided strength. The temptation to be just a little more than we are is the temptation we read of in the garden of Eden:—Eat, says the serpent, of that tree, “and ye shall be as gods,”—ye shall go into another kind of society, into a saloon higher up, larger, and better lighted; put forth your hands, eat freely, and become “as gods.” See if the serpent is not still deceiving society by this very suggestion. Who can live simply and lovingly within the lines of his own conscious strength, and do the work which God has obviously designed him to do? It is when the wish to do something else and something better comes in, that many a man is thrown down and loses what strength he has, much or little, as the case may be.

Then the king of Lachish. The word means hard to be captured, almost out of reach, or so defended that it will be almost impossible to get at the king. Is not the king of fancied security to be slain and hanged? We say it is impossible to penetrate to our hiding-place and dislodge us from our ramparts, not knowing that our ramparts, which are supposed to be made of granite, are constituted but of ice, and the rising sun shall not smite them, but dissolve them, and they shall stream away from us and leave us exposed to every dart and every stroke of the assailant. What is our security? Not money, I hope: for riches take to themselves wings and fly away. Not physical strength, I hope: for even Samson has had his energy drawn out of him, and has been left a giant in carcase, but a cripple in power. Not ancestry, I hope: for who would live upon the dead and wear the respectabilities of an exhausted generation? There is only one security, and that is harmony with God, peace with Heaven, identification with righteousness, the absorption of the little imperfect will with the infinite will of God. You have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay-tree: yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not, yea, you sought him, and he could not be found. The mystery was that there was no violence; there was no record of the decadence in the newspaper of the day. It was a mystery. The man changed: his mental power deserted him: he put out his hands to take something when there was nothing to be seized; he spoke, as it were, upside down, in confusion that would have amused you if it had not too much distressed your sensibilities. He lost, he reeled, he groped at noonday, he went back to find his rampart, and, behold, it was gone! This we have seen in life in countless cases; but if we have *only* seen it, the sight will do us little good: such visions should be laid to heart.

King of Eglon. The word "Eglon" means pertaining to a calf, and may be taken as representing the whole system of false worship. A great mocking voice is heard in one of the minor prophets, saying, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." It is the way of false gods: they betray their worshippers; they withdraw themselves when danger crowds the scene with innumerable hostilities; they will do in the sunshine—that is

to say, they will do when there is nothing to be done ; but they have no biding pith, no staying power, no quality divine. Such is the difference between men. Under some circumstances the men are, as it were, equal—equal in pleasantness, in cheerfulness, and willingness to assist ; but some of them can bear no strain : so long as the whole business can be done by assurances that are without security, they are willing that the whole business should be completed. Men are known by their staying power. Many a man walks the first mile as if he were treading upon air. It is a kind of exercise in levitation, rather than in ponderous and literal walking. But there are ten miles to be walked. The second mile sees a difference ; the third mile excites pity in the beholder : the man was never made for that task. So it is with false worship, with imperfect worship, with fancy worship. There are men who worship reason ; but reason never worships them or trusts them : it does but coldly smile upon them and wonder at their philosophic insanity. And there are those who worship gold and fame and honour and ease ; and these base deities cast them off at eventide. Be right in worship, if you would be right in character. Be right in religious conviction, if you would be right along the whole line of life and equally strong at every point.

Joshua, having slain these kings, goes upon his conquering way. Joshua said, in effect, There are not only five kings to be killed, but more and more, a line of kings, far as the eye can see. So, soldier-like, captain of God, he passed on from Makkedah to Libnah, from Libnah to Lachish, from Lachish to Eglon, from Eglon to Hebron ; and there we lose sight of him for a moment. His sword is up, his eyes aflame, and he is the captain of the Lord towards all “devoted” things. And on, too, we must go—on from evil to evil, until the last bad king is slain : on from habit to habit till the whole character is purified : on until the whole life is cleansed ; and this sweet old earth, so debased, so ill-used, shall become, in every land, in every clime, beautiful as a palace built for God.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we pray with our hearts because thou hast taught us to pray, and we know that in heart-prayer the answer is found in the very petition itself. We are cleansed by this exercise; our mouth is purified and our lips are made clean. How can we speak the name of God, and then speak any other name that is not related to it by pureness or by love? How can we lift up our eyes unto heaven to behold the revelation of light, and then turn them downwards to look upon anything which that light has not created and approved? So thou dost make us better by our praying; we feel the stronger after we have spoken to God. Thou dost draw nigh unto those that address thee; thou dost put out thine hand towards them, and in thine hand is the sceptre of gold. We come by the way of the Cross. We have tried other ways, and they end in cloud and nothingness: but the way of the Cross is a way straight up to heaven; we meet angels upon the road and the spirits of the just made perfect,—a sweet and innumerable companionship of souls: all the dear friends we have lost, and the brave comrades, and the crowned ones of every name and quality whom we have known and with whom we have consorted; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. So we form one host: part of it in heaven, part of it on earth; still, we are one family in Christ, and we shall all be brought together into the larger house, and stand night and day in thy presence, whose look is heaven, whose breath is peace. For religious hopes we bless thee: they sing in the soul like angels from heaven; they make the night as the morning, and the morning they make as sevenfold noontide in the summer-time. We thank thee for them; they drive away dejection and fear and solitariness and all evil. We pray thee to multiply these hopes; increase not only their number, but their radiance, and in their light we shall work industriously and hopefully, and every hour shall create its own heaven. The days are few with many now before thee, because the pilgrims are hastening quickly to the end. The end may be to-morrow; the end may be to-night; the end cannot be far off, by reason of natural weakness and the increase of days. Some are young, and full of hope and high life and hot blood,—brave and chivalrous when good, but desperate and evil-minded when under the inspiration of the devil; the Lord send a message to such—a great gospel of love that shall seize the attention, attract the confidence, and save the soul. Help the young man in his struggle; it goes hardly with him sometimes. Now and again he is quite down, and but for thy touch he would remain there a dead man. Save him in the time of peril! Kill the tempter that sits beside his ear to speak as he may be able to receive the bad communication. Some are engaged in good service: the Lord help



them; their heaven is in Christian toil; their delight expresses itself in sacrificial labour. Give them courage and good cheer, and may they be able again to draw together their whole strength, in the name of Christ and for the sake of his Cross, and to go out and do valiantly for the Son of God. The Lord hear us when we pray, and be patient with us in our best endeavours. Pity our littlenesses and vanities and mean conceits. Pity us wherein we carry diseases, distresses of mind or body, brought upon us by no blame of our own; when the evil rises within us, consider our estate, we beseech thee, and remember whence we sprang and through what course we have come in all the ages gone. Take us into thine arms; give us rest awhile from storm and strife; quiet us with thy peace, thou tranquil one; and all this and more immeasurably do thou accomplish for us, because we pray in the name which must prevail. Amen.

### Joshua xi.

#### TYPES OF CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

**A** GAIN there seems to be nothing for us in these historical records. Yet, properly understood, these records were only written yesterday, as if with ink of our own making, and by hands that are writing the story to-day. Surely we find here types of Christian warfare; and surely we find here lessons by which we may direct our energy, as well as our thought, in the great conflict which is going on as between light and darkness, right and wrong, Christ and Belial. Change the words only, and the spirit or thought may remain without modification. Nothing has gone out of this chapter but the mere terms, the proper names of men and of places. The law of warfare remains, because the fact of warfare abides; and the method of warfare is just the same to-day, substituting spiritual purposes for military thoughts and the usual armour of the battle-field. This might be substantiated incidentally by referring to the great forces which are set in array against the Christ of God. In the first five verses of the chapter we have a statement of the numbers that came out against Joshua:—

“And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, and to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. And

they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel."

That is a modern speech. The same kings, being spiritually understood, are meeting to-day in order to fight the Son of God. The kings have almost always been against him,—not the nominal kings only, as the kings of nations and of empires, but the kings of influence, the kings of society, the leaders of public sentiment, influential men—scribes, Pharisees, rulers, and the should-be guides of the people. The enemies of Christ are very many in number. We sometimes attempt to create Christian statistics. It is easier work upon that side than upon the other. Arithmetic is less distressed when called upon to state what good there is in the world, as represented by communities and activities, than when asked to give some dim hint of the evil that prevails. Who can give the statistics of the enemy? We have made some approach towards an enumeration of the persons and activities identified with the cause and kingdom of Jesus Christ, but where are the black books, the tables of figures that would represent the sin, the sorrow, the heartbreak, the baleful purpose, the selfish design, the cruel disposition, and all manner of evil known amongst men? We are told that there are ten thousand little girls upon the streets of London alone whose name is associated with sin. I do not blame them altogether. Judgment must not fall upon them solely. What do they represent? They must be taken in their symbolical character, as well as judged by their real conduct; and so taken, what is the meaning of it all? Who can trace the lines backward? Who can fix those lines in the proper centres and personalities, and identify those who are socially invisible with this infinite degradation? We are told that if all the drunkeries of Britain were set together, they would make a street six hundred miles long, and that street would be a double street, having a return line equal to the first, so that, if stretched out in one continuity, there would be twelve hundred miles representing the traffic which is doing more to destroy the earth than any other traffic which man can originate or invent. But what does this represent? The

matter does not begin and end in thronged buildings, in flaming windows, in flowing poison; there is something behind, round about, and until we can get into the atmosphere of the case we shall not be able to state statistically how evil stands. As many as the sand upon the sea-shore in multitude are they who are busily engaged in propagating evil. The worst of all evil is the respectable evil, the well-dressed wickedness, the haughty, disdainful blasphemy against all good and truth and love. The worst of all evil is in our own hearts. We are prone to go out in quest of statistics that we may represent how other people are breaking the ten commandments and offending the sanctity of Heaven: "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Is there any irony more pitiable, is there any irony less excusable, than our figuring down upon paper, which we shock by the very violence of the figures, how other people are transgressing the law, and saying nothing about our own selfishness, vanity, jealousy, cruelty, and designs to which we dare not give audible expression? "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did righteously, and he said, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Nor do we add to our supposed morality by publishing statistics against other people. It is quite true that we ought not therefore to spare other vices which are more public and in a social sense more calamitous than the vices which characterise conventional respectability: it is perfectly true that there ought to be exposure and denunciation and judgment and penalty, and that hell is too good for those who work evil; but the two statements are perfectly compatible: whilst we are indignant, and justly and rightly so, with things that we see, we ought to be equally indignant with the things that are hidden in our own hearts. Purify the fountain, and the stream will be clean; make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Thus there are two aspects, both of which may be zealously maintained, but no one of which ought to be maintained at the expense of the other. Blessed be every man who, having found evil, tears the mask from its face, and blessed be that man who is busy casting the beam out of his own eye

whilst he is mourning the frailties, the follies, the wickedness and ineffable iniquity of others.

Not only are the enemies of Christ very numerous, but they are perfectly united. There is a common consent amongst them. They hate the good. They are unanimous, and their unanimity is power. Though they sin in different ways, so that the details seemingly have no relation to one another, yet there is an understood unanimity amongst bad men, there is a password of evil, there is a touch which is known throughout the infamous fraternity. Bad men support one another. Herein they set Christians an example. Christians are not united. There is no body of men so disunited as the Christian body. What are they doing? Setting one opinion against another, battling for *isms*, contradicting one another publicly and bluntly, assailing one another, creating indictments which involve petty heterodoxies or erratic thinkings amongst honest men; whereas Christians ought to begin with this fact, namely: we are one brotherhood; we are one in our worship of Christ, in our trust of the Cross, in our expectation from Calvary; we are one in prayer. The moment we begin to pray, all hearts throb in one grand energy; the moment we begin to speak to one another, contradiction sets in. Then let us leave everything of the nature of dispute, contradiction, and variety of opinion, and show a common front to the common enemy. There is no occasion to say that we are undervaluing opinions, differences, and varieties of conviction and expression; we are now speaking relatively, and I cannot but repeat that, in view of enemies many as the sand upon the seashore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many, the one grand question amongst Christians should be, How far are we one? and not, How far can we divide and subdivide ourselves, and separate one from another as if in vital hostility? All the world over the bad man supports the bad man. He may not do so openly, but there is an understanding between them: the one bad man knows that if his house falls, the other man's house is in danger; or when the other man's house falls, his own dwelling is in peril. Whatever the differences in name and detail and circumstance, evil is one, and evil gathers itself together in tremendous concentration to fight against the Son of God.

The forces of evil are many, united, and desperate. They have made up their minds to work rack and ruin. We have covered over a great deal of enmity, but it is still there, as rank and virulent as ever. There are men within sound of the church-going bells who would tear down the bells, or use them to announce some other act and some other day than Christian service and resurrection morning. Within the sweep of our own observation there are men who would burn the Bible, dig up the very foundations of the sanctuary, destroy the memory of the Cross of Christ. We need not go to heathen lands or foreign countries, and talk about the opposition which is offered to the gospel of Christ. There is no such opposition in many of these places, for the simple reason that the name of Christ is not known. The rancorous and awful opposition to the Cross of Christ is in our own hearts, in our own life, and may be within the circuit of our own influence. Wicked men—let us repeat again and again—are desperate. Never undervalue the force that is against you. Nothing is to be gained by pouring contempt upon the numbers that are arrayed against the kingdom of Christ. There are those who would say, The enemy can be but few in number—why heed a dozen men? Why make any account of a hundred souls? What are they in relation to the great numbers which constitute the army of Christ? Pour contempt upon no one man. The kingdom of heaven itself is like a grain of mustard seed: it had a small beginning, and it has gone forward under the contempt and opposition of the world to its present position, whatever that may be, in beneficence and nobleness. One desperate man is an army. One really earnest man is a host, either on the one side or the other. There are so many ciphers; the number is very great, but the value is nothing; the value would be increased if even one unit could be set at their head: that one unit would shoot a value through every empty cipher and make it stand up the symbol of number and force and goodness. Woe betide the Church when, shutting her doors and closing her windows, she simply looks round upon her own congregation and supposes that congregation to be the world! At any given moment in Christian history the majority of men, taken by numbers, has been dead against the Messiahship of Christ.

What, then, is to be done? A dreary picture has been drawn; a very discouraging outlook has been taken in some respects and in some directions: what is to be done? The answer is in the sixth verse:—

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel; thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.”

It required the Lord's voice at that critical moment. There are times when, if God himself does not speak, the heart cannot live any longer. Hosts are gathering, the kings are coming down, every man is a king, and every king has brought his army with him, and his chariots; the gathering-place is within sight, and in one moment more the tremendous war will open,—“and the Lord said—” The Lord times his sayings. He will allow Joshua to look on until Joshua's heart becomes as water within him, until his strength utterly declines; and when Joshua is in that condition, the Lord will say, “Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel.” Who can tell what will happen within one round of the clock? We must not be discouraged because at any one moment the Christian cause seems to be overwhelmed. The Lord will suddenly come to his temple. Many things are nearer than we suppose, and in their bringing-in there will be no violence or revolution. The great spiritual victory may be won, to our surprise, in the night-time, as though we had nothing to do with it, but it were purely a conquest of heaven as against hell. History is made in critical moments, and sometimes apparently within measurable periods. Yesterday the kings were in high feather, yea, in great glee. As king came in after king, the shout of victory arose. There was no terror-stricken man in all their royal gathering. The forces of the land had come together. This was no deputation work; it was original service: the kings themselves were soldiers. How long did it take to overcome them all? What we should now term one round of the clock. Surely there is a kind of latent contempt in the observation “for to-morrow about this time.” One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Great deeds are wrought in a short time. This is the hope of the Christian; this is the

confidence of all noble workers in noble causes. We cannot tell how it is, but this miracle is promised—the last miracle—the miracle of suddenness, immediacy. Who can tell how the proud and the mighty shall be broken down “to morrow about this time”? Who can tell how short a period it will require God to work in to strike off the fetter from the foot of every slave, the manacles from the wrist of every bondman? Sometimes a grand emancipation or deliverance has appeared to be a thousand years off, and yet “to morrow about this time,” even to morrow the whole blessed issue was wrought out and accomplished, and Right as against foul Might was crowned. This is the view we must take of our service. Our service appears in some respects to be even contemptible. We preach, but nobody hears, or they who hear do not believe; they laugh with their hearts, or put away Christ with silent disdain. He seems to be fighting a losing battle; he is no further on to-day than he was yesterday; even where his sentiments are acknowledged, and where the compliment of hypocrisy is paid to him, there is no sound progress of righteousness and verity and holiness. That is a false view, or it is a view which should be false by the testimony of all history. “To morrow about this time” there will not a king be found arrayed against the Son of God. “To morrow about this time” heaven will descend, earth will arise, and none will be able to tell the difference between the fair worlds; Christ shall have the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. He seems to be now ten thousand ages away from that royalty, but “to morrow about this time” that astounded earth will throw down its arms, and say, in every language, “Galilean, thou hast conquered,” or, “Son of God, reign over us; thine is the right to reign.” Blessed is that servant who expects these things! He is inspired by the expectation: he comes up again to the fight, assured that “to morrow about this time” the victory will be won. Is it not possible for us to anticipate even the time which God has set, and, as it were, to surprise him by an early surrender? Is it not possible for some even now to say, I will not put it off until to-morrow; it shall be done now. Now I will part with all evil; I will dissolve alliance with all iniquity; I will, God helping me, be a new man, and serve the Lord in fulness of the heart’s consent?

Joshua did his work thoroughly. In the twelfth verse we read, "he utterly destroyed them." We want thorough work. We have partially cut down many vices: we have shaved off the top of them, but the root is still there, and, as we have seen before, the vine is the root, not the flower, not the blossom. What would be said of the husbandman who simply took the top off the poisonous tree which was destroying the fertility of his land? We should describe him as thoughtless, foolish, unwise altogether, and exhort him to dig up the root and burn it with unquenchable fire. What would be said of the man who painted himself a healthy colour,—who, without taking note of the internal disease, simply concealed its symptoms under a coating of fine tint that should express to the casual observer real health? We should call him "fool;" we should describe him in the severest terms; we should designate him a madman. But what is that to what we ourselves may be doing,—washing the outside of the cup and platter, while the inside is full of rotteness and dead men's bones? The eyes of judgment will look upon the inside, and many an outside flaw or stain will be forgiven or excused because of the friction of life and the multitudinousness of our relations; but the inside, the interior, that will be judged, and that will be approved or condemned.

Sweet is the last word:—"the land rested from war" (v. 23). The tocsin sounded no more; the trumpet was not again heard. The whole earth is to be at peace with God, and therefore at peace with itself. The sword and the spear are to be turned into ploughshare and pruning-hook, and the shiel is to be hung up in the hall—a piece of ancient history, only preserved that it may stimulate to holier thanksgiving and profounder prayer. The land had rest from war. The fiend went abroad no more. Man came to man as brother to brother. Feuds and differences and separations were things of the past. Every man knew the Lord; every man prayed with his brother-man in happy consent. This is a great outlook from the Christian's specular tower: he sees the morning of peace, the day of light, the Sabbath of humanity; and he preaches in that tone—the great, glad, triumphant voice, like the voice of many waters; he says, Peace is coming; the battle-flag is furled; and the world



is at last at peace! Towards that end we are moving. We are not ashamed of the issue; we are hoping for it, praying for it, working for it. Ask what the Christian Church is doing, and if in earnest, she is doing this one thing only—fighting for peace, praying against evil; and all she does tends in the direction of “the federation of the world.”

### SELECTED NOTES.

*Jabin, king of Hazor.*—(1) One of the most powerful of all the princes who reigned in Canaan when it was invaded by the Israelites. His dominion seems to have extended over all the north part of the country; and after the ruin of the league formed against the Hebrews in the south by Adonizdek, king of Jerusalem, he assembled his tributaries near the waters of Merom (the lake Huleh), and called all the people to arms. This coalition was destroyed, as the one in the south had been, and Jabin himself perished in the sack of Hazor, his capital, B.C. 1450. This prince was the last powerful enemy with whom Joshua combated, and his overthrow seems to have been regarded as the crowning act in the conquest of the Promised Land (Josh. xi. 1-14).

(2) A king of Hazor, and probably descended from the preceding. It appears that during one of the servitudes of the Israelites, probably when they lay under the yoke of Cushan or Eglon, the kingdom of Hazor was reconstructed. The narrative gives to this second Jabin even the title of “king of Canaan;” and this, with the possession of nine hundred iron-armed war-chariots, implies unusual power and extent of dominion. The iniquities of the Israelites having lost them the divine protection, Jabin gained the mastery over them; and stimulated by the remembrance of ancient wrongs, oppressed them heavily for twenty years. From this thralldom they were relieved by the great victory won by Barak in the plain of Esdraclon, over the hosts of Jabin, commanded by Sisera, one of the most renowned generals of those times, B.C. 1285. The well-compacted power of the king of Hazor was not yet, however, entirely broken. The war was still prolonged for a time, but ended in the entire ruin of Jabin, and the subjugation of his territories by the Israelites (Judg. iv.). This is the Jabin whose name occurs in Psalm lxxxiii. 10.

The question has been raised whether these two Jabins were not one and the same; and the affirmative has by some been assumed as an argument against the authenticity of the narrative in Joshua; while others think that the two narratives may be of events so nearly contemporaneous that they may have happened in the lifetime of the same person. This latter hypothesis, however, cannot possibly be retained; for even supposing that the ordinary chronology, which places the defeat of Sisera one hundred and fifty years after the time of Joshua, requires correction, no correction that can be legitimately made will render it possible to synchronise the two narratives, nor can we suppose that within the lifetime of one man Hazor could have been rebuilt, the shattered kingdom of its ruler restored, and that ruler enabled to tyrannise over his former conquerors for twenty years.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we know that thou art love, but what love is, who can tell? Yet we feel after thee because of our need of One greater and better than ourselves. Our souls have often cried in the darkness, O that I knew where I might find him: I would come unto him, and order my speech before him. We know where thou art; unto us who live in these latter days is the sanctuary of the Almighty well known. Thou art in Christ Jesus thy Son. Thou art in the Cross of redemption; thou art always to be found there; to that Cross, therefore, we now come, and our eyes are unto it with the eagerness of love and expectation. Thou wilt not disappoint the look of trust; thou hast never denied the prayer of simple faith. Thou wilt not deny our prayer when we ask for pardon, saying, God be merciful unto us, sinners, and forgive us our iniquities, and cleanse us from all our sins. To this prayer thou hast but one reply. Whilst we are yet speaking, may we hear the answer, and stand up like men who have heard music from heaven. We rejoice in a pardoning God. We need pardon. We have done wrong; but thou art merciful as well as righteous, and there are tears in the eyes of judgment. We come to thy compassion, not to thy righteousness; we hasten to thy Cross, O Christ, and not to the throne of the judge. Who can stand when God inquireth for life? What man may abide the look of justice? But we come to Christ; we stand at the Cross; we hope in the mysterious blood, the wondrous sacrifice, not to be explained, but to be felt: an influence that touches the heart, a ministry that awakens the love. Send none unblessed from thy word; let a portion of meat be given to each in due season; and may we feel that in perusing thy Book we have been enjoying a spiritual feast, eating and drinking in the King's presence, and that we have been refreshed and satisfied and stimulated by the bounty of thy house. Amen.

Joshua xii., xiii.

## A RECORDED LIFE.

THESE two chapters contain a good deal of hard reading. They are studded with unfamiliar and difficult words and names, so that reading them is like reading the writing upon gravestones in a foreign land. Still, there is much for our instruction here. For example, we are called to behold how good a thing it is to keep a detailed record of life. These

chapters are in a certain sense diaries or journals. The men of the ancient time wrote down what they did—that is to say, they kept their story freshly before their memories: they lost nothing; they wrote their accounts up to date; and at any given moment they could peruse the record and derive from it the advantage of stimulus which such an exercise could not fail to supply. The twelfth chapter deals with the slaughter of many kings. Their names are given, or the names of their cities. Men were not slain, and forgotten. This was not a heedless fight, wherein the soldiers on the victorious side struck in the dark and knew not what men they slew or what progress they made. The whole matter is detailed, put down—simply, clearly, and definitely. Moses seems to figure but poorly in the record of slaughter. He killed but two kings; and Joshua killed thirty-one kings. But who are the kings that Joshua killed, compared with the kings slain by Moses? The two which Moses slew have famous names; they were great and mighty men. The thirty-one slain by Joshua did not add up to the two slain by Moses. Thus work is estimated by quality. We do not reckon by number in the sanctuary, but by quality and by relation, by just standards, and the weighing is done in scales of gold. The poor woman who gave all she had gave more than all the rich: for they gave out of the margin, out of the abundant and all but unreckonable profit, the surplus of their earnings or savings; but she plucked out her whole heart and cast it into God's treasury, the only donation she could give; said the Treasurer, It is more than they all. This shall be the law of judgment: according to what we have, according to the quality of our work. The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. He who has killed many kings, and he who has killed but two, shall be judged, not according to the number, but according to the difficulty, the dignity, the quality involved in the tremendous exercise. Do we keep a record of life? How few men write their own story: in truth, there seems in many cases to be nothing to write. But this is quite a mistake. It is better to write the little nothing there is, than to omit the inscription altogether. A man may be shamed by the very nothingness of his entries to go out and do something worth putting down on paper and leaving as a record. We do not

know what we do until we detail it. No man knows how much money he spends unless he puts down every coin. That is the difference between the wise man and the fool. The fool knows nothing as to what he is doing: he goes out in the dark, works in the dark, returns in the dark, and he cannot tell what he has made of the trust which was put into his hands. The wise man is his own judge, his own scribe and secretary; and many a page he peruses which his hands wrote long ago with tears and penitence, with the difficulty of self-conviction. No man knows how much he gives in charity unless he puts it down. But who dare put that down? Who can say how little paper would be required for the record in many cases? Yet, on the other hand, who can say how much paper would be required by other men? But there is a deadly sophism which relates, not only to the giving of money, but to the giving of service, which expresses itself in this form: I am always giving. If you think so, you are never giving. Have you put down what you have done, and added it up? Now add up the other page on which the luxuries are written, the adornments of the house, the decorations of the person, the indulgences of appetite, the tribute paid to social ambition. Add up the figures: recite them if you dare! Yet it is well to write down the story—the story of discipline and battle and sorrow: the story of spiritual kings that have been slain, of enemies that have been conquered by love, and of positions that have been seized by prayer.

Then, again, we see how time beats the strongest. This is set forth very pensively:—

“Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the Lord said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (xiii. 1).

We have seen Moses go up to die with the fire of his eye unquenched. Joshua is said to be “old,” but not in the sense of years; he was “stricken in years,” that is to say, the years had told heavily upon him. There was not much of him to begin with. He was fertile, keen, quick, flashing; but he had not much stubborn stuff in him to stand the wear and the tear of a captain's life. He was only about a hundred and ten when he died, a sum counted as nothing in the ancient days.

But the word here used literally means, time has told upon thee ; this wear and tear has made havoc in thy strength, Joshua ; how old thou art !—not in days, but in anxiety, in care ; thou art whitened, blanced, withered ; and yet there is much work to be done, much land to be possessed. So God takes note of our failing strength. He says, concerning this man and that, Grey hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not. About some supposedly strong men, he says, They are wearing out ; they are old at forty ; at fifty they will be patriarchal, so far as the exhaustion of strength is concerned ; they will die young in years, but old in service. God's work does take much out of a man, if the man is faithful. A man may pray himself into a withered old age in one night : in one little day a man may add years to his labour. We can work off-handedly : the work need not take much out of us ; but if we think about it, ponder it, execute it with both hands,—if it is the one thought of the soul, who can tell how soon the strongest man may be run out, and the youngest become a white-haired patriarch ? But blessed is it to be worked out in this service. A quaint minister of the last century said, "It is better to rub out than to rust out." How many are content to "rust out" ! They know nothing about friction, sacrifice, self-slaughter, martyrdom. The work tells upon men in different ways. Moses was as young when he died as when he began. As for his spirit, his enthusiasm, he could have taken a thousand kings ; but it was time he was in heaven : God knew his life, God counted his pulses, God estimated his strength ; and God sends for a man when he wants him. Joshua came briskly forward, though at first we felt there was something wanting in the man somewhere. He needed so much encouragement. The opening of his story is full of "fear not ;" "be not dismayed ;" "only be of a good courage ;" hope in God ; keep your spirits up ; cheer yourself : now go forward. We wondered as to the meaning of this. We could not tell at first all it signified. Now it comes out. He is old already, stricken in years before he has begun to live ; and the land unconquered lies before him like a challenge, yet darkens upon him like a despair. No man completes the work. This is saddening, even to the point of agony. A man is permitted to build the wall of his tower half-way up, and then

when he has got into the way of it, and could build blithely, because of added skill and experience, he is told to come down—and to die! Providence is thus a continual rebuke to human ambition. We cannot put on the topstone. How much we would like to do so! to see the last child thoroughly educated and comfortably settled in life; to see the last effort crowned with success! Then we should retire into the sylvan shade, and listen to the singing birds all day, and spend a quiet eventide, and glide into heaven, rather than die into its splendours! But the column is broken in the middle. A man is old whilst yet his friends are rallying him on the fewness of his years. And the uncompleted work testifies that God is the Builder and man but the labourer of a day. Seldom can a man complete his own work. There is always “much land to be possessed.” The author has planned ten more volumes. Men, looking on, say, How active he is, and busy and prolific! He says, I have done nothing yet, I have not even begun; presently I will set to work and go through it like a man. It is not to be! The man who has lived well has a thousand schemes in his head when he dies. He says, I was just planning the noblest work of my life; I had just settled in my mind to begin what would have proved to be one of the most useful projections of the age; and now my right hand is withered, and the one strong arm falls by my side in impotence. “In the midst of life we are in death;” “boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;” “work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh, when no man can work;” “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;” for the time of ceasing is at hand. Does God look at the worker only? No; he looks at the work as well:—“there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” So he will have the land divided; he will have it allotted before the battle goes any further. What, is not this an allotment on paper? The battle has not yet begun in these other regions. We have seen the conquest of Jericho, and the burning of Ai, but as to these other portions of the land, the foot of Israel has not even been set upon them. God says, That does not concern you; take pen in hand, and write after my dictation. Then he maps out the land, fixes the boundaries, appoints the possessor, determines

the tribal relations, and creates a new geography. But suppose that the fortunes of war should alter all these appointments? What is God's answer to that? His answer is, There are no fortunes of war, there are no accidents; life is not a speculation, human history is not a game of chance; all things are ordered and appointed, and move by a massive and inevitable law, the meaning of which in the long run is—righteousness, beneficence, right. And the scribe wrote how the land was to lie. This is the Christian's comfort! "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." If we are doing anything on our own account, in a kind of practically atheistic manner, God will allow us to build a little more, but he will come down to see the tower we have been building; he will put his finger upon it,—and in the morning it will be found a ruin! Only they build wisely who build under God's direction and by his daily inspiration.

Then, comes the alarming, yet comforting thought,—that *God* keeps a record, if we do not. Read chapter xiii. 2-6, and see how detailed is the knowledge and purpose of God:—"This is the land that yet remaineth: all the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, from Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites: from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that is beside the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the borders of the Amorites: and the land of the Giblites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baalgad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee." Yet we try to exclude God from his own world. We think *we* make the fields to grow; whereas we have no power to make anything grow, except we obey the unwritten and eternal law of nature. We can do wonders in little patches of land; but who can strike a light that will illuminate a landscape? Who can kindle a fire that will warm the earth? We are such toy-makers; we do all

our work on such a minute scale, that we deceive ourselves by supposing that we are doing something : whereas, in reality, we are only keeping the law. We can break the moral law, but we must keep the natural law. Breaking the moral law, we call ourselves free men ; keeping the natural law, we do not know what we are. But that is our position. We work by the sun ; we take our time from the meridian. We are the slaves of nature : we are the rebels of the sanctuary. Blessed is the man who meditates in the law of God day and night—the great law, the whole law, natural, moral, spiritual : it is really one law, because the Law-giver is one. Why not be as obedient in morals as we are in labour, in agriculture, in travel ? Who counts it degradation to wait for the tide ? Who calls himself a slave because he waits for the seed-time, and cannot hasten it one hour ? The whole scheme of things is set in law, “the Lord reigneth.” All we have to do is to study the law, understand it, obey it ; then our peace will flow like a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea. God knows what has been done. He says, in effect, I have watched you, and I have marked down every step you have taken : you are at this moment at this point ; now from this point the course is thus and so ; and all the land is to be possessed. God will have the land, even if we die. Noble is the thought that he has entered into covenant with his Son. We may smile at the old theological terms as we please, but noble is the thought that there is a covenant pledging that Jesus Christ shall have the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. Sometimes it seems as if this could not be. We say it never can be accomplished ; the so-called Christian civilisation is going backward. Only going backward as we have seen the waves go backward, that they might come in with a fuller force and throb against the appointed boundary. We believe that all the land shall be possessed, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Then there is another consideration, and that relates to the recurrence of bad names in the comings and goings of human history. We are startled on reading the twenty-second verse of the thirteenth chapter :—

‘Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them.’



We thought we had done with Balaam. We made a study of him and closed the page. But who knows where his name may come up again? Who can tell in what relation he will stand to human history as the ages move on and circumstances vivify the memory of men? We think of names we will not mention to ourselves: they bring up nought but pain and shame and woe. We think of names we would speak all day long, for the mention of them is like a mention of summer flowers, and the record of the deeds in simple speech is like a gathering of such flowers, handful by handful, until the house is beauteous and fragrant as a garden. Our actions will come up in curious connections years after. People will say of one, He was a mean man, a selfish calculator and designer; he never did good to any living soul. Of another they will say, He was a brave creature, full of chivalry, quite lowly in heart, and so munificent that both hands were employed in helping the helpless and blessing those who needed comfort. A little incident will occur, and all memory will be lighted up, because the observer will remember how good some one was, and tender and sympathetic. The business man will help the young man because he will remember, when the case comes before him, that he himself was once young and needed a friend, and that a friend touched him as he lay in prison, and the chain fell off and he walked out a free man; and he will say, "In memory of that friend I do this deed." So the good does live after men, though the evil is not often interred with their bones. We will reverse the poet's moaning strain and say, Yes, the good does live, as well as the evil. Blessed are they who have laid up material for this kind of immortality. Even this, if the only immortality, is worth living for: in years after the name shall be a household word in many a family-circle, for it is associated with noble thought, generous impulse, self-sacrificing deed, and bravery to which the darkness was but as the light, and to which danger was a challenge rather than a dread. If we do not write our life, God is writing it. A man in his vision saw the great white throne, and the Judge was set, and the books were opened, and another book, which is the book of life. Wherever our name is written, may it be written in that book; and God will see that no fire can destroy the record.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we pray for one another that, according to the necessity of each heart, thou mayest command a great blessing from heaven. Thou knowest what our life is—how full of pain and trouble and unrest, how much disabled, how weary oftentimes, yea, how dejected and even despairing. But thine eyes are upon us for good; the heavens are opened unto our prayer; the Cross of Christ is still the centre of our hope. We come to that Cross day by day, longing to understand more and more of its love, of its deep meaning in relation to our sin. We would be affected by that love; we would see what thou feelest and thinkest concerning men, and would exclaim, Herein is love! God is love; God is very pitiful and kind: his mercy endureth for ever. He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. May we be subdued by that love, chastened and elevated by its infinite spirit; and as thou dost love us, so may we love one another. We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren. May this love grow within us, and find continual expression in our speech and conduct, so that others looking on may begin to wonder and inquire, saying, Behold how these Christians love one another in deed and in truth! We have come up to worship God. We would be bowed down before thee in penitence and humiliation, because of sin. God be merciful unto us, sinners! The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. There is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness. We have no answer; we are without excuse or defence; all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. Have mercy upon us for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who freely bore our griefs and carried our iniquities. Amen.

## Joshua xiv.

### CALEB'S CLAIM.

CALEB was a prince of the tribe of Judah, and before the allotment of the land was proceeded with he said, in effect,<sup>s</sup> I have something to say about this; the allotment ought not to proceed until I have been heard: whether the word was written or not, Caleb said, in effect, I cannot tell, but it was surely written in my heart; I will tell thee what it was: A distinct promise was made to me some five-and-forty years ago,

and that promise was to this effect. Then Caleb quoted the words or their substance, and set the case before Joshua, who, as prince of the host, listened kindly and answered generously and justly. How wonderfully the Past affects the Present! We must not think that affairs are lying upon the surface and are open to the handling of any one; that the business of life is superficial, easy, requiring no reference to the historical past, and no reference to unwritten, but eternal law. There is nothing so simple as it often seems to be. Sometimes simplicity is but the last result of complexity. Beware, therefore, of all counsellors who treat life in an off-hand, easy fashion, as if things could be set up, and pulled down, and changed without much anxiety or without appealing to the deepest affections and sometimes the tenderest memories of the soul. Caleb referred to the past; Caleb said, A promise was made to me in this matter, and I will tell you what that promise was. Mark the wonderful consistency of Caleb's spirit. He is the same at forty and at eighty-five. At forty he was a man of chivalrous spirit: a tall man did not affright him; he looked upon walled cities as upon paper castles. He returned with Joshua, saying to Moses, The work can be done. All the other princes or heads of houses had "melted" hearts; their courage had gone out of them; they said, The people are very tall, and the cities are very strong, and there is no more spirit in us. But Caleb was a man of "another spirit." That spirit kept him young to the last day of his life. King David was called "very old" at seventy. We saw in our last reading that the word "old" is not a time-word; it is a word that relates to work, and to the effect of work upon the worker. The wear and tear of work tells terrifically upon some natures; they are so intensely devoted: there is nothing trifling to them; every moment brings its own judgment, every day its own solemn sense of destiny. David was old because his work had been heavy. It is trouble that makes men old. Where is there a man that says he has been overborne by mere work, mere labour? But a thousand men could stand up *i* challenged to reply to the question whether trouble does not wear down the spirit, take out the very strength of the man, and make him old at five-and-twenty, aged and venerable at half a century. So it was with Joshua. He took hardily to the work; it was a great

study to him; he did nothing perfunctorily or within the limits of the moment for the moment's sake; all he did, drew blood—"virtue"—out of his interior nature. So it was with king David—"very old" at seventy. Other men are younger as the years pass on! They have a happy way of working; they are blessed with the inestimable blessing of cheerfulness; they are able to take everything, as it were, with a light hand and yet not frivolously; they are so buoyant, so happy, so cheery altogether, that, whatever comes, they approach it almost with friendliness, and they pass through controversy as if it were but a variety of life's pleasantness. The man who is now speaking in the text is eighty-five years old, and he says he is as strong as he was nearly half a century ago. May we not be so in our degree? Why do we so soon give up the work? Why this whining after rest, this desire to be let go, to be let alone, and to be permitted to flee into the wilderness or "some boundless contiguity of shade"? To touch such men as Caleb, is to receive new life, new hope. The cheerful man comes into history, bringing a warming influence with him, helping men to carry their burdens more resolutely and more hopefully.

But perhaps Caleb was simply asserting this youthfulness in order that he might claim the inheritance. Did he affect juvenility? Was he for the moment buoyed up with a false hope? The answer is very distinct, and there is no escape from it. In the eleventh verse he says,—

"As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now" [what for?] "for war, both to go out, and to come in."

It is a soldier's speech. It is not the utterance of a man who simply wants his wages and then to be allowed to luxuriate amid the uplands of Hebron. Caleb feels the old war-horse stirring within him: I am eighty-five and as strong as ever for war, both to go out and to come in,—to take the fortunes of the day, to be and to do what the times would suggest and justify. So this boasted youthfulness was neither an affectation nor a sentiment. What did Caleb choose? By his choice we shall see somewhat into his character. Did he choose a garden blown upon by the south-west wind only—a very choice and well-screened portion in the new

land? He chose Hebron! Those who have read the history know what that choice meant. Hebron was the metropolis of the Anakim, the country of the most warlike people in Southern Canaan. Hebron meant difficulty. For the moment, the Anakim had withdrawn, but they were still at a point of observation, and their intention was to return and take Hebron and its lands. Caleb, knowing all this, said, Send me where there is most danger. As for these people who went with me—or, at least, their descendants, for there is probably not a man of the original camp left—they would be affrighted by the tall Anakim: even to-day they would be as cowardly as ever. There is an heredity of cowardice, a descent of meanness. I have no patience with these people. Let me have Hebron, with its tall warriors and its defences and its positions fortified and all but invulnerable; give me the hard lot. Now we know the meaning of his boast. We want some such men now. We must not dismiss old workers who are willing to continue the work. Have no faith in any Christian communion that wants to get rid of the old pastor who has borne the burden and heat of the day, who loved and strove and suffered long before many of his critics were born. And this doctrine would admit of application in all directions. Remember the men who cheered you in darkness, who were lights in the time of your despair, who brought you grapes from the land that was afar off, and brought you the true wine of heaven, in that they said, This work can be done: arise and do it. Such men ought not to be treated unkindly or discourteously. They were brave men in their day. Some of them are as young now as they were when they were forty. If they think they are young, do not discourage them; if they suppose themselves to be as deeply interested in passing questions as they ever were, it is not ours to throw them into dejection; it should rather be ours to encourage them and bless them, for, whatever they may be to-day, in the brave days of old they were our soldiers, and heads-men, and leaders. When they ask for hard work, they prove their mettle.

Who can estimate the indirect influence of such an example? Indirect influence is a subject we do not perhaps sufficiently consider. There is a direct influence which is much spoken about and highly valued, and not improperly so; but who can

tell all the mystery of radiation? Who knows in what direction the warm rays shoot? Who can follow all the palpitation of heat, and say it begins here and ends there? Who can tell the indirect influence of Scripture well read, of a Gospel well preached, of a life well lived? There are observers on the outskirts. The prisoners were listening whilst the apostles were singing. Taking into account indirect influence as well as direct service, many a life will in the judgment be surprised because God attributes to it the outworking of so many and such gracious results. Who could refuse the better portions of Canaan when Caleb said, "I will take the hard part. Let the old man grapple with the difficulty. As for these young people, they will get younger as they grow older perhaps; they will become more courageous as the years come and go. Meanwhile, I will take the land that is now peopled by the giants; and in the strength of God I will subdue the land and make it part of the inheritance of heaven"? We want to hear such voices. We are tired of the moaning word, the despairing note, the sign of dejection, the cowardice that betrays itself even in the voice. Many persons can follow a tune who cannot raise one. We must have leaders, captains, mighty men. Who knows what influence Lebbæus had in the first discipleship? He is a man of no historical account; he does not figure among the three mighties; but "Lebbæus" means "heartly, cheerful." Who can tell what influence the man had by virtue of his cheeriness? We are not all speakers; we do not all go to the front and lift up an ensign; but many help the good work who stay at home and make the house glad, make every window face southward, wherever the builder has made it turn, to catch all in the sunshine. Who can estimate the influence of home music, home love, home encouragement? When we go home, carrying life's burden with us, and say we are now exhausted and can return no more, who knows the effect of a cheerful word, an encouraging expression? These things are pointed out that many may be encouraged who suppose they are doing nothing. Apparently they are not engaged in much public work of any consequence; but they do so much good to us at home or on the highway: we never met them in the dark night but they brought all the stars out; we never spoke to them in the storm but within the tempest there was a great calm. Let

every man discover what his gift is, and his vocation, what he can do, and let him do it in the name and fear, the sight and love of God.

Who could give up when the senior was willing to go forward? We are shamed into some good deeds. Who would give anything to a collection if the congregation was not present? Who would really give in the dark? Some people would: the darkness and the light are both alike to them; but is it any libel upon human nature to say that there are some other people who would not do it? We are moved by example. There is a subtle contagion in social unity and action. We thought we would not go out; but seeing Caleb arraying himself for the night and going out into the storm, we cannot for very shame stay at home. So we look to our leaders, our senior men, to be young, to speak the glowing word, and to show that what they say is not sentimental, but real, because they themselves are willing to keep the door, to watch the gate, to stand outside, or to accept the most difficult position. Are there not some secondary heroes in the Bible? Very little is said about Caleb. There are three men of the name of Caleb in the Bible, and if you put all the three Calebs together the space required for the record of their deeds would not be a large one. There are under-heroes, men who are not of the stature and volume and force of Elijah, who fills the whole space of the time he lived in: but there are Calebs, men who are less, and yet of the same quality; men who have accepted Heaven's vocation and are working it out with a rare courage and a sweet patience. May such a word as this touch many a man who is wondering what he is doing, and help many a woman to believe that in quietness and in peace in household privacy she may be touching with helpfulness some of the boldest and bravest lives of the time.

What was the secret of this continual cheerfulness? It was a religious secret. Caleb says,—

“Nevertheless, my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the Lord my God” (v. 8).

When does God allow a man to grow old in any sense that involves contempt or insignificance or worthlessness? No man grows old at the altar. The Church, properly understood in all

its relations and activities, is the ground where grows perennial youthfulness. When did the aged preacher say he could find nothing more in the Bible? The blessed difficulty is this: that the older we grow, the larger the Bible becomes; the more we read it, the less we seem to have perused it; we want to begin at the very beginning again and go through all the music, so enchanting is it, so inspiring, yet so scathing. The religious man ought to be young. The religious man is bound for the heaven of God, for immortality; he must not die into nothingness, into extinction; he must live upwards, so that when he dies he ascends. Herein I would not hesitate to preach the religion of Jesus Christ in what may be termed its spiritually sanitary aspects. Christianity keeps the soul clean, pure, healthy. Christianity will not abide in the heart with any enemy of Christ; there will be controversy, all-night fighting, but Dagon must go down; the Spirit of Christ will not abide peacefully by truce or compromise in any heart in which is hidden iniquity. For bright faces, for kindling eyes, for voices having in them soul and expressiveness, to what can we look as we can look to the Christianity of the New Testament—the moral precepts and doctrines of the holy record? A beautiful image is this: "I wholly followed the Lord my God." The Bible is a pictorial book. Nearly all the words are pictures. Most of the proper names certainly are pictorial or illustrative. Many of the references belong to the same class. What is the image underlying the words of Caleb? "I wholly followed the Lord my God," equal to, "I was like a ship in full sail and going straight on." The figure was worthy of the man. He was not halting, beating about the shore, wondering where he could find a night's refuge, or how he could escape the voyage altogether. He said, When I was forty years old my life might be described as a ship in full sail, the wind blowing it on to the desired haven; what I was at forty, I am at eighty-five: not a sail taken in, not a wandering thought, not a divided affection; as I was then, so am I now: so I claim the fulfilment of the promise spoken five-and-forty years ago. 'Did Joshua say, "No; many things have happened since then"?—a politician's base excuse under some circumstances for not carrying out his word, or doing what he once promised to do. No. He said, "This is right, and because



it is right, it must be done." And it was not done with the right hand only, but with the left hand as well; and not with the right hand and the left hand only, but with the right hand, the left hand, and the whole heart.

So Caleb's cheerfulness was met by a buoyancy equal to itself, and Hebron was given to him with a blessing breathed from the sincere heart. Is not many a blessing kept from us because we have not been like a ship in full sail? Have not our iniquities kept good things from us? How can we claim the inheritance if we have never been ready for the battle? And why should we sit in contemptuous judgment upon the Calebs of any age, when we have not known the stress that was put upon them, or entered into their labour, which made their lives oftentimes a great burden? Understand that we have come into an inheritance of history. We enjoy a Hebron that has been made for us. The civilisation round about us to-day is none of our handiwork; at the best we have only put a kind of top upon it. To-day gathers up into its throbbing heart the energy of all the centuries that have gone. Blessed are they who live under the inspiration of this idea. They will be grateful to their forefathers; their forefathers will not be spoken of as dead men, but as men who are now living and historically ruling the sentiment of their age. One thing is certain: God will not forsake a man who has been "wholly" devoted to him. God knows the number of Caleb's years, and the promise shall be redeemed. O poor heart, wondering when the good time is to come, when Hebron is to fall in as part of the inheritance, thinking the time is long, long in coming, and there may not be many days left in which to enjoy the heritage, take courage! God knows every word he has spoken. He is not unfaithful or unrighteous to forget our works of faith and labours of love. When he does bring in the inheritance, he will surprise us by it. It will be no mere handful of mud, no little measurable Canaan, but all heaven's blessedness, all heaven's purity, all heaven's music. Cheer thee! He is faithful who hath promised; he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are not discomfited because the lot is cast into the lap and the disposing thereof is of the Lord; instead of being disquieted, we are at rest: this is right, this is best; not our will, but thine, be done. We would desire to dwell on the sunny side of the hill, and to find out where the rivers flow all the year long, and where the soil is garden-land; but thou dost put some men in the wilderness, and some upon the mountain-top, and some in stony and rugged places. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Every place is praying-ground, every stone is an altar, and everywhere there are paths straight up to heaven. We desire to see in our lot God's law, God's will. We are here,—we want to be there; but thou dost say, No, abide on thy lot unto the end of the day; be a good and faithful servant, and heaven shall find thee room. This is thy sweet word. It makes us glad and strong; it fills the night with great stars; it makes the winter a kind of summer. Once we did not understand all this, and we chafed as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; now our eyes are opened: we see that God is King, and Lord, and Father, Shepherd, Friend, Companion, that there is but one throne, and that it is established upon righteousness. Now, come weal, come woe, we are not far from God. The cup is sometimes bitter, but thou canst help us to drain it every drop; sometimes the cross is heavy, but thou dost send a friend to lift it for us, at least for a day or two; sometimes the road is all roses and song and joy, the very dust of the ground leaping up in praise, and then all is heavenliness;—whether it be thus or otherwise, guide us with thine eye, preserve us by thy grace, give us comfort in all sorrow, and chastening in highest ecstasy. Work within us all the good pleasure of thy will. Give us the joy that comes of rational obedience, and the higher joy that comes of loving faith. Give us some touch of heaven even upon the earth; surprise us by some little flower that cannot have grown under these cold skies, some leaf from paradise, rich with fragrance from above; then we shall be young again, and strong and mighty, and though the enemy have chariots of iron we shall drive him out, and God shall have the praise. Help every man to see life broadly, clearly, and hopefully; enable every one of us to lay hold of it with a strong man's hand; keep us from all fear, fainting, dejection; take not the spirit of hope from us: may it dwell within us, and sing to us, and make us glad. We can ask all this in the name of Jesus, who carried our sorrows, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He taught us to call thee Father, and to ask great things of thee, yea, even to ask the Holy Ghost—all gifts in one. Jesus is our Saviour; Jesus died for us. We know not all the meaning of this Cross of his, but in the night-time of tempest and sorrow and loneliness, there is nothing so grand, so good, so comforting. Amen.

## Joshua xv.-xix.

## DISTRIBUTION.

LOOKING at these chapters is like looking at infinite rocks. Most stony are these verses. The eye is affrighted by these Hebrew and other polysyllables. The land is being allotted and distributed. Why then dwell upon a picture whose chief feature seems to be its inhospitableness? Because the picture is full of suggestion, and full of abiding and useful truth. One tribe is ordered to the right hand, another to the left; one north, another south; one into the valley, another to the mountains; one to places where fountains spring, another is commanded to go to the wood country and cut down trees and clear a space for itself—make a civilisation. This is but an analogy of higher distributions. Is there not a great law of distribution in all human life? We have but to open our eyes and look upon it. We cannot alter it. We may here and there modify it a little, or pass laws concerning it, or make it a subject of scientific inquiry: but there is the law, and there is no lasting escape from its operation. Nor need there be in order to prove the goodness of God and the riches of his mercy. The whole globe is allotted. Every continent has its own people, every island its own socialism. Wherever man can be placed he is set down there by a law which he cannot control—a marvellous, but gracious predestination. We feel it to be so. Who does not know a foreigner the moment he sees him? We say within ourselves, if not in articulate speech, This man is a long way from home. Who said so? By what right do we determine his relation to the globe? We cannot tell, but we do it. Instantaneously we see that the man has come from over seas thousands of miles away; his colour, his dress, his aspect—something about him says, I do not belong to this part of the land, I am a foreigner here: have regard for me upon that ground; I speak your language imperfectly: do not impose upon me because of my ignorance, but guide me, protect me, and show me hospitality whilst I linger within your borders. Who made the difference? What is the meaning of the difference? Why are some men put in

tropical climates, and others are set among the eternal ice? And why this spirit of contentment more or less evident in every land? Because, whilst we would regard the man as a foreigner, we must remember that, were we visiting his country, he would regard us, even us—great and glorious and all but infallible Englishmen—as foreign! It is sad to think of! It is sometimes intolerable. But even an Englishman may happen to know the mystery of the misfortune of being a foreigner in some parts of the world—an idea almost impossible to drive into the English mind, for an Englishman, whilst hating all boasting on the part of other people, spends his time in boasting about himself. But there is the law—the unwritten law—the imperious and unchangeable law. The bounds of our habitation are fixed. We are tethered to certain localities; we have a fatherland, whether it be here or there; we have an appointed place, where our dead are buried, where our battles are fought, where our progress is developed: hence the spirit of patriotism—that marvellous spirit that burns within us when the country is the question. We feel, therefore, in perusing silently these wondrous chapters in Joshua that distribution is perfectly familiar to us: we see it in every part of the globe; we see it in men, in animals, in plants. There is no monotony in the divine allotment; it burns with colour; and in so far as it accepts the law, it throbs with music, with lofty, grateful song.

So it is with talent and faculty. The kingdom of heaven is as a man who took his journey into a far country, and distributed to his servants various talents—to one five, to another two, to another one,—to every man according to his several ability. There is the fact. Why enter into pedantic discussions about the parable, and the allotment, and the outworking of the little drama? Here in our own circle and within our own consciousness we have the parable itself in every detail and syllable. We may covet one another's allotment, but we cannot cross the hedge, or steal the talent that we envy. Who would not play upon the musician's harp? Who would not wear a poet's mantle? Who would not dream great dreams, the very beauty of which creates a language of its own, purifying all common terms and making refined gold of them, and jewels precious as rubies? Who would not be a great merchantman, knowing things, as it were,

without study? Where other men toil towards conclusions, the greater mind moves to them with natural ease and dignity, seizes them and applies them to wealth-producing purposes. Who would not be the heroic soul that never goes out but when the wind blows from the north, and then in great gusts and thunder-blasts?—the man who would not sail over a smooth sea, but wait till the wind seizes the infinite deep and torments it into agony? Who would not be so brave as to wait till the war is at the thickest, and then plunge into the very midst of it, and ask only for the privilege of fighting the strongest man? But we cannot interfere with the operation of the law. Some men cannot sing: there is no poetry in their being; they never dream; they never see heaven opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God; they never rise to that high ecstasy which treats miracles as trifles, as occurrences that transpired millions of miles beneath them. Others are without courage, except the courage of subtle impertinence, which suggests that everything must be attempered to their timidity, and nothing must be done that can affright their souls. Did they but know they were mean and small and worthless, they might be forgiven, but they do not, and therefore they keep society at prayer, for nothing but the profoundest prayer can enable us to tolerate their presence. Why is not every man as able as his brother? Why is one man eloquent, and another speechless? Why is one man gifted with the power of acquisitiveness in intellectual directions, and another unable to learn his first lesson? If we imagine that all these things can be rectified, in the sense of making all men equal, we shall toil at abortive reforms, and have nothing at the end but empty hands and disappointed hearts. The question is, What can be done? What is the divine will? Or, if we shrink from theological or biblical terms, still we need not surrender our reason: we might stand back and make a philosophy of that of which we decline to make a theology: the conclusion is the same; the fact abides.

The same law applies to distribution in heaven. All the beings, white-robed, unstained, beautiful with purity, do not stand upon an equal plane in the celestial country. There are angels and archangels; cherubim and seraphim; beings all fire, beings all vision, typical of wisdom all but immeasurable; quick-

flying angels speeding with messages from the throne, and brooding spirits hovering over our life, appointed to watch little children: in heaven their angels do always behold the face of Christ's Father. In heaven there is variety of mental stature, spiritual service,—a great distribution of faculty and force and ministry. And this is essential, from our point of view, to a complete and beautiful heaven. We must give up the idea of monotony. If we still think of heaven as a place of harps and harping and songs, we are quite right, the meaning being that all true life blossoms up into song: we could not complete any pillar of logic or of fact without putting upon the top of it the lilywork of music and gladness and victory. We have painted heavens the colour of which wears off, monotonous heavens that become burdensome, small heavens picked out for ourselves and our friends. We must burn these heavens, and let them pass away with a small noise, for such heavens could never make a great one. The true heaven is one of glorified earth, glorified facts as we know them; heaven of variety and position, locality, service. We know now what it is. We do not need to die to be in heaven, or to know it and speak about it familiarly: the kingdom of heaven is within, in the deepest, truest, most living sense. There are father-spirits, and mother-angels, and little people—children playing. The child that does not play ought to be looked after, and the case should be inquired into with awful solemnity. Children must play everywhere—at church and in heaven. A glorious paradise that, by reason of its variety, personality, faculty, and colour, and engagement! In it there is room for you, for me, for greatest, smallest, richest, poorest:—"in my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you."

Remember that every man begins with gifts. This is the very law of these chapters of allotment. The people have something to begin with. No man made his first dowry; it was in him, or handed to him; he did nothing towards the first germ, the plasm of his fortune and his destiny. This is often forgotten in estimating human position and human progress. Every man has a faculty given to him—a first thing—a nest-egg—a wonderful beginning! God gives us the light, the air, the land, the sea. We did not kindle the sun; we do not loose the winds from

their tabernacles; and no man ever made one inch of land, or added one pebble to the earth's surface. In this particular we are very limited and very small. Think! the man who built the greatest cathedral that ever domed itself out towards the skies never added an atom to the sum-total of the earth. He worked with stones that were laid up for him, banked for him in the treasure-house of the earth. So when the Lord goes into a far country he leaves with every man something which the man did not make—five talents, two talents, one talent, whatever it may be; that germ or starting-point or protoplasm was given. So we begin with grace, privilege. We are trustees to start with. With all this ability and wonderful inventiveness we have never invented a new pebble, in the sense of adding to the earth's stones something that was not in the earth and hidden there by its Maker. If we leave that central or primal thought, we get into detail that vexes us, then we begin to manipulate and rearrange and redistribute; but it all comes at last to this fact, that every man has something to start with,—a wealth that cannot be communicated, a property his alone; and that must be inquired into at the final audit.

Some possessions come as rewards :—

“And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife” (xv. 16).

There begins the test of talent and force and quality in men. The speech is, Come, now! the palm be to the brave, the crown to him who wins it. Up to a certain point all things seem to be appointed, settled, almost arbitrarily distributed; but then there are chances in life that seem to come afterwards, as it were, amongst ourselves, competitions of a personal and social kind. How early this competitive spirit was developed, and how wonderfully it has been preserved through all history! The spirit of Providence seems to say, in homeliest language, now and again, Here is a chance for you; you had something to begin with, to that you can add more, by pluck, bravery, force,—to the war! We need such voices; otherwise we would soon slumber off, and doze away our handful of years, and awake to find that the day had gone. So voices appeal to us continually, Here is reward for you: he who is up earliest in the morning shall have

this ; he who has most staying power shall have the prize which I now exhibit ; he who can take the most strongly-fortified city shall have this crown—all gold, except where lit up with diamonds. We know that this offer is made ; we are aware that these opportunities do exist. Now if they who obey such calls do it to obtain a corruptible crown, what shall they do who are called to the possession of an incorruptible ? If before running a race, or engaging in a wrestle, men subject themselves to discipline, diet themselves, allow themselves to be directed, controlled, and overborne by another energy and wisdom, what should they do who say they are striving for heaven, fighting for a crown of life, aspiring for celestial citizenship ?

Compromises are sometimes inevitable. This is made clear by the sixty-third verse of the fifteenth chapter :—

“As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out : but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day.”

Here the mysterious alliances begin which mark our life. We do not know how it is, but there are some forces we cannot expel ; we are obliged to make truce and compromise and workable arrangement. It is so. Why dispute it ? We cannot have everything four-square, snow-white, absolute in heavenliness or righteousness. The Jebusite will elbow the children of Judah. Good may come out of all this, in the sense of wonderful educational influence and social modifications and chastisements. How many men there are whom we almost want to die, and die they will not ! We see fair creatures dying—sweet innocent things, flowers of heaven upon earth, wither away ; and there are stubborn lives, perverted, conceived in a false key, operating upon mischievous lines,—and the night dew will not damp them, the fogs of winter will not choke them, they escape perils on land and perils on sea. Why do the wicked live ? Why do men who are apparently useless and mischievous live ? Why is poverty continued ? There may be many answers to these questions, but all the answers seem to leave the mystery where we found it. Life now in this part of its educational process is often a compromise. How then shall it be ? Shall the Jebusite overpower Judah, or Judah overpower the



Jebusite, or shall they both grow together until the harvest? We must not carry on works of destruction. Men are not to be killed out of the way. Even the worst men are not to be despatched by poison. There is a mystery which God will solve; but this we can do: we can so grow in the grace of God and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that we shall be able to throw off all the baleful influence which otherwise would fall fatally upon us by associations we are obliged to maintain. "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" Why does he not kill them off the face of the earth? Instead of doing so, he goes to be guest with a man that is a sinner. That is true; he can do it, because he is the Son of God: the sunlight is not afraid to go anywhere; the wind cannot blow out that candle of the Lord. Our little lights sway in the wind and die in the cold, but the sunbeam looks upon carrion, and yet is pure; heaven's mid-day looks upon hell, but receives no taint. By Christly character, by Christly pureness, by Christly consecration we can live even with the Jebusite: he cannot harm us, so long as we are Christ-like; we may do him good, for love is mighty: an eloquent tongue hath love, charged with the power of persuasiveness; and pureness has wonderful influence, operating day by day as it does, with the most sacred and sacrificial constancy. What if one day we should say concerning the Jebusite, "Behold, he prayeth"? Sad will it be for us if the Jebusite should say, "Behold, he hesitates in prayer; we have mocked him so long that he is now afraid of his own faith: we shall win at last." Oh, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of Philistia rejoice, saying that the men of prayer have been mocked into unbelief, and the men of high profession and noble character have been brought down by arrows skilfully shot by arms that are mighty. We accept the lot: not our will, but thine, be done. Whether the talent is five in number, or two, or one, give us the cheerful, grateful heart that goes to work with a will, and that finds its heaven, not in the number of the talents, but in their happy and beneficent use.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, in whom can we put our trust but in the Living One? Death is written upon all other securities. Thou remainest evermore the same, and in thy righteousness is no change. We hasten therefore unto thee as men hasten to the rock in which they can be protected against the tempest and the storm. Thou art indeed a refuge from the tempest. Thou dost hide thy people in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues; thou dost call them into the chamber in the rock until the storm be overpast. Enable us to take refuge in the Son of God, to find our home and our heaven in his protection; and thus shall our life be spent wisely, and our strength shall go out from us to return again abundantly enriched and honoured. We would live in thy fear, we would work in thy love, we would be comforted with thy consolations and none other. Heal our diseases; direct our steps; keep us in the time of strife, and give us solidity of confidence in the day of distress. We bless thee for all thy care, so patient, so tender, so minute, covering all things, and attending to each as if it were a solitary concern. This is thy greatness, thou Infinite One, that nothing is too little for thy notice. We put ourselves into thy hands. We would have no will of our own; we would listen for thy voice morning, noon, and night, and answer it with the readiness of love. We own our sins. We will not count them, for no number can set them forth; nor will we speak of them, for we cannot state them as they are in thy sight; but we will look towards the Cross of Christ; we will fix our attention upon the Son of God as he expires in agony. When sin torments us most, we will remember what Jesus, Son of man, Son of God, did in Gethsemane and on the Cross, and therein shall we find perpetual comfort. Enable thy servants to work better than they have ever done. Enable all to whom the ministry of suffering is entrusted to suffer patiently, uncomplainingly, and hopefully; yea, may they so suffer as to awaken the wonder of those who look on, because of gentleness, meekness, and patience. When we read thy Book, first read it to us, utter the music in our souls; then shall we see thy meaning, and answer it instantly and lovingly. Remain with us; yea, tarry with us, lingeringly, as if thou couldst not leave us: and in that lingering we shall see a pledge of eternal fellowship. Amen.

## Joshua xv.-xix.

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND.

WE have taken our first survey of the distribution of the land, and noticed several particulars of some consequence to ourselves; other particulars are now to be noticed. The

inquiry will be, How far the distribution and the particulars associated with it are true to human nature as we know it. In answering this inquiry we shall soon see whether the Bible is an old book, in the sense of being obsolete and pointless, so far as the conditions and requirements of this day are concerned. The case is a very simple one. The land is to be divided among a given number of people. How they took the distribution or accepted the circumstances is an important inquiry.

We soon come upon a line that might have been written yesterday. It was not enough to have a great general distribution, but there must be some particular and singular allotment, to one person at least. She had a petition to offer; she offered it, and the supplication was answered. She asked through another a request from her father. Her father had received his portion, even Hebron and the region round about, and his daughter Achsah would have a little gift all her own. She would say, "Give me a blessing." That is vague. Not only would she have a benediction, but a portion—quite a little one, but still a portion, belonging, as it were, to herself—a jewel for her own neck, a ring for her own finger. Who does not like to have something particularly his own? It is well to have some general stake in the country, but to have a little private piece of land—one little bubbling, singing, fountain; a corner quite one's own—is not that the very joy of proprietorship? No doubt there is a general sense of wealth, so general indeed as to be of little particular service under the occasional pressure of necessity: but when the child has six inches of garden-land all its own at the back-door, there is, after all, a landlordly feeling in the young heart that finds frequent expression. Caleb's daughter would have "a field:" "she lighted off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wouldest thou?" She answered, "Give me a blessing." That she could have in a moment, but said she, Give me more, "give me also springs of water in addition to the south land." "And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs" (vv. 18, 19). To whom did she pray? To her father. Have we not a Father to whom we can pray for springs of water? Yes, we have such a Father, and from him we can have the upper springs and the nether springs. The river of God is full of water. It cannot be drained

off. It sets a-going all the fountains of creation, and is more at the end than at the beginning—the very fulness of God; a contradiction in words, but a grand reality in experience. The sun lights every lamp, and not a beam the less is his infinite glory. We therefore may have a special portion, a little all our own; yea, a double portion of the Spirit may be ours. Do not let us be content with the general blessing of the Church. That, indeed, is an infinite comfort. But that general blessing is a pledge of particular donations on the part of the Father of lights. Here we can pray without covetousness; here we can be ambitious without selfishness; here we can have great desires, and be enlarged in our generosity by their very operation in the heart. Let each say to the Father, Give me a field; give me a faculty; give me some dear, sweet consciousness of thy nearness and lovingness—something that nobody else can have just as I have it; whisper one word to me that no one in all the universe but myself can hear, and that whisper shall be to me an inspiration, a comfort, a security, a pledge; not that others may not enjoy the same in their own way, but I want something mine own. To that prayer who can measure the reply, if spoken in faith and love and noble unselfishness?

Now another voice is heard. Joshua was not going the right way about the work, in the estimation of some people:—

“And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto?” (xvii. 14).

These were the Ephraimites, the most arrogant and the most cowardly of all the tribes. Arrogance and cowardice have been bed-fellows all through time and all the world over. “The children of Ephraim being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.” We expected no less. We were sure from their vaunting boast at the time of the distribution of the land that there was no quality in them. The bark of a dog would be mistaken for the roar of a lion; the falling of a leaf would be construed into the noise of advancing foes. Yet not all the Ephraimites were of that quality. Joshua himself belonged to that tribe. The contrast, therefore, is the more beautiful, that they, the boasting leaders of Ephraim, should come up to Joshua, the true leader, and talk to him in a tone

of arrogance and lofty demand. They thought they would touch his pride, but his pride lay beyond their touch. He was too great to be restless, too profoundly religious to be in a tumultuous state of mind, too much in heaven to care, from a selfish point of view, for all Palestine—a mere speck of mud upon the sea. Yet they thought they had good standing before Joshua. “We are a great people,” said the Ephraimites, “and one lot is not enough.” Joshua answered them with infinite wit, with a fine touch of satire, as well as with high religious nobleness :—

“And Joshua answered them, If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee” (xvii. 15).

The answer is the answer of statesmanship in all times, and the answer of wisdom to those who clamour for great spaces and for liberties worthy of their greatness. Consider the answer well : If thou be a great people, go out and cut down the forests : create a space ; prove your greatness by your service ; great men cannot be kept back : if thou be a great people, go and fight the giant ; don't spend thy time in catching flies. The Bible is not an old book in the sense of being outworn. It is still the best business book in the world. It is still the book that holds all things within its four corners ; no man can add to it, and none can take away from it. That is the mystery of the Bible. We have already seen that no man can add a single pebble to the universe. With all man's greatness and ambition and fiery determination, and all his love of conquest, he cannot add one little pebble to the earth ; he labours with infinite toil within a very small circle. With the book of God it is the same in the matter of addition and subtraction. You cannot publish a supplement to the Bible. You cannot really and vitally take anything from it ; you may do so feloniously and literally, but the Bible is the complete Book. Call it a seed-house, and grow whole forests and beautiful gardens out of it ; but as to its vital substance, its eternal pith and music, you can neither add, nor subtract anything.

Joshua, continuing the high satiric strain, said :—

“Thou art a great people, and hast great power : thou shalt not have one lot only : but the mountain shall be thine ; for it is, a wood, and thou shalt

cut it down : and the outgoings of it shall be thine : for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong" (xvii. 17, 18).

This is how we should try all supposedly great men in the Church—put them down into barren positions, and tell them to make gardens. Send the very greatest professor to the most desolate missionary station, and tell him that it will be at his peril to write one word of discouragement ; every post must bring news that gardens are growing, birds are singing, the desert is rejoicing and blossoming like the very garden of God. So should all great people be treated. They should not have merely hereditary blessings—the meanest of all wealth, the wealth that has no soul in it, no blessing with it—a great load set upon a sliding scale that goes on and on by its own impetus. If we think we have great faculty, go out and prove it by going into the mountain, and by battling with the Canaanites. If we suppose ourselves to have very superior talents, go to the most destitute parts of the city, to the east end of every city, and make it as the west should be in all hopefulness and in all spiritual purity and dignity.

We come now to another set of circumstances. It appears that when all was done up to this point, a good deal still remained to be accomplished. We read of this in chapter xviii. 2-7 :—

"And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance" (xviii. 2).

Joshua said, Go and walk through the land and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the Lord at Shiloh. In other words, Go and see what can be done with the remainder ; bring me a map of the country ; state to me the possibilities of the situation, and I will make a religious question of it, as I have always done. That is how we must do now. There are more than seven tribes amongst us who have nothing. What have we to do ? We have to go out and look at the situation, in its length and breadth—measure it, grasp it, be master of its details ; and come back and settle destiny by religious standards and considerations. To young men I would say, Do not stand there complaining to your fathers and your leaders ; nothing is easier than to moan, and to complain, and to murnur ; go out and look around and see what the

reality of the circumstances is, and then address yourselves to that reality as you may be religiously directed. What is the globe? Let me understand something of the earth upon which I live. What is its size? Right through it, how far? Round about it, what distance in miles? How many people are there upon its surface? What is the history of its growth and trade? And as we map this globe out and understand something of its history, we see that the great thing to be done is to emigrate. That is what young men of consciously great faculty and strength have to do. You are playing the part of suppliants; you are running after your fathers and mothers, asking for new garments when you ought to be away making them, weaving them, and making nature a bank yielding you what riches you require. But the fathers and the mothers are somewhat to blame herein: the world is very great; and to conquer it seems to break up the family circle, and to bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. O foolish, mistaken love! Nay, let us go further, and say that is not love at all. There is space enough, land enough, and we can so act as to find liberty enough. We may have to go into woody districts; and says some dear, foolishly-mistaken father, "The idea of my boy going into a wood!" That is the right place for him; he will be made a man of there. The wood is necessary to complete the school, and the drawing-room, and the confectionery period, in which you have done your utmost to ruin your boy. "But he is such a fine boy!" That is the very reason why he should go:—Thou art a great people?—then go and cut down trees, and lay them out foursquare, and roof in the place as well as you can, and begin there. To commence elsewhere is to begin to build a temple from the top of the steeple or the tower. Or trade may take the place of emigration. How lies the globe of trade? What trades are too thickly thronged? Where is the congestion? Where is the difficulty? Where is the point at which genius can operate in the construction of new relations and the creation of new possibilities? What a field for the exercise of mind! And what is true of young men who are complaining that they cannot get a living, is true of the Church of the living God—is true, in other words, of the great field of evangelisation. A great Church staying at home, eating its own banquet, drinking its own wine, and talking over

the number and excellence of its own luxuries—surely that is the way the end whereof is death. The larger the congregation, the more valorous should be the evangelistic assault upon the fortresses of darkness, ignorance, superstition, and heathenism. The hotter the centre, the further should radiate the beams that can touch with illumination and encourage with warmth those who are afar off. We must not take our greatness as a reason why we should do nothing, but as a reason why we should do more. Let those whose faculties are small and whose opportunities are limited remain at home and do the housework; but the children of the mighty—men who are conscious of strength—should be found, all the world over, heroes to fight; protectors to defend purity, innocence, and weakness; and leaders to inspire the faint-hearted.

And has Joshua nothing in all this—the great man himself, so quiet, so gentle? Caleb asked for his portion right boldly, but he asked—as a heroic man should ask—for difficulties. At eighty-five he wanted to prove that he was as young as he was at forty. Joshua might have taken that opportunity of saying, Caleb, I was with you in that matter of the espial of the land; if you want your portion now, I may as well have mine at the same time. Nothing of the kind. Joshua waited until the very last. So we read:—

“When they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them: according to the word of the Lord they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein” (xix. 49, 50).

The greatest came last. Joshua could afford to wait. Sometimes the end is better than the beginning, even in this matter of distribution. But when he did get his portion, it was called “Timnath-serah”—in English, “an abundant portion”—afterwards called “Timnath-heres,” “the portion of the sun.” Herein he was the type of the coming Joshua: he shall have all nations for his tributaries, all kings for his servants; his dominion shall be as the circuit of the sun: “Timnath-heres” shall be the name of his empire, for the sun shall never set upon that wide dominion. Is it not also beautiful that Joshua *asked* to have the city Timnath-



serah? The city was given at his own request. What saith the Psalmist in the second Psalm?—"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Ask thou? The Joshua, the Jesus of the race, shall have Timnath-serah, Timnath-heres; and as the type was satisfied with his portion, so shall the Antitype be satisfied when he shall see of the travail of his soul.

A very tender word is found in regard to some of the tribes. "Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan." Sweet words!—"beyond Jordan." By a very legitimate accommodation these words may be applied to many a Christian. Some Christians have but little portion this side of the river; their lot is a small one; their riches could all be hidden in one hand; yet how bright they are!—as radiant as a summer dawn, as songful as a wood in spring-time, when all the birds are swelling their feathery throats with song. Why? Because the refrain of their hymn is "beyond Jordan." The crown is on the other side of the river; the city lies beyond the stream; the great inheritance is at the other end of the valley of the shadow of death: they are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." So their citizenship being in heaven, they have learned in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content. Blessed are they who are rich in faith; yea, blessed with seven-fold blessing they who can say that their souls are already in heaven, and the consciousness of the heavenly possession creates contempt for the vanities of time.

Looking at the whole matter practically, let us not forget that the land was given to be cultivated. This is not a mere matter of enjoyment. When Palestine was seized, it had to be brought under agricultural treatment, and men were to enjoy the fruit of their labour even in the Land of Promise. There was fighting to be done, there were trees to be cut down; the centre of the country was a great forest, and the foresters must go into it and bring down the timber and root out the old roots, and make flowers and fruits grow in the old forests of

Palestine. Life is given to us to cultivate. We are not called upon to do merely the work—if so it may be termed—of appreciation and enjoyment; we are called to battle, to cultivation, to toil, to service, to disappointment, and to some fruition of our hope and love.

Nor must we forget that variety did not excite discontent. The lots were not all equal. Judah had twenty-nine cities and the villages thereof; Benjamin, fourteen cities with the villages; Joshua had Timnath-serah, in Mount Ephraim. So it is possible for us now to have variety of lot, and yet a sweet content of heart. The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called together his servants, and gave to one five talents, to another two, to another one—representing talent and opportunity and capacity. The Lord must distribute as he pleases. The great lesson for us to learn is, that it is possible for us to have little, and yet not to want more; to be called to a great opportunity, and yet not to boast over those whose limitation is so obvious. This sweet content, this hallowed peace, can only be enjoyed in proportion as we abide in Christ, like living branches in a living vine. This miracle is not a trick of the human hand; it is the miracle of the Holy Ghost.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

*Eccentric Boundaries of the Tribes* (Josh. xv.-xix.).—Thomson, in "The Land and the Book," writes: "The reason why the boundaries of the different tribes were so eccentric originally, and are now so difficult to follow, was that the 'lots' were not meted out according to geographical lines; but lands of certain cities lying more or less contiguous were assigned to each tribe. These cities were the capitals of small principalities or districts, just as Tibnin, and Hunin, and Bint-Jebail are now. The territory of one might extend far to the east of the city, that of the next to the west. It is now absolutely impossible to draw lines around the separate 'lots' with any degree of certainty. Their general positions with relation to each other, however, can be ascertained with sufficient exactness for all important purposes in the study of Biblical geography."

## PRAYER.

O THOU who art the refuge of men, let us flee unto thee, assured that the door of thy mercy will not be closed against us. We have sung for a lifetime of Jesus as the refuge of the soul. We have found him to be a covert from the storm. We would abide in him, let come what may, strong in his strength, confident in the immutableness of his love. This is our daily thought and this our nightly rest : a very song in our mouth ; a perpetual joy, like a singing angel hovering over the life. We turn and think of Christ, and behold our thought makes us glad. We muse about the Son of God in holy wonder, and as we muse the fire burns, and by its glow we know he is near who is the light of heaven. We would dwell upon the thought of his life ; we would count his words as men count jewels ; we would number them, and set them in order, and preserve them with all the eagerness of unutterable love, accounting each one necessary to the perfectness of the whole. Whilst we thus treasure thy Word, and find in it our true wealth, thou wilt not forsake us ; thou wilt make us stronger, younger, happier, as we proceed in this faithful and delightful service. Reveal thy word to us day by day—a new light, a new beauty, a new possibility ; may it be unto our eyes as the dawn of heaven, and unto our ears as the music of the skies. According to our necessity may thy word present itself to us—now a staff to lean upon, now a sword with which to fight, now a light that shall be as a lamp unto our feet, and now an unspeakable comfort, making even sorrow itself welcome, because sorrow brings the Saviour nearer. Thy word abideth for ever ; thy word is patient like thyself, waiting for its opportunity, standing at the door of the attention and knocking and waiting until we be ready to hear what it has to say. It has waited for us many a year. When we hear it, we know it to be thy word, because there is an answering spirit in our own hearts which says, This is none other than God's word—a very speech from the heart of the universe. We thank thee for all thy mercies. Though thou hast set us in a time of depression, yet do we see that the stars are all in their places. It is indeed night-time with many, by reason of difficulty, poverty, distress, and hardship ; yet not one star has gone out, and the heavens look brighter sometimes than they ever did. Thou hast not forsaken thy people, nor left in desolation those that trust in thee. This is their confidence and their song ; yea, it has become their boast and their sure refuge in time of difficulty. Even now thy mercies are more than we can number : even when winter has set in and all the flowers have hidden themselves, thy mercies are full and thy compassion is near and thy kindness is loving-kindness. Even in the midnight of the year we can sing praises unto our God and shake down the prison of our distress.

Help us in all things to see thy hand, and to say, All is well. Enable us to prove our faith by the nobleness and clearness of our testimony. May we be enabled to say, Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him, and though the night be dark and dreary, it is but short at most, and the morning is already dawning on the higher hills. We commend one another to thy loving care; they are well kept whom thou dost keep; in their hearts shall be no unrest, but one continual radiant Sabbath-day; no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast go up thereon, it shall not be found there; all holy thoughts shall dwell there, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, like birds of the night, afraid of the sunshine, terrified by the day. We are found again at the Cross. We wait at the altar of the atonement wrought by him who is thy Son, our Saviour. His blood is our prayer, his sacrifice our plea. Amen.

### Joshua xx.-xxiv.

#### AFTER REST.

THE twentieth chapter deals with the Cities of Refuge. A very beautiful expression is that—"City of Refuge." Very suggestive, too. But there is a great black shadow in the middle of it: for why should men want refuge? The term is noble in itself, but what is it in its suggestion? Surely it means that there is a pursuing storm. We have heard travellers say that by making haste they will just be in time to escape the impending tempest; so they quicken their steps, and when they gain the threshold of the sanctuary they were aiming at, they breathe a sigh of relief and thankfulness. The sanctuary is doubly dear to them. Home is always sweet, or ought to be; but how sweeter than the honeycomb when it is reached under circumstances which try the spirit, exasperate the sensibilities, and weigh heavily on the soul! In this case there is a pursuing storm, but not of weather—a social storm. The man who is running has killed a man, and the one who is following him is "the avenger of blood." Who will be first in the city? God will help the first runner, if it be but by one step he will be in before the pursuer can lay hold of him. There is a wondrous ministry of helpfulness operating in the world. We are helped in a thousand ways, not always in the one way in which we want to be helped, but in some other way; yet the help always comes. Was the refuge then for the murderer? No; there was no refuge for the murderer. But is it not said that the man who is fleeing to the city of refuge has killed some person? Yes, it

is so said ; but a definition is given which clears up all the moral side of the mystery :—

“The slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither” (xx. 3).

It was not murder, it was accident, an awful accident, and therefore not to be lightly dismissed ; still, not murder, and therefore not to be requited with blood. The suggestion of the arrangement is itself a gospel. Mark the discrimination of the great Governor of the universe. There is no confusion in his statute-book. There is no want of discernment in the eye of God ; that eye distinguishes between the intentional and the unintentional, the accident and that which was of malice prepense. All such distinctions give us confidence in the Book. God is not unrighteous. The spirit of moral criticism pervades the whole Book, so that none can escape by false plea or by special pleading, and none can be unjustly accused or over-weighted with impeachment ; God will hear the case, and judge it himself. So it will be in the summing-up of things. It will be found at last that many things were done “unawares and unwittingly,” and were never meant to be done ; and who shall say what mercy will be revealed when that fact is made clear ? We may even now magnify it to the comfort of men. Life is not to be severely judged, but righteously examined and pronounced upon. Many a sin is committed unawares and unwittingly ; many a wrong word is spoken under the same qualification ; many a life plunges into disastrous relations without purposing so to do. Some lives get a wrong start. The young man is put where he ought never to have been placed ; his life began in a false key and with a false conception of things. From that point he has gone staggeringly onward : now tolerably steady ; now flat down in the dust, as though he had been smitten by an invisible, but mighty hand ; now crawling a little ; and now strong enough to run a few paces ; but altogether the life was wrongly started. Others, again, seem not to have any keen moral discernment : they blunder in making their distinctions ; in a moral sense they are colour-blind. God must be judge in all these matters, for he conceived the notion of the City of Refuge ; he has been trying to save men, to make the most and best of men, to give new chances to

men. What wonder if at last he should set up the Cross, and say, This is all that even God can do? On the other hand, whilst we magnify this thought for our comfort, we must not pervert it to our soul's degradation and loss. Let us not make too free with the gentle utterances and gracious arrangements of the inspired volume. They were meant for encouragemētts and the beginnings of hope; they were not meant as excuses for indolence, or malice, or selfishness. Herein is the righteousness of God revealed. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked; he will rather make one righteous man balance a thousand bad men than that a hair of a righteous man's head should perish. So then we take heart again. All that we have done unawares and unwittingly that was wrong is provided for; but if we have done wrong, aware of the error and wittingly, then "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Murder cannot be balanced by tears. High treason against human life cannot be blotted out by sighing. Some one must die; blood must answer blood somewhere. If God shall provide a Lamb, let him do it, and let him be adored in the doing of it. But sin means blood somewhere—in the sinner himself or in God. Herein is love, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. The law is never altered. Blood must pay for blood. That is the eternal law of the universe; but by whom the blood shall be shed must remain for the solution of God. We believe that the precious blood of Jesus Christ was shed for the sins committed by men; and it is our joy to hear a great voice, strong as thunder, musical as love, saying in the midst of the ages, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

We read in chapter xx. 7-9:—

"And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation."

That is the best fame. Better be Kedesh and Shechem and

Kirjath-arba and Bezer and Ramoth and Golan than be cities of infinitely more famous names. These are mother-towns, these are mother-cities. We read of cities infinite in domination, innumerable in population, marvellous in military resource and prowess, but it is a smoking fame that goes up in clouds to be blown away by the wind. This refuge-reputation is the true fame. There would be no difficulty in learning these names. When the names of great fighting cities have been forgotten, the names of the refuge-cities would be repeated as men repeat rhyme inspired with reason and made noble by love. Such fame we may have. Are there not men who are in very deed cities of refuge? We can go to them by night or by day, and there is always the genial welcome, the glad, Sit down and tell me what it is; sob out all your sorrow, and keep back nothing of your sin; let me know it through and through—the very worst and blackest that can be told. Are not these men as Kedesh and Shechem and Kirjath-arba? Are they not more beautiful to us than Bezer and Ramoth and Golan? There are other men from whom you must expect nothing in the day of weakness and distress. They are critical men. You can only go before them with a clean white folio, and even then you will be coldly received, for such men have no heaven to give; they are not cities of refuge; in your poverty they will tell you that you ought to have done very differently from what you have done, and they will read you a lecture full of sternness, and punctuated with stings and reproaches. Who would go to them? No one who knows them; they will never be knocked up at midnight; they will never be quoted in the hour of distress; they are not cities of refuge; they are not sanctuaries of hope and love. Let us, however, dwell upon the thought that we may be cities of refuge to men who need rest, defence, and comfort. We may be blessed with the enduring fame: "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me . . . I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame." We may share our last loaf with poverty; we may speak the cheering word to despondency; our very smile may be as a fire radiating hope and comfort in the house made bare and desolate. To this fame we are called. It is the fame of the Son of God: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now Joshua proceeds with his valedictory speech. Here and there he records a sentence which belongs to all time. The twenty-first chapter has little or nothing to say except to the people to whom it specially related; but in summing up the twenty-first chapter Joshua says,—

“There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel” (v. 45).

The verse would end well there. But that is not a full-stop. After the word “Israel” in that part of the sentence there is but a semicolon. Four words remain, which contain all we want to know about God’s promises and God’s dispensations. These four words are all of one syllable. They might form a child’s first lesson in reading—“all came to pass.” What a testimony for the old man to bear! What more could be said? The note-of-hand had matured and been redeemed. The promised harvest had grown into golden abundance, and had been reaped and garnered. Can we bear this testimony to-day, or can we not? Christians ought to speak out upon these matters. There is a mischievous sophism, working endless disaster in society, which says that religious experiences lie between God and the soul, and are not to be talked about. There is a very little grain of truth in that assertion. The greater truth is:—“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” This is the evidence that cannot be answered. It does not admit of criticism; it is personal experience; it is personal testimony. But for verses such as this the miracles would be incredible and the history of the Bible would sound like a romance. Now and again a great stone is put into the building, which seems to bind the whole structure together in unity and solidity, and this is one such stone:—“There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.” Now after that we can do with matters local and transient. We seem to need some smaller stones after that great block of marble has been set in its place. Is not that same block put into the temple of to-day? What has failed of all Christ has spoken? Here we are thrown back upon a definition we have given before, that prophecy is not intellectual genius exercised upon an unknown future, but is simply a moral declaration—the declaration that right means upward and heavenward, and



wrong means downward and perditionward. All men, therefore, may be prophets with regard to any city that now lives. Just as the old prophets spoke of Babylon and Tyre and Egypt, so men may speak of the capitals of the world and the countries greatest in history at this moment. Given selfishness, narrowness of policy, love of war, devotion to luxury, an obliteration of moral distinctions, heedlessness of moral responsibilities ; and the prophet gathering his mantle around him, and standing upon some eminence, may declare that the feasting shall be turned into mourning, lamentation, and woe : the satyrs and the owls shall hoot in the palaces of greatness, and all the renown of the bad men shall be turned into infamy. The colouring will partake of the nature of the imagination which depicts it : the colouring is not in the prophecy, but in the utterance of it ; the prophecy itself is moral : right—heaven ; wrong—hell. Now let Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah fill in the colouring ; the prophecy is not touched in its moral integrity and grandeur by the colour used by the prophet or the parabolist. We need no books upon the fulfilment of prophecy. Such books often stand in the way of the Bible. They turn prophecy into a narrow letter ; they want to insist upon coincidences which satisfy the merely literal mind. There is but one prophecy, with a thousand varieties of expression and illustration, and it is—“ Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him : Woe unto the wicked ! it shall be ill with him.”

A noble testimony this, too, borne by the old man. It is not youth that anticipates, it is age that reviews. Old men never become infidels. We say sometimes that seldom is an old man converted to Christianity. How far that may be true we cannot tell ; but did ever an old pilgrim who had once seen heaven opened, turn round and say, in his wrinkled old age, that he was going to the city of Negation, or to the wilderness of Atheism ? Old men ought to be heard upon these subjects ; they have lived a lifetime ; they have fought upon a thousand battle-fields ; they know all the darkness of the night, all the sharpness of winter, all the heat of summer, and they have a right to be heard upon this question ; and their testimony on the side of the Bible is united, distinct, emphatic, and unanswerable.

Another point is found in chapter xxii. 5 :—

“But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

The hurly-burly is done. What is to be the new turn of affairs? After tumult—music, study, and worship. Our ears have been plagued with the uproar of war. Sometimes our faith has almost reeled under the historical tumult through which we have passed. Now and again we have come into a sanctuary, and there we have breathed a while; and out of it we have come to join the rush and the roar of battle, and advance. Now the Lord has given rest unto Israel. What is to be done? Now that the battle is fought and won, the old man speaks :—

“Return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession. . . . But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law” (xxii. 4, 5).

Thus is life balanced: great battle to-day, and great prayer to-morrow; a period of solitude to-day, and a period of excitement and terrific assault upon evil fortresses to-morrow. Thus, let us say again and again, is life brought into equipoise. Life is not all sentiment, nor is it all action; life is not all prayer, nor is it all war. The one must balance the other. Dark days and bright must contribute to one another, and make the common day between them. Let us not say that Providence has forsaken us because we are thrown into a day of war and misunderstanding, because one is taken and another left, and because there is a fire in the earth and a sword in society; nor let us say that we have come into special favour of Heaven because there is nothing to do in our day but to dream ourselves off into imagined heavens. The times are many-coloured. Life is a great variety, but the thing that abides is the presence of the Son of God. Come who may, go who may, dig what graves we may, Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” Activity should be balanced by knowledge. He who is not profoundly versed in the law cannot guide the battle. Hence, they who guide the State should be good men. They who are in charge of the nations of the earth should be men who take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, and to walk in all God’s ways, and to keep His com-

mandments and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all their heart and with all their soul. Piety should be in the premiership; honour should be at the head of affairs. He who speaks the guiding word should first have learned that word in communion with God.

It would seem as if some interviews in life could not be satisfactorily closed but with the language of benediction. An ordinary word would be wholly out of place. There is a fitness of things in human communication as in all other affairs and concerns of life. It is fitting, too, that the benediction should be spoken by the old man. Joshua was "old and stricken in years," and he concluded the audience fitly by blessing the children of Israel:—

"So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away; and they went unto their tents" (xxii. 6).

Without that blessing, the interview might have been perverted into a controversy; but the benediction ennobled all that had gone before. Is it not often so, with the last word of even ordinary human speech? Following the discourse, the mind of the hearer wonders, interrogates, doubts: then coincides, admires, believes: or, it may be thrown into a state of conflict, weighing evidence and hardly knowing which scale is preponderant; but as the speaker moves on to other strains, and delivers himself in nobler tones, and gathers into one sublime appeal all the religious considerations which can affect the issue of his argument, it would seem as if by a grand Amen, all the difficulties had been dispersed, and a great reconciliation and sympathy had been established. Happy the interview that ends in a benediction. All our interviews with God may so end. In the benediction lies the very wealth and force of the argument. Who can live upon contention, or be edified by wordy phrase? We sigh for the blessing; we are unanimous in the benediction; we are a church undivided, mute because so eloquent, when invoking the seal of the divine love. But some blessings are full of subtle suggestion. They mean what they do not fully say. Probably the blessing of Joshua was one of those benedictions fraught with suggestion—perhaps not always to the credit of the hearers and receivers. It might mean, being broadly interpreted,—Begin again: let the past be buried; now remember, and from this day

forth be your better selves ; claim your inheritance divine ; be at peace one with another ; learn from all the past ; now farewell : to your tents, and be blessed of God. Have we not all been dismissed in this way now and again ? Has not the prodigal been sent to his chamber with a blessing which meant much of fear and much of suspicion, and yet was intended to act as an encouragement and an inspiration, a kind of divided blessing, a benediction with a rebuke in it, an effort lacking in stimulus, a hint which made the reproach the keener ? We should listen to the tone as well as to the words—the tone explains everything ; the words explain nothing. What poetry is not disabled and uncrowned by the very printing of it ? And Christianity has fought the battle and overcome the disadvantage of words. The Christianity spoken by Christ is one thing, and as spoken by those who do not understand it, another, wholly and pitifully.

Now the children of Israel go to their tents. They are to be at peace. Ceasing war they are to be students of war. We shall hear no more of controversy ; every man having received the blessing is a good man, and there is an end of a tumult which at one time threatened never to cease. So we should imagine, but our imagining is wrong :—

“Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan : but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them. And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment : divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses” (xxii. 7-9).

But in going they did something which excited the anger of Israel. They built a great altar “by Jordan.” The altar is described in the tenth verse as “a great altar to see to,” that is to say, it was very high, a piece of wonderful masonry, a thing that could not fail to attract attention ; and the children of Israel said,—This is the beginning of a new idolatry ; we are no

sooner blessed by Joshua than we are cursed by the spirit of impiety, and misled and dishonoured by some seductive demon. See how the altar rises heaven-high! A great and influential deputation was despatched :—

“And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manassch, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one was an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel” (xxii. 13, 14).

They went up to war against the two tribes and a half. They would have no idolatry; they would put down superstition and false worship by the sword; they were not going to have the sanctity of their history trifled with. How wonderfully consistent they were! The very people who had been building altars of their own and fashioning a god of their own were now warmed into right holy zeal, because the two tribes and the half tribe had built an altar! What was the issue of the interview? It turned out to be no altar at all. It was meant as an altar of witness and not of sacrifice. It was not for religious purposes, but for historical. They said :—

“Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: but that it may be a witness” (xxii. 26, 27).

So when the children of the one side and the children of the other say, What is the history of our people? they may point to this great altar as a mark of punctuation in all this noble and exciting story. So there was peace where war was threatened. But it is not safe to build altars if you do not mean to use them as such: the immediate and local circumstances may be forgotten, and the altar may remain a continual temptation to false thought and vicious desire, so that that which was at the beginning perfectly innocent and open to a rational and satisfactory explanation, may in the end be turned into a temptation and a curse. A great and lasting lesson arises here. We are not always present to explain how this or that was begun. Men will come upon our work without knowing its history, and they will turn it possibly to their own meanings, and to uses which would surprise and distress the original builders. Why create temptations for ourselves? Why adorn

the walls with pictures which may suddenly become serpents, talking to us and making great promises, which can never be redeemed? Why encourage practices which in themselves at their beginning and under certain local conditions are innocent enough, but which may become temptations to other persons, who coming upon them without the original explanation, use them as mere instruments by which to gratify desire or delight imagination? We should search into reasons and follow with religious solicitude certain vital possibilities. We have to do with the impression we make, as well as with the actual work we accomplish. The two tribes and the half tribe had their own idea in building the altar, and that idea was perfectly defensible; its meaning was honest and good; but what impression did it make upon observers? Abstain from the appearance of evil. To have a great argument is not enough. Sometimes we are bound to accommodate our argument to our listeners, and to save our contention from possible perversions and misuses. Have we not a right to do what we may? Certainly not. If we have dug out a stone, may we not build it where we please, and as we please? The answer is a solemn, No; you have no such right. No man liveth unto himself; no man dieth unto himself. The solemn question should be, What effect will this action have upon the young, the unsuspecting, the inexperienced? Blessed is he with a right royal strength who can stoop down to the weakness of inferior men.

This being settled, a very tender scene occurs. Joshua gathers all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, calls for the children of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and talks to them historically and grandly. He called the people themselves to witness what God had done for them:—

“And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you” (xxiii. 3).

Not only so, but he uses a very searching expression:—

“And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (xxiii. 14).

Mark the precision of the appeal. The old man would not speak in vague generalities, nor will he have a vote as if by

majority; he must have a clear testimony as to the faithfulness of God. To what does he appeal? To mere opinion? To the common judgment of the people? No; his language is more precise:—"Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls." These are the witnesses, and we can admit no other. We demand such testimony. Whatever it is, let us have it from the heart and from the soul. A man can bear such witness only now and then. No man has full command over his heart and over his soul so as to summon the witness at a moment's notice. A man may have to retire for awhile and gather himself together, and prepare himself by daily meditation, before he is at liberty to speak a single word. Joshua points to history, says in effect—Review it, put it together, understand its meaning; then compare the history with the promises you started with; and let your souls speak and not your vain intellect; let the heart make the avowal; do not ask the imagination to declaim. It is a solemn and grand appeal! Would God men would speak from their hearts and from their souls! We should get rid of infinite lying, of every variety of falsehood, of every misleading colour in the hue of social intercourse; we should, too, have the right testimony about the Bible and divine Providence and the whole quantity termed divine revelation. We should also be driven back into realities, and made to talk about real things. Who ever keeps to the vital line? Who is not prone to run off into side-issues and to dwell with meanness of mind upon merely incidental points or accidental details? Is it not so in human intercourse? Friendships of a life standing are broken up because one of the parties being of mean mind—incurably mean mind—seizes upon an incidental point and magnifies it unto absurd proportions. Thus love is lost and life is turned into misery. What we have to do is to review the whole day by day—the summer, the winter, the seedtime, and the harvest—put altogether into one complete quantity, and then say, from heart and soul, whether it be not noble, massive, strong, beneficent. The judgment is not to turn upon the detail of this day, or of that day, but upon a review of the whole line of life. By this rule of judgment, many men will be much better than they seem to be now and then; by this rule of judgment, others will prove to be

worse than at one time they appeared to be, for whilst many can do incidental acts of kindness, it takes something like completeness of conviction to pursue a pure and useful life day by day, year by year, until youth is supplanted by age, and the cradle is exchanged for the tomb. An incidental kindness does not make a beneficent life. An incidental mistake ought not to destroy a lifelong friendship. Judgment must be upon the whole; and judgment must be spoken not by heated lips, not in a feverish excitement, but deliberately, with the heart and with the soul, with the innermost life, and under a sense of the divine criticism.

Now Joshua changes his tone:—

“Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; . . . But cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day” (xxiii. 6-8).

What is the call of these verses? It is a call to moral courage. The people were soldiers; when they saw that an altar had been reared to heaven which they did not like, and which they misunderstood, instantly they sped from their tents and challenged the builders to battle. That is the rudest courage; there is nothing in it. Many men can fight who cannot suffer; many are brave in activity who are cowards in waiting. Joshua calls the people now to thought, study, quiet and consistent and continuous obedience—namely, “Cleave unto the Lord.” Without this, growth would be impossible. Men cannot grow in the midst of continual or unbroken excitement. We grow when we are at rest; we grow not a little when we are in the shade; we advance when the burden is crushing us, and we are not uttering one complaining word because of its fatal weight. When the history of the land is written as it ought to be written, many a battle which now fills pages and chapters will be dismissed with a contemptuous sentence; and sufferings at home, quiet endurances, Christian manifestations of patience, will be magnified as indicative of the real dauntlessness, the heavenly bravery, the lasting courage. Let every man examine himself herein. To say “No” to a tempting offer is to win a battle: to receive a blow from an enemy and not return it, is to reach the point of coronation in Christ’s great kingdom; to hear a rough speech and make a



gentle reply is to evince what is meant by growing in grace. So the history rolls on, from battle to battle, from mistake to mistake, from point to point, until at last the moral displaces the material, questions of the soul put into their right place questions of rank; and moral courage—simple, loving, unquestioning obedience—is set at the head of all the virtues; and the quiet, meek, submissive, patient soul is crowned and throned, and stablished amid the hierarchy of heaven. We cannot dazzle the world by our greatness, but we can please God by our goodness; we cannot harness the winds and make them bear our names far and wide, but we can so live, so suffer, so speak, as to constrain the enemy to say,—Verily, this man is a prophet; verily, this man has been with Jesus and learned of him; verily, there is in this supposed weakness a wonderful and enduring strength.

We cannot but be struck by the equality of the divine way as it is marked by the venerable leader. The fifteenth verse is very expressive upon this point:—

“Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you” (xxiii. 15).

The way of the Lord is equal. We have already seen that there is no mere partisanship with God, or favouritism that is heedless of the position and needs of other people. The point which has been established beyond all dispute is that God's partiality is for character—that is to say, for truth, integrity, and holiness; where these are found God's benediction rests; and where these are not found no blessing of Heaven can descend or abide. We only hold what we have from God so long as we hold God himself. But had not Israel come into possession of the promised land? Certainly; and yet even the promised land itself was only to be held by the title of character. The sixteenth verse makes this clear:—

“When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you” (xxiii. 16).

We cannot read such words without feeling that God is righteous

and just in all his ways. We are not entitled to reason that because we are once in possession we are always in possession. We stand or fall by character. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of truth and goodness, and not of mere words and ceremonies, pretensions or technical rights. Even heaven itself cannot be held by sinful men. Were it possible for sin to enter into the celestial land, those who committed that sin would be cast out of heavenly places into deep and outer darkness, notwithstanding all that had gone before. What a sublime security is this for the peace and beauty of the universe! Might shall be without power, and royalty without a crown, and high descent without any value, except in the proportion in which character is maintained in unsullied purity. Only goodness is to be guaranteed in its possession.

Joshua having gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and delivered unto them his final speech. Again we are thrown upon the grand truth that men must bring all their history into one view at certain periods, that thereby they may renew their covenant and revive their best hope. The work of the Lord is not of yesterday; it goes back through all the generations; and he is the wise scribe, well instructed in holy things, who brings into one view all the course of the divine education of the world. This is what Joshua did in brief in the twenty-fourth chapter. Having given the historical outline, the old man began to exhort the people, saying:—

“Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth” (xxiv. 14).

Exhortation comes well after history. It is like flowers growing upon the top of the rock. In order to encourage the children of Israel to be faithful in their religious relations and responsibilities, Joshua solemnly announces his own determination:—

“—but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (xxiv. 15).

This is the true spirit of leadership. The world will pay little heed to our exhortation if we do not follow it up by personal practice. Many can understand our religion who could never understand our theology. This is the secret, too, of all wide and

lasting evangelisation. The evangelist himself must be absolutely devoted to Christ's Cross and to Christ's truth. At the centre there must be intense heat if there is to be any radiation of warmth around the circumference. We cannot hear such noble resolutions pronounced without ourselves being either shamed into silence or encouraged into harmonious and equal action. It is the earnest man who makes his impression upon society. If preachers are doubting; if Christians are wavering; if suppliants are halting in their prayers and endeavouring to balance their sentences by remote considerations, or are troubled by unexpressed fears, the Church can never make any deep and lasting impression upon society. Resoluteness wins. Unanimity within the man himself is the secret of growth in grace. If imagination is going one way and judgment another; if the understanding and the will are in perpetual feud; if conscience is disobeyed and appetite is gratified, the man is divided against himself, and there can be no stability or duration in his character. Joshua, in making this bold and noble resolution, has rebuked the cowardice and the timidity of all inferior men, and has shown them how they ought to deport themselves in the presence of wavering and hesitation. We can kneel down the more gracefully and hopefully now that our venerable leader has declared himself so emphatically and completely upon the side of God. The people, indeed, answered Joshua with a good deal of enthusiasm. They said :—

"God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods" (xxiv. 16).

Then they review and repeat the solemn history and say that all Joshua has said is true in fact. Then Joshua says unto the people—"What you have now said amounts to little more than mere words; you forget that God is a holy God and a jealous God, and you are speaking from impulse rather than from settled conviction." Then the people reply that Joshua himself is mistaken, and they have really made up their minds once for all to serve the Lord. So be it, then, said Joshua—"Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him." The people answered—That is even so; "We are witnesses." Then said Joshua, There is one final word to be spoken. If you have made up your minds to this course, you

must put away the strange gods which are among you ; no taint of idolatry must remain behind ; not the very smallest image must be taken with you one day longer or one inch further ; the expurgation must be immediate, complete, and final. The people answered unanimously : "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." It was indeed a solemn day ; a day of covenant, a day of memorial, a day which condensed into its throbbing hours generations of history and strong and ardent pulsings of devotion and prophetic service. A covenant was made, and a statute and an ordinance were set in Shechem. To make, if possible, the matter inviolably permanent, "Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord" (xxiv. 26).

Then a very solemn scene occurs :

"And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us ; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us : it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God" (xxiv. 27).

Then the assembly broke up. It broke up never to meet again under the same wise and valiant leadership. All pathetic occasions should be treasured in the memory ; the last interview, the last sermon, the last prayer, the last fond lingering look ; all these things may be frivolously treated as sentimental, but he who treats them so is a fool in his heart : whatever can subdue the spirit, chasten the sensibilities, and enlarge the charity of the soul should be encouraged as a ministry from God. Now Joshua dies, at the age of one hundred and ten. He was buried in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in Mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.

"And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel" (xxiv. 31).

Now the history is done. The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, were buried in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem. Then men died quickly :

"And Eleazar the son of Aaron died ; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim" (xxiv. 33).

Death, death, death! The great man dies, and yet the work goes on. The minister ceases, but the ministry proceeds. The individual sermon closes, but the everlasting gospel never ceases its sweet and redeeming proclamations. Book after book is finished, but literature itself is hardly begun. Amidst all mutation there remains one everlasting quantity: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." All the new generations acknowledge it. They come up in great pride and strength, as if they themselves were to outlive God, and behold in a few years their pith is exhausted, their hope dies, and they know themselves to be no better than their fathers. When we are touched by the death of those whom we have known best, and wonder how light can ever shine again upon the circle in which we move, we should give the mind free scope to range over all the noble and marvelous history of the world, so shall we see that how great soever have been the men who have led us, the world could do without them; God knew how to supply their places, and amidst all change and fear and dismay the purpose of Heaven went steadily forward in all the grandeur of its strength and all the tenderness of its beneficence.

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In coming thus far in our Bible studies let us pause a moment to consider how many illustrious men with whom we have companied have passed away. Truly the dead are quickly becoming the majority. Adam died, but, though his years were many, how few are the deeds which are recorded of him! He stands in history as the very Gate of Death. "By one man came death." We feel as if we might say—"But for thee, O Adam, all men would now have been alive; no grave would ever have been dug; no farewell would ever have been breathed."—That is an overwhelming reflection. Consider the possibility of Adam himself now entertaining it, or following it out in all its infinite melancholy! Think of him saying—"By my sin I ruined God's fair earth; to me ascribe all iniquity, all shame, all heart-break; by my presumption and disobedience I did it all: I slew the Son of God; but for me there would have been no Bethlehem, no Gethsemane, no Calvary, no Cross: lay the blame at the right door,—O ages of time, ye burdened and groaning centuries,

curse my name in all your woe."—On such thoughts we may not dwell, for the mind reels in moral amazement, and the heart cannot quench the passion of scepticism. Enough is known to make us solemn. Count the graves until arithmetic gives up the reckoning in despair. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, all gone! Just as we had come to know them in the breaking of bread they vanished out of our sight. It was as if rocks had been uprooted, or as if planets had ceased to shine: nay more, for we have not only lost strength and majesty, we have lost guidance, stimulus, friendship, and the subtle ministry of eloquent example. Can history repeat such men? Does our story now lie all down-hill, from steep to steep until we reach the valley of commonplace or the plain of mediocrity? Jesus Christ has taught us how to regard great men, saying "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Here we have at once recognition of greatness and hope of greater history. What if we may know more than Adam, see farther than Enoch, embark in greater adventures than Abram, offer greater sacrifices than the priests, and see a deeper law than was ever revealed to Moses? In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom, yea riches unsearchable, promises exceeding great and precious. My soul, bestir thyself, go out in the early morning, remain in the field until the stars come out, for every hour brings its own spoil, every moment its own vision. O my Lord, Father in heaven, Blessed One, made known to me in the Cross of salvation, inspire me, lift me up, and make me gladly accept thy yoke and do all thy bidding; give me the aspiration that is untainted by vanity, and the consecration that is undefiled by selfishness, then shall I be willing to be baptised for the dead, and to stand steadfastly where princes and veterans have fallen by the hand of Time.

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

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“... *the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.*”—JOSHUA ii. 11.

Everything depends upon a right conception of the personality and character of God.—The Hebrew conception was marked by great exaltation and comprehensiveness.—Again and again we have observed that a little conception of God means a little religion, and a little religion means a little morality.—We must in all our thinking strive after the largest conceptions, not simply for their own value as thoughts, but for their moral influence upon the whole circuit of thinking and action.—Joshua’s description of God is absolutely inclusive: (1) he is “the Lord your God;” as if he were associated with the Israelites only, and with every Israelite in the whole community: thus he is made a personal, or social, or tribal God; but such a God can never be more than a mere idol; to save God from the rank of idols we must have a true conception of his greatness as well as of his moral qualities: (2) Then “he is God in heaven above;” there the thought receives wonderful and sublime enlargement: what “heaven above” is must be left to the imagination, and imagination itself reels in any attempt to comprehend the vastness and glory of the expression: though

the mind is thus bewildered, it is yet exalted and ennobled by the very endeavour to comprehend the incomprehensible: (3) Then he is God “in earth beneath;” thus all the dimensions are included; a beautiful method of education is this, for it enables the mind to begin at certain clear and ascertainable points and to move onward and upward to greater distances and to sublimer effects.—The Christian conception of God has never enlarged the thought of the Hebrew theology. Christianity has introduced tenderness into it by describing God by more familiar and endearing names, yet not at the expense of the sublimity, but rather in illustration of it, showing that true sublimity is not far from true condescension.—The Hebrew conception of God should have been followed by a grand conception of personal character.—To have a great God in the intellect, and no God in the life, is the most criminal atheism.—When a man with this conception of God does that which is unworthy of the conception, he not only drags himself downwards, but he drags also the conception of God along with him.—It is possible to have an intellectual conception without a moral realisation. This is the most painful irony that can occur in life.—When we speak of a great conception of God, it is not intended that the mind alone or the

pure reason should be interested in that conception, but that it should fill the whole being, enlightening the mind, subduing the heart, chastening the disposition, and regulating the will. With such a conception immorality is simply impossible; because it is impossible that such light should be quenched by the darkness round about it.—The vital point to be ever remembered in these studies is that a great intellectual theology does not necessitate a grand moral purification. Theology must be made more than an intellectual science; it must supply the motive and the reward of sanctified impulse and action.

“Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God.”—JOSHUA iii. 9.

In the Old Testament, the question of place has never been regarded as inferior.—To us locality is a matter of little or no importance, but to the Hebrew locality was an element of true worship.—The Israelites were in this instance invited to a particular place, in order that they might hear the words of the Lord.—Christianity so far enlarges this idea as to find in the sanctuary the place in which God especially reveals himself to earnest and expectant worshippers.—Jesus Christ went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-days. Jesus Christ also withdrew from the crowd in order that he might alone commune with God in the silence of night and the solitude of the mountain.—There is no doubt an utter destruction of the idolatry of place in Christianity; but the destruction of idolatry is not equal to the deconsecration of given places of worship: the altar is still holy; the church is still recognised as praying-ground in an especial sense, namely, the sense of bringing together men of common sympathies and common aspirations,

and giving them to feel the security of nearness and multitude.—Whilst it is possible to pray in the great throng, and even to commune upon deep subjects amid the noise of the world, yet Silence will ever be regarded as constituting a kind of sanctuary in which the soul more especially delights. Every Isaac will feel a pleasure in going into the fields at eventide to meditate.—There is a kind of thought which may be said to have its residence in the mountains, and a kind of praise which may be said to reach its noblest expression amid the waves of the great deep.—The mere act of “coming” is itself a religious exercise; it means withdrawal from usual avocation or entertainment, and speciality of thought and service: it breaks up the idea of commingling and intermixture, which too often tends towards earthliness rather than towards heavenliness, and constitutes in itself a severe trial of intellectual attention and moral expectation. Such coming means willingness to set apart time for Christian purposes, and to create opportunities for spiritual education.—Coming is thus, in some degree, a sacrifice, a token of the heart’s willingness to obey God rather than yield to the clamour of earthly appeals.—All men are the better for coming together for religious service.—We get something in fellowship which we can never get in solitude. Men belong to one another in this sense, and are not complete in the absence of one another.—Even where physical association is impossible, the very act of yearning after the absent, and compelling them to be spiritually present, is in itself an expression of the noblest religious feeling.—Atmosphere will always have its effect upon moral education.—Here the great subject of environment shows its importance.—Whilst there may be some minds so strong and independent



as to create their own atmosphere, yet looking at men in the generality, they require the help of locality and all the subtle suggestion of association and habitude in order to excite religious impulse and expectation to the highest point.—There is great plausibility in the sophism that men can hear the words of the Lord anywhere.—Jesus Christ did not mean to teach that doctrine when he told the woman at the well, “Neither in this place, nor at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father;” he merely meant to destroy the idolatry of place, not its consecration; his idea was one of inclusiveness, not of exclusiveness; and his purpose was to show that men could everywhere pray, and that, when compelled to abstain from consecrated places, that compulsion would not interfere with the integrity or prevalence of prayer.—Men can *live* everywhere, but they can live best at home. Men can express their thoughts in any language, but there will always be about the mother-tongue a tenderness which cannot be communicated by any other. Men can see in other men brothers, but they can see in family likenesses and feel in family sympathies what cannot be found elsewhere.—It is so with religious life in relation to the Church.—The fact that some men are superstitious upon these points must not destroy rational veneration.—So long as the Church preserves the peculiarity of its function, and strenuously endeavours to meet the abiding demands of human instinct and reason, it can never lose its hold upon the confidence of the world.

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 “*God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea.*”—JOSHUA iv. 23.

This presents God as doing the little and doing the great: in the one case

he dried up a river; in the other case he dried up a sea.—The idea to be kept steadily before the mind is, that it is the same God that worketh all in all.—Omnipotence is as much required in the drying up of the Jordan as in the dividing of the Red Sea; and the Omnipotence that divided the Red Sea condescended to dry up the river.—Every action on the part of God must of necessity be a condescension.—When God made the universe he humbled himself.—When God made man he subjected the Deity to degradation.—This must not be looked upon in the light of experiment, but in the light of necessity. Terms which seem to indicate the contrary are merely terms of accommodation, and not terms which express the essence of things.—We are to reason from the greater to the less; thus, if God dried up the Red Sea, he will also dry up the Jordan; if God enabled us to kill a lion, he will enable us to slay a man; if God enabled us to climb a mountain, he will not forsake us when we have to pass over a molehill.—The text is an appeal to memory as well as an appeal to confidence.—That we may live well in the future we should live steadfastly in the past.—The witness of God’s personality and presence in life must be found in a man’s own experience; he can only assent to them with the intellect, but he can claim them as verities, and affirm them as the truest facts of life only in proportion to the richness of his personal experience in divine things. Thus growing life should be growing religiousness; old age should be itself an argument; memory should be a library of exposition and defence.—What is forgotten so soon as grace or favour even on the part of man to man? It is even so with God.—We forget that our whole life has been a miracle. We forget this in proportion as we draw a line beyond which our recollection is not permitted to go—

Recollection must be helped by association or analogy.—Thus we can go back to our own infancy by carefully regarding the infancy of others, marking its frailty and its continual exposure to fatal danger.—Life regarded thus from the beginning to its end becomes itself a piece of work which no human hands could have executed, a very miracle of mystery and beauty.—The Old Testament saints in particular were accustomed to reason from the past to the future. David did so in relation to Goliath. That is but a typical instance. Job did so when he contended that, as God had been with him in six troubles, he would not forsake him in seven; or when God himself affirmed this to be the line of his treatment of mankind.—Our own hymn-writers have celebrated this truth in many a soothing and encouraging line,—“His love in time past forbids me to think,” etc.

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 “*Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow.*”—JOSHUA vii. 13.

In this sense sanctification was equal to preparation.—There should be solemn days of scrutiny in every man's life.—We can complete the process of self-scrutiny even where social scrutiny is impossible.—The man who judges himself most severely has least to fear from the judgments of others: he can bear their criticism with composure when he knows it to be just; he can treat it with disdain when he knows it to be malicious.—All these appointments lead up to the grand assize in which the whole world shall be judged.—To live without scrutiny is to live without the enjoyment of many a privilege.—Scrutiny is not all on the side of severity.—The Old Testament saints were sometimes enabled to plead their integrity under circumstances of persecution as a ground for divine protection.

They knew that the enemy had formed a wrong estimate of their character, and, being confident of this, they had also confidence in God.—Such scrutiny as is indicated in the text shows that there are circumstances in life which can only be met by severe moral inquest. Penetrating questions must be asked; detailed examination must be conducted. A man must, so to say, retire within himself, and submit every part of himself to scrutiny, as if each part were a separate individuality. The sin may be found lurking in the imagination, the taste, the affections, the understanding, the selfishness or the ignorance of man.—The man must not look upon himself as a whole, and ask general questions regarding his conduct, but must regard himself as divided into many attributes and forces, and must seize each, and by severest cross-examination discover which is the Achan, the thief, the idolater, the miser, the blasphemer, the liar; it is easy to talk about a general examination and to pronounce vague judgments; we are called to analysis severe and exhaustive.—He does not love himself, but, on the contrary, bitterly hates himself, who is unfaithful in this matter of self-scrutiny.

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 “*He hath wrought folly in Israel.*”—  
 JOSHUA vii. 15.

The charge seems to be a two-fold one. The first is that “He hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord;” and the second is that “He hath wrought folly.”—Look upon sin as being not only criminal but foolish.—The sinner is not only a criminal, but a fool. He plays with fire, and burns himself. He trifles with edged instruments, and maims himself. He tampers with eternal forces, and thus in every way disables and impoverishes himself.—It is pitiful to think that at the end the sinner will

stand forth as a fool, and not as a hero. He mistakes the relations of things; the values of things; and the consequences of actions.—A great French statesman was blamed because he pronounced a certain policy not only as a crime, but worse than a crime—a blunder.—Crime does not touch one side of the character alone, for then under some conditions it might claim somewhat of heroic importance, and be invested with a kind of transient grandeur.—According to the Christian conception the universe is a great moral constitution; not an infinite vastness of matter, but a symbol and expression of something within tenderly sensitive and ineffably pure: he, therefore, who operates in a manner contrary to its law and purpose undertakes to supersede Omniscience, and to re-create creation: at the end he stands forth in pitiable weakness: a man who is not only regarded as foolish, but who is constrained to call himself a fool.—Some men are more touched by the contempt which follows upon folly, than by the censure which follows upon crime; their pride is affected, their sense of dignity is lowered.—God thus attacks the sinner at every point; he shows that in the very act of playing the great man the sinner becomes a foolish man, and is obliged at last to confess that his conception of life has been a profound and pitiable mistake.—Folly has but a short day. The time of its revelation is always at hand.—No sinner has ever proved himself to have been both a genius and a criminal in the moral sense: genius there may have been in the conception of the crime as a merely mechanical or social act, but the folly of it has been demonstrated by its consequences.—It may be for this reason that God pities the sinner: he sees what a fool the sinner is; he sees to what fate of contempt and shame the sinner is hastening; he knows it is hard for the sinner to kick

against the pricks.—On every ground God hates the sin and pities the sinner.

“... an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron.”—JOSHUA viii. 31.

This is a point in the spiritual education of man.—We must think ourselves back to the time when such mechanical exactitude was part of personal and national religion.—The uses of such studies may be to show how far we have advanced, and to inquire into the methods by which our progress has been realised.—We do not advance from those points unless we have really been at them ourselves, either literally or sympathetically.—It is not enough to know that the Israelites were at the point of literal detail, such as is indicated in the text; we must ourselves have been at that point in some clearly recognised sense; we do not descend upon great spiritual privileges, but we work up to them through processes of subservience; we are not born into this household of grace and liberty, but are brought into it by long processes of self-rebuke, self-chastisement, and self-denial; all men must begin at the alphabet, and pursue their way into the delights of literature.—It is the same with religion as it is with education.—We are born into a great literary estate, full of philosophy, poetry, history, and imagination; yet though we are born into this inheritance and have certain rights to it, we can only claim the inheritance by becoming patient inquirers and students: when the philosopher leaves his philosophy to the world, even his own children must begin at the alphabet, and toil up the ascent upon which the great fortune stands.—Passages of this kind rebuke the idea that religion now is a merely off-handed exercise, a pleasure that can be taken up or laid down: a species of

luxury which may be languidly enjoyed or languidly declined.—To build the altar is not to create the God.—To build the church is not to unfold the revelation.—There is a wonderful co-operation in the whole process of religion.—God will, so to say, be met half-way.—He will come to the top of the mountain, and meet us at the end of our opportunity.—A beautiful thought is this, that God sometimes will come no further down than to the top of the mountain; if he remained one league above it, we could not reach him; but it is in accord with his mercy that he begins where man ends; man toils to the top of the mountain, and cannot proceed one step further, and it is in this extremity that God creates his own opportunity.—Although altar-building may now have been done away, and much of mechanical process may have been abrogated, yet still there remains the great fact that man must always make some preparation to meet God and enter into the full enjoyment of religious privileges.—The preparation indicates the spirit of the worshipper.—When called upon to offer hospitality to a king, we prepare according to the dignity of the guest; when summoned to the presence of some great one, all our preparations are made with a view to the greatness of the man whom we have to meet.—We have only to apply these facts in a religious direction to discover what we ought to do when we are called upon to commune with Heaven.

“ . . . the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.”—JOSHUA x. 42.

Israel was an undivided name betokening a complete whole.—The Israelite, as an individual, had no existence from Israel, the whole number.—If one man wandered away from Israel, the whole body felt itself in a state of

incompleteness, and was inspired by a spirit of solicitude and yearning after the absent one.—There is a nationality as well as a personality.—We miss a good deal by supposing that life is wholly a question of individualities.—In a very important sense it is so, but in another equally important sense it is not so.—England has a character as well as every Englishman.—We speak of the *health* of a country and say it is good, at the very moment when thousands of persons are lying without ability to walk or work: we speak of the *wealth* of a country, and call it exceedingly abundant, at the very moment that work-houses are crowded with inmates; we speak of the *intelligence* of a country, and may describe some countries as the most intelligent in the whole world, notwithstanding the fact that there are within them uncounted numbers of illiterate persons.—Thus there is another life beside the merely personal.—God is here represented as fighting for nations.—God never fights for any nation simply because it is a nation, but because as a nation it is on the right side of the controversy.—God has no partiality for any land, except in the degree in which that land is marked by righteousness of purpose and action.—Patriotism is folly unless it be based upon moral considerations as well as upon kindred and sentiment.—Throughout the whole Bible the Lord has always shown himself as ready to give up one nation as another when moral fidelity was impaired or perverted.—Men cannot be permitted to unite themselves with Israel on the ground that God always fights for that particular denomination. This would be selfishness, not piety.—God searches the heart, and judges absolutely by the motive.—No nation then must pride itself upon being a particular favourite of Heaven: God hath made of one blood all nations of men: God is the Father of the whole

world: God is only on the side of the righteous man, be that man black or white, great in wealth or mean in poverty.

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 “*He left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.*”—JOSHUA xi. 15.

An easy sentence, but a most difficult process.—First of all, here is an assumption that Joshua was a *student*. How did he know what the Lord had commanded Moses, except by diligent inquiry and study?—Not only was Joshua a student, he was a minute or critical student.—He did not take a merely general view of divine commandment, but went into particularity; “he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses;” the word “all” is the critical point.—Here is a process of enumeration, weighing, balancing, and allotment: some things are to be done by day and some by night; some things were essentially and others relatively important; Joshua had to study the perspective of the moral outlook, and not to commit folly by the transposition of persons or events.—Not only was Joshua a student, and a critical student, he was a man of active obedience. His life was a process of doing. He found enough to do from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.—God has left no vacant hours in all the day. God has made benevolent preparation for sleep or rest, but he has also made abundant arrangements for industry and service.—Not only was Joshua a student, a critical student, and a man of active obedience, but he was inspired by the thought that all he did was done under the direction and for the glory of God.—It is something to know that we are working, for what master we are acting, and in view of what reward.—The strength is often found in the motive.—Far behind all

outward instrumentality, we find our power in spiritual philosophy, thought, and confidence.—Herein is the supreme value of prayer: it shuts us up in close communion with God; it leads us to the very fountain of power; it clothes us with ineffable dignity.—A blessed thing it is to realise that our whole life-plan is laid down for us.—In the matter of moral purity and action we have nothing to invent; the commandments are all written, and will all be understood by the heart that really wishes to know their meaning.—It is a sign of a false life when a man hesitates on the ground that he really does not know what his duty is. Duty is perfectly and continually plain to the man whose motive is simple. “What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?” “What is written in the law?” “How readeest thou?”—There can only be bewilderment in the matter of detail; there can never be any confusion as to the distinction between right and wrong, noble and ignoble, upward and downward.

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 “*There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.*”—JOSHUA xiii. 1.

This is no threat. This is no sentence of discouragement. This indeed is inspiration.—It is true of every department of life. It is true, for example, of a man's own individuality: every man is not yet master of his entire self: some men have possessed themselves of their whole reason who have yet left their imagination unchastened and unsubdued.—Many men are chaste who are not generous. Many men are generous who are not just. Many men are impulsively good who are not rationally benevolent.—Such men may say to themselves, “There is yet very much land to be possessed.”—It is true with all intellectual education.—He knows best how much land is yet to be conquered who has conquered the

most.—The advanced student is the most modest.—The wisest man is most assured of his ignorance.—Sir Isaac Newton said that he was like a child on the seashore who gathered a few pebbles, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before him.—It is true with regard to the spread of the kingdom of Christ.—Take a map of the world, and show where Christianity has made progress, and where it is unknown; and even the imagination will be appalled by the extent of land yet to be covered.—We need not rest because there is no more to be done.—We do not obliterate what is to be done by closing our eyes and resolutely refusing to look upon it. The infinite darkness is still round about us, and is not at all decreased by the closing of our eyes.—But instead of the text being a discouragement, it is an encouragement; the land is there in order that it may be possessed; it is not afar off and inaccessible, but is immediately in front of us, and is intended for our use; we may have to obtain possession through battle and even through suffering, but the battle and the suffering do not destroy the possibility of possession.—What is worth holding that has not to be secured through suffering and loss of a temporary kind? The kingdom of heaven itself lies at the end of a strait road; but the very straitness of the road gives some hint of the value of the kingdom.—The Church must enter into a full realisation of the fact that the work yet to be done is greater than any work that has yet been accomplished: it is not an acre that awaits conquest, but a whole continent; not a whole continent only, but a whole world.—The work to be done enlarges in proportion to the work that is done.—If the work were superficial only, it might be completed with comparative ease, but it is cubic, solid, through-and-through work, and, there-

fore, it is difficult, but its difficulty is an indication of its glory.

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*“The Lord God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them.”*

—JOSHUA xiii. 33.

This was spoken of the tribe of Levi—in a peculiar sense the religious tribe of Israel.—The kingdom of God has an outward and an inward aspect: it has a land to be conquered, and it has a doctrine to be received and obeyed.—The idea of the text is that man may so live in God as to have no conscious need of outward things: and then the counterpart of the idea is that he who ascends to spiritual functions need have no fear with regard to the supply of physical necessities.—God is not the portion of religious men in the sense of feeding themselves only with thought and consolation and promise; he is pledged so to act upon the impulses and consciences of other men as to see that every lawful necessity is abundantly supplied.—Whilst the Levites were asking for God, God was asking for them, in the very sense of finding them bread and home and security.—If we trusted God more we should receive more from God.—If we will always persist in undertaking our own business, what wonder if God should leave us to ourselves and give us the reward of disappointment? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Blessed is he who has God for a treasurer.—It is more than folly to say that all this is impossible.—We imagine that we must do so much ourselves, or God will do nothing for us; and that statement is so far true as to give the sophism which lies at the heart of it some hold upon the confidence of the least earnest thinkers.—The text certainly suggests that God has appointed some men to

be the spiritual teachers and guides of the world.—We cannot get rid of the idea of spiritual ministry.—It is right to disclaim all merely official dignity and importance, but infinitely beyond the merely official lies the grandly personal and real, which all men recognise with admiration, and many men honour with homage and generous support.—When spiritual thinkers and workers give themselves wholly to the function assigned them of God, they will realise more perfectly God’s meaning when he says he has undertaken to be their inheritance; the meaning is not that they are to live upon fine thoughts and splendid conceptions, but that in addition to such thoughts and conceptions God himself will undertake to see that their house is watched and their table is supplied.—“He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.”—No man can work wholly and lovingly for God, and be neglected by him.—“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”

“Give me also.”—JOSHUA xv. 19.

This was the petition of Achsah, the daughter of Caleb.—The father had given his daughter a portion already in the form of a south land, and now she asks him for something more, namely, “springs of water.”—The emphasis of this text would seem to be on the word “also,” if we accommodate it to the temper and desire of our own times.—Achsah was not content with the south land; she wanted an addition.—Who ever is content with what he has? Does not one possession suggest another? This suggestion may be base and selfish. It may indicate a spirit of greed or covetousness which can never be satis-

fied. We have a proverb which says “much wants more.” Where such a spirit is manifested the possession already in hand is unworthily held.—Here is the secret of the amazing disparity between class and class, and the explanation of some of the grossest tyrannies of history.—Men should watch their desires in this direction.—All getting should be accompanied by corresponding giving.—Where there is no outlet there will soon be stagnation.—This desire, however, may be one of the noblest aspirations of the human mind.—There is a discontentment which is to be religiously encouraged. Say, for example, in the realm of knowledge: we go on from one advancement to another, earnestly desiring the completion of our study: say, for example, in the region of Christian donation; Paul counted himself not to have apprehended, but he resolved his whole life into one action expressed by the attitude of pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus: he urged the Christians of Corinth to “covet earnestly the best gifts:” there is, then, a covetousness which is equivalent to prayer; a desire for more which is a holy aspiration.—It is often difficult to distinguish between the legitimate and the illegitimate in human desire. As a broad rule it may be said that all desire for more material possession or personal gratification is wrong; and all desire for more light, clearer insight into truth, and fuller realisation of duty, is right.—Every man must determine this for himself.—There must be no shrinking from the most penetrating inquiry.—When the soul is really anxious to know what its own desires are in the sight of God, there cannot be the slightest difficulty in obtaining the information.

“ . . . the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them.”—JOSHUA xix. 49.

Joshua had rights of his own, and could have claimed such rights; but beyond rights which a man may claim are still more precious rights which are accorded to him by the conscience and generosity of the community.—This is the very law of divine providence.—The fact that we are born into the world is a fact which brings with it certain natural rights, in the absence of which we should hardly be men at all. But this is not the limit of the divine bounty. Beyond all that is merely legal and necessary there is a region of grace, of large and happy dowry, showing not only the bare justice, but the sweet mercy of the rule under which we live.—In a social sense it is true that we might get more if we claimed less.—Joshua lived a noble life amongst his people, and carried out his function of leadership with obvious justice and disinterestedness, and it is beautiful to observe how the people seem to have recognised this by their willing concession to him of an inheritance by their coasts.—This should be true in all family life. Obedience is due to parents by an unwritten law, as well as by formal decree; but beyond obedience there lies the whole region of voluntary testimony and service. Blessed is he who gives his parent an inheritance in that wide region!—The same thing should be true in commercial relations: there should be something more than a bond: where the bond is carried out loyally on both sides Duty will gracefully take upon itself any crown which Gratitude may be disposed to place upon its head.—This should be also true ecclesiastically: men who have laboured in season and out of season for the good of others ought not to be forgotten in the time of audit and general winding up of life and service,

but should have accorded to them all possible honour in view of a life unstained by sin, and crowded with acts of beneficence and sacrifice.—The charm of some possessions lies in the spirit which dictated their ownership.—It is a poor thing to have only those possessions which are bought and sold, and on which merely commercial lines are inscribed; such things, of course, every man must have; but the things which are written all over with love and thankfulness are infinitely more precious, and in an obvious sense are even more enduring.—No man begrudged Joshua his city in mount Ephraim: every one felt that the city was due to the brave captain and obedient saint.—It is well when our honours are doubled by the recognition of their desert by those who know us best.—The Well-done of the Master constitutes the best part of heaven.—To go into heaven even as a mere act of justice is to deprive the holy city of its most fascinating charm. It is because the city is given with the Well-done of its King that residence in it becomes the final and eternal joy of the soul.

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“ *Appoint out for you cities of refuge.*”—  
JOSHUA xx. 2.

The law in Numbers xxxv. appointed that the Levites should have six cities of refuge and forty-two others.—The law of the cities of refuge is given in full in Numbers xxxv. and Deuteronomy xix.—All cities should be cities of refuge.—How great the number of the inhabitants, and how well-organised the institutions; how fitting, then, that the young and the inexperienced should find refuge in such highly-civilised asylums.—The city is an aggregation of homes, and should surely bring the home feeling into wandering and aching hearts.—Is not the city crowded with churches? And are there not in them men of God appointed



to preach the great Gospel which was meant to heal the dying life of man?—All these reflections suggest the gracious thought of refuge.—Where men are few it would appear as if the soul were more exposed to assault.—Solitude has dangers peculiar to itself.—When the young life is hidden amongst ten thousand times ten thousand others, surely it ought to feel a sense of security, because in such a number the spirit and genius of brotherhood should be developed and crowned.—Consider what libraries there are in the city; how rich in literary treasure; how impossible is solitude in the midst of such eloquent silence.—Is not a library itself a city of refuge?—May not wandering thoughts be stayed amid all its treasures of learning and language?—Who can be lonely in any sense of desolateness who has access to a library?—Whilst all this is pictorially true, consider how different is the melancholy fact.—The city is full of trapdoors opening upon perdition.—Count the number of its inns, places of harmful amusement, people devoted to what has now become the fine art of knavery, sharp practice, and all manner of delusion.—Consider how the net is spread even in the sight of the bird, and the snare is laid on the open ground.—Compare a city as it might be with a city as it is, and see how steady and tremendous has been the process of degradation and corruption.—It has pleased God to represent his Church and kingdom under the image of a city.—We read in the Psalms of "the city of God."—Heaven is represented as a city whose walls are jasper and whose streets are gold.—This would seem to be a restoration of the ideal city.—It is a mistake to suppose that a city is bad simply because it is a city.—Association, companionship, interchange of opinion, the commingling of trusts and stewardships, ought all to combine to constitute an idea

of commonwealth, brotherhood, and home.—In proportion as the city is really bad, the Church should take care to provide refuges from all its malicious pursuers and an answer to all its seductive appeals.—Let there be a city within a city,—the city of God within the city of destruction.

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"*The avenger of blood.*"—JOSHUA xx. 5.

The text of course is limited by a local reference, but its suggestions spread themselves over the whole area of life and society.—Recognise the fact that there is in all civilisation an avenger of blood.—This indeed is necessary to the complete idea of civilisation.—If blood could be shed with impunity, civilisation itself would be a continual prey to passion.—God has set a high price upon blood; its quality would seem to be kindred to his own; it is full of fire, vitality; it is the very alphabet of immortality.—Every human creature is of inexpressible consequence to God.—Given a globe consisting of twelve hundred millions of human beings, and who can assign the exact importance to any one of them?—What is he but as a flock of snow upon a landscape, a drop in the Atlantic, an insect hardly visible in the sunbeam in which it dances for a moment?—Not such is the divine view; the very hairs of your head are all numbered; the providence of God is minute, personal, critical, exacting the uttermost farthing, and ruling all things with the severest economy.—Civilised society takes in its degree the same view of human life, for not a single child may be touched without society instantly arising as an avenger of blood.—Surely there can be no great offence in destroying an unconscious life, in putting an end to an infancy which has barely begun,—what can be the loss?—Yet even society itself instantly demands

an answer to the accusation of child-murder : no excuse would be tolerated : no fine theory of limiting the population would be admitted for one moment : organised society instantly becomes as it were the parent of the child, and demands an account of its life and recompense for its loss.—This being so with regard to the body, are we not entitled to lift the argument to a higher level, and to contend that there should be an avenger of mind, thought, purpose, as well as an avenger of blood?—They that kill the body can do but little ; they are indeed hardly to be feared in comparison with those who can sow the seed of wickedness in the opening heart, and suggest evil thoughts to the awakening mind.—If we slay him who slays the body, what should be done to him who takes away the life of the soul, who perverts the operation of motive and purpose, and who drags down the whole life to shame and infamy?—All this anxiety about the body, its protection and its prerogatives, is but the beginning of an infinitely higher argument, if we are just to its logic.—He would be accounted a fool who cared for the child's clothing, but paid no attention to the child's health : how much greater a fool is he who pays attention to the child's health of body and utterly neglects the child's health of mind !—Consider how the avenger steadily proceeds in his task : men cannot sin with impunity : they are made to feel the result of their wickedness in their health, in their property, in their whole outlook of life ; their fellow men shrink from them ; they are distrusted, and handed over to reprobation, if not always openly, and as it were by public demonstration, yet more or less secretly, silently, but surely : whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. There is an avenger of blood upon the track of

every bad man ; as to when he shall be discovered and punished no man can tell the exact time, but God fixes it, and by the decree of Heaven, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.

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 “ *And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah.*”—JOSHUA xx. 7.

The mountains of the Bible form an interesting subject of study as to their moral suggestiveness. — A beautiful thought is it that the cities of refuge should be upon the mountain-top, or should nestle in the sides of the mountain.—Two ideas of strength seem to combine here, the mountain itself being strong and the city built upon it inviolable.—Thus the works of God and the works of man unite in a holy effort to secure human life.—Are not all the works of God intended to save and educate and complete manhood?—Whenever the works of God fight against manhood we may be sure that sin is operating with deadly effect in some direction. — The whole world-house seems to have been built for the accommodation of the tenant ; for him the sun shines, the rivers flow, the earth grows her harvests, and the sea yields its population.—Man should add nothing to the works of God that is not in their own nature and according to the direction of their own purpose.—To build a home upon the fair landscape is to add to its beauty ; to build a church on the noblest elevation on the surface of the earth is to lift the mountain to a higher altitude.—The earth is sanctified or desecrated by what is put upon it.—The schoolhouse ennobles the district in which it is placed.—Every benevolent institution is as a tree of the Lord's own plant-

ing, though it be set in the midst of a garden, or made the crowning point of a lofty summit.—On the other hand, how much has the earth been desecrated by the presence of buildings upon it devoted to evil purposes.—The public-house may be a blot upon the landscape; the building in which evil arts are practised and evil professions are taught is as the presence of perdition in the very sanctuary of nature.—We should find more upon the mountains if we looked for more.—God has put cities of refuge upon every one of them.—The mountains themselves may be cities of refuge; there the weary reap new strength; there the over-driven and fevered brain cools itself and receives a tonic, enabling it to resume the battle of life and carry it on to conquest.—Not one thing in all nature has had its full meaning yet disclosed.—God burns in every bush; his house is by the seashore; his tabernacle is in the stars; his temple is in the tiniest flower that blooms.—The day is coming when the whole earth shall be the mountain of God; “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: . . . and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—To bring about that day we are not called upon to be ideal, to dream away our time, to slumber in selfish contemplation; we are rather summoned to activity, to discipline, to suffering; every man should feel as if the dawning of that day depended upon his individual exertions.

“*Cities to dwell in.*”—JOSHUA xxi. 2.

This chapter deals with the distribution of the Levitical cities.—They were given to priests, to Kohathites, to Gershonites, and to Merarites.—We are told that in the camp of Israel there were two squares surrounding the

tabernacle: an inner square of priests and Levites, an outer square of the tribes of Israel, three on each side.—Our point, however, is that every tribe had a city.—The distribution was so made as to involve each and all in some responsibility or trust.—The Kohathites carried the sacred vessels, the Gershonites the curtains and various fabrics of the tent and tabernacle, and the Merarites were entrusted with the bars and boards.—Wherever we find distribution in Scripture we find it so meted out that every man has his own particular vocation or trust.—The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who took his journey into a far country, and distributed his goods to his servants, giving every one a portion to profit withal.—We have nothing to do with the amount of the distribution, but we have a distinct responsibility in relation to its fact.—Let every man ask himself, What have I, what am I expected to do, what burden have I to carry, and what is the strength wherewith I am endowed?—No one man has all the talents: the greatest cannot do without the least.—Greatness is often misunderstood in this matter; the probability is that there is nothing so dreary as the solitude of greatness when it is deprived of popular recognition and sympathy.—The mountains may be very great, but they are often very barren.—The valley can do better without the mountain than the mountain can do without the valley.—Though the talents be few in number they can be applied to great purposes.—The reward is not in the dowry but in the industry.—It is not humility to deny the possession of talents; it may be simple dishonesty and unfaithfulness.

“*And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land . . . and the Lord gave them rest.*”—JOSHUA xxi. 43, 44.

The Lord is always giving.—He lives

to give.—“God so loved the world, that he gave . . .”—Trace the word “give” in connection with God throughout the whole of the Bible, and it will be found that the extent of his gifts is simply infinite.—The point to be observed here is in the contrast between the one gift and the other.—How much is implied in the word, “gave unto Israel all the land,” when it is contrasted with the expression, “the Lord gave them rest !”—Was there no rest in obtaining the land? No, not so much as one day.—Although the land was given it must be fought for.—This is the great law concerning all the gifts of Heaven; they are gifts only in a certain sense or in a limited degree, or are meant as provocatives to human energy or prizes for human patience.—The word “give” must thus be enlarged so as to represent its whole meaning: the Lord gives life, but man must train the life that is given: the Lord gives opportunity, but man must embrace the opportunity and fill it with all its significance: the Lord gives society, but society must enter upon a process of self-development and self-protection.—The thing that is given may be but the first seed, the germ, the protoplasm: all the rest may come of time, the succession of events, and the adaptations of educative influences and ministries.—In a larger sense the Lord gives rest.—He never gives rest until he has prepared men for it.—When men are not prepared for rest, they do not understand it as a blessing.—The six days’ labour make the Sabbath what it is; but for the six days’ labour the Sabbath would be a mere institution, a religious ordinance, an arbitrary distribution of time; but after the six days’ toil it comes as a benediction—the very beginning and pledge of Heaven.—The true rest is the rest of the soul.—“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” “There remaineth therefore a rest to

the people of God;” “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . that they may rest;” “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

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*“There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.”—JOSHUA xxi. 45.*

Personal testimony is better than literary argument.—Of this testimony Biblical religion can always avail itself. Of this testimony Christianity can still more pointedly make account. It is no mean indication of the power of Christianity, that it constrains its disciples to bear witness to the power of Christ in the soul. The Bible writers are always particular to maintain that the word of the Lord never failed. Failure there would have been fatal to the whole idea of divine providence as disclosed in the Bible.—The ancient writers are, if possible, more particular to notice that the good things promised of God were assuredly given rather than that his threatenings were realised. There seems to be a subtle willingness to overlook the infliction of punishment in view of the daily and abundant manifestation of divine goodness.—We soon forget the darkness when the light shines. The day whose wind and rain gives us discomfort is speedily forgotten when the summer broods over the land and turns it into one garden of flowers.—A very marvellous thing it is, that in health we soon forget our sickness; there may be in this some indication of that which will take place in higher states of being; in heaven we shall forget every trouble of earth.—A text of this kind seems to challenge the reader to contradict it.—If it were a mere question of argument, one disputant might be outwitted by another;

but where it is a question of direct personal witness, the character of the witness must be taken as equivalent to an argument.—The good things of God seem to grow in number and in magnitude in proportion as we look upon them from the point of advancing age. We do not see them in their true magnitude at first, or at the moment of their introduction; we are then too near them to see exactly their bearing and colour; a man at fifty knows more of the riches and blessedness of life than it was possible for him to know when but half that age.—The testimony in this case is most precise and inclusive. It is not a general commendation of the faithfulness of God, but a critical declaration that not one thing failed of all which God had spoken.—The argument of history is one of the most solid arguments in theology.—Doctrine is attested by providence.—We judge men by the manner in which they have kept their word to us, and where the word has been faithfully realised, honour is accorded and trust is increased. It should be so in our relations to the Creator and Ruler of life.

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 "What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?"—  
 JOSHUA xxii. 16.

The children of Israel are here represented as coming unto the children of Reuben and to the children of Gad and to the half tribe of Manassch, and challenging them respecting a certain action.—Here is a great principle, the application of which is world-wide and time-wide: the principle is that men have a right to inquire into the trespasses committed by one another.—There is no right of trespass; there is

no chartered sin.—Men are the keepers of one another, and ought to be severely critical as to the moral atmosphere which any man or number of men may create.—It is worse than a fallacy to suppose that a man has a right to do even with himself as he pleases.—There is a sense in which there is no mere "self" to be dealt with.—In a sense, every man is a part of some other man, or part of the body corporate.—There is no isolation in any sense that limits evil action.—Even an infamous example may be doing untold mischief in society, though the man himself may be taking no direct or energetic part in the propagation of evil.—Every householder has a right to inquire into the nuisances created by adjoining householders.—No man has a right to vitiate the common air; it belongs to all the people, and they have a right to protect its purity, or to avenge any violation of its healthfulness.—This principle is not sufficiently recognised; hence men are told to mind their own business and to let other people alone.—The merit of this speech consists entirely in its brevity, for it is wholly without wit, sense, charity, or beneficence.—The mother has a right to inquire into the nature of every road along which her child travels day by day.—The parent is called upon to inquire into the character of the school in which he may place his child.—He who detects any noisomeness in the air has a right to follow that noisomeness to its origin, if he possibly can, though in doing so he may have to trample down hedges and boundaries and landmarks.—The public health is of more consequence than the temporary integrity of mechanical boundaries.—If we had more challenging of one another in this matter of trespass, we should have a healthier state of society.—The time will come when men will not only be anxious about nuisances that vitiate the air or throw disquietness into the

social life; they will be still more anxious about thoughts that unbalance the mind, ambitions that fever the soul, and speculations that destroy the serenity and peace of the heart and mind.—It is in vain to preach a doctrine of brotherhood or commonwealth, and yet to desist from the exercise of those rights which belong to community and fellowship.—To preach that all the world is a brotherhood, and then to act as if every man had a right to do as he pleased, is simply to contradict preaching by practice.—When man asks, Am I my brother's keeper? the answer should be a grand and solemn affirmation.

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 “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.”—JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

There is a point at which all religion becomes voluntary.—There is a sense in which natural religion is not voluntary, although there is a strained sense in which a contention may be set up for its voluntariness.—The whole value of spiritual religion consists in its expressing the supreme desire of the heart.—An appeal is thus made to reason, inasmuch as man is called upon to make a choice. To make a choice means, in other words, to examine, to attach values, weigh one thing against another, and to pronounce on rational grounds for the election of a certain course of conduct.—A beautiful union of words is here found, namely, “choose,” and “serve.” Here is a beautiful instance of voluntary slavery.—There is a service that is merely of the eye, regulated by selfish considerations and determined by self-indulgence: that service is of no account in the sanctuary: it is a vain oblation, and is rejected by God.—The apostles did not hesitate to describe themselves as “slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ;” the word slave seems to mean more than servant,

and it was after that further and deeper meaning, that the apostles strained themselves when they described their service as slavery.—There is a slavery of love.—Love can never rise too early, or toil too severely, or give too lavishly; it lives to give; it lives to gratify others; its joy would be taken away if its service could be limited.—In such a case as is referred to in the text, “service” must not be taken as a merely intellectual or ceremonial relation,—it means downright hard work, genuine obedience, hearty devotion, complete, unsparring, and joyous consecration.—The profession of religion may be an aggravation of immorality.—To profess and not to do is to be guilty of the blackest falsehood.—Great mistakes about the service of God must be cleared away: it is a mistake, for example, to suppose that we may serve God by singing hymns, attending services, and patronising ministers, when in doing all this we only gratify our own desires without exposing ourselves to a single pang or loss. Exercises of this kind must be taken as merely part of the great consecration. The beauty is not the flower, nor is it the fragrance; there must be root-life, hidden sources of nutriment, and direct connection with the sun.—We cannot serve God if we are not living in God, and God is not living in us. To serve God is to bring the spirit into activity at every possible point of life, thinking good, doing good, and, where necessary, suffering for good.—The greatness of this service may be seen in the fact that it is always associated in Christian teaching with concentration.—Jesus Christ said, Ye cannot serve God and mammon, as ye cannot be going east and west at the same time. Here, therefore, the meaning clearly is that divine service means undivided concentration, complete and absolute devotion to the will of God.—In view of this definition (a definition

realised only by the Lord Jesus Christ) let every man say how far he is worthy to be called a servant of the living God.

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 “Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us.”—JOSHUA xxiv. 27.

This is more than poetry; this indeed is the greatest of realities.—We are accustomed to regard nature as a silent and unresponsive quantity, but it is never so regarded in holy Scripture.—We cannot tell the relation of nature to our own spiritual life.—There is nothing secret that shall not be revealed; there is nothing spoken in whispers that shall not be repeated in thunders. Who cannot recall the places at which certain vows were spoken, or memorable prayers were poured out of the heart? The world is full of trysting-places, altars of promise, mountains of aspiration, sanctuaries of vow and oath.—Every place at which we have kneeled will be a witness against us. Every time we have handled the Bible we have marked down a witness either in our favour or against us.—A recollection of these circumstances would hallow nature and give all life a new sensitiveness.—“God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” Had not the children praised Christ, the very stones would have cried out against them, and taken up a song of gladness in his honour.—There are places which

we cannot pass without great memories leaping up from them, and making us live our years over again in sudden agony, now of pain, now of rapture.—The footprints we leave behind us may be seen by others, and may be encouragements to them. It is for us to say whether those encouragements shall be found on the upward road, crowned with heaven, or on the downward road, at the end of which there is a burning pit.—A very solemn thought it is that we are never really alone.—Time and space are God’s witnesses, and the stones we accounted deaf may be alive to hear every oath and blessing uttered by our lives. It is a fearful thing to live!—What did you say at the child’s grave?—What at the wedding altar?—What was the meaning of the gift of a mother’s Bible?—Recall the spot on which a great deliverance was wrought, and remember your many tears and vows.—How desolate the condition of a man against whom dumb nature exclaims!—The very stones cry out.—Every harvest rebukes spiritual indolence.—Every star puts to shame the life of darkness.—Every flower protests against moral hideousness.—O my soul, how many have been thy vows, and how few thy fulfilments! Wilt thou always be a liar before God, and always dare the very faces of nature to put thee to shame? I will arise and redeem my vows, and ask him who is merciful evermore to give me courage to own my cowardice, and strength to repair the waste places of my life.

## EXCURSUS.

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WE have now reached a point in our Biblical studies from which we can look back to see the general line of thought which the inspired writers have pursued. As this is distinctively the *People's Bible*, we are entitled to ask questions respecting what may be termed the people's religion, by which is meant such a religion as would be understood by the mind of the common people who have not received specific or professional training either in theology or philosophy. Given the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua in order to discover what impression the popular mind would receive from reading them; this is our problem, and at this point we are prepared to make at least a tentative reply.

We must always distinguish between the people as a whole and those specially gifted individuals who have achieved great influence and renown as powerful thinkers. We may judge either by the many or by the few; and in a case such as is now before us we are certainly entitled to judge by the many, asking ourselves the question, How will this or that doctrine or revelation strike the average mind? Unless we keep in view this broad distinction as between the many and the few, we shall do injustice to both. Judging by the many, we might be inclined to view with contempt, certainly with disesteem, the few who are supposed to plume themselves on great gifts, and claim to be the leaders of the world. Nothing would be easier than for the multitude to scorn



the little clique or sect or faction claiming to be all but inspired, and asserting some kind of right to rule the general thinking of mankind. The common people might ask whether it is more probable that a thousand men should be right than that one man should be right when he differs from them. A good deal of supposed eminence might also be traced to vanity, or set down to some inferior motive. On the other hand, it is just as possible to do injustice to the many by unduly magnifying the gifts and rights of the few. Was the revelation of God made to mankind, or was it made only to a man here and there of superior intellectual capacity and force? Is the Bible intended to be the Book of the People, or is it meant that it should come to the people only through the interpretation of priests, ministers, or scholars? Is there not a spirit in man, and doth not the inspiration of the Almighty give him understanding? Did not the common people hear Jesus Christ "gladly"? Are we not distinctly told again and again that many sacred mysteries are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes? Does not the whole tone of the Bible sanction the thought that the revelation made by God to man respecting the salvation of the race is made to the humble, contrite, penitent, unassuming, and is withheld from the princes of this world? It should be remembered on all sides of an argument of this kind that some men have what may be termed a theological faculty or genius: they have insight, a kind of prevision, a comprehensive glance as to power of grouping details and setting facts and doctrines in their true perspective: they may be emphatically termed theologians, and ought to be duly respected as such; but it is perfectly evident that Christianity cannot come through merely scientific theology, otherwise the great common world would never receive the blessings of the Gospel, or if it did receive them it would be with such a sense of obligation to learned and gifted men as to constitute those men into a kind of priesthood, and offer to them, more or less

consciously, a tribute scarcely distinguishable from idolatry. The theologian has a distinct function and position of his own; keeping himself strictly to that function and position, he is to be consulted with the hope of spiritual advantage on the part of the inquirer; but it must never be understood that the Gospel intended for the salvation of the whole world is entrusted solely to the custody of men of letters, men of metaphysical genius, or men of piercing insight, and can only be received through their mediation or instrumentality. Between the theologian and the Christian the widest possible contrast must be established: a man may be a profoundly scientific theologian, and yet know nothing about the Spirit of Christ; on the other hand, a man may be imbued with the very Spirit of the Lord, and yet be totally unacquainted with the methods and results of distinctively scientific theology. We cannot be too careful in protesting against the erection of preaching into some kind of mere profession. It is in this way that priesthoods are formed, and that all kinds of spiritual tyranny are established. The people must never hold the idea that the Bible can only be understood by a certain kind of men to whom exceptional privileges have been granted. We must insist that the Bible is the people's book, that it can be understood by the people, that there is nothing in it necessary to salvation which people cannot find out for themselves, without the help of priest or preacher. This is true liberty of conscience, and this is the proper exercise of the right of private judgment. When questions of history, archæology, letters, ancient civilisations, or any species of criticism come up, then the assistance of learned and competent men is indispensable: but so long as the question relates to the method of reconciliation with God, and the building up of spiritual and beneficent character, the people must discuss and settle the whole matter without what may be termed, inoffensively, professional intervention. There is in human nature a strong tendency towards priesthood, professionalism, or

official superiority. This tendency is to be resisted as if it were one of the most subtle and persistent temptations. The most eminent professor of Biblical learning would do well sometimes to sit at the feet of the humblest disciple. He would be all the better if he could hear some broken-hearted man read the Bible to him morning by morning. The great passages of the Bible are to be read through the tears of sorrow. Learning of a verbal kind can do only the very meanest sort of work in the house of God ; a needful work no doubt, a work by no means to be contemned when limited to its proper scope and uses, but the spirit of the Bible is in the heart of the people, and by that heart alone can that spirit be fully and influentially revealed.

Looking back upon the course we have traversed, what would be the people's idea respecting the God of the Bible ? The metaphysician might begin by some analysis of the elements or attributes of Godhead, but we are not now asking what the metaphysician would do, but rather what would be the impression of the people regarding the God of the Pentateuch ? There are two distinct ways of entering upon the question of the existence and sovereignty of God. The metaphysician has one way, and the non-metaphysician has a way quite different. We have now to do with the non-metaphysician—the plain, common, average mind of the world. Let that mind carefully go through the Pentateuch, and through such portion of history as is set forth in the Book of Joshua, and its impression must be that, according to the teaching of the Bible, God is great, good, mysterious in character, inscrutable in purpose, but always revealing himself in great acts of moral correction and beneficence. The ordinary reader might not be able to define with anything like exhaustiveness such terms as Omnipotence, Eternal, Jehovah, and yet the inability to give such definition would not prevent the mind entertaining the sublimest thoughts of God's nature, attributes, and govern-

ment. We may have carried this matter of definition too far. In all religious thinking there is a point at which analysis must stop, and man must simply begin to pray and to wait patiently upon God. To this of course it will be replied that the people will insist upon saying, *What* have we to believe respecting God? *Who* is God? But this reply itself needs correction. The answer is both Yes and No. How are such matters settled in practical life? You may as well say that before a man who is hungry can accept bread he is bound to ask certain difficult questions respecting bread,—as, for example, by what process did it grow, what chemical forces operated in the production of bread, what is the relation of the earth to the sun, of light to water, and what is the secret or mystery of germination? Now whilst it might be most interesting to answer all these questions, the answer to them is not at all necessary to the appropriation of the bread which is offered. There is no violence in the suggestion that he who accepts bread without inquiring into all the chemical or other questions which relate to the mystery of germination or growth, acts upon faith rather than upon reason; his reason is not at all satisfied simply because he knows nothing whatever regarding the processes which took place in the production of bread. Nor is the analogy to be thrown out simply because it does not cover the whole ground; it covers ground enough for our immediate purpose, when it shows that in practical matters men are content to act in a practical way. We contend that there is no matter more practical than the moral settlement of the mind, the purification of motive, the acceptance of divine blessings, ending in reconciliation with God, a beneficent life, and sure hope of heaven. We must insist that these questions are themselves practical; for, the moment we allow them to be taken out of practical relations, they become merely speculative, and can only be treated as so many high conjectures to which there is no definite answer. The people cannot read the

portion of Scripture through which we have come without feeling that the existence of God is everywhere recognised ; is, indeed, assumed as the one all-ruling fact of the history ; is not brought up for discussion or consideration, but is set down as the unit without which all processes of calculation would be simply impossible. The mind, therefore, might accept God as the Bible accepts him. He is there assumed, taken for granted ; not a step is taken except under the distinct conviction and happy consciousness of the presence and rule of God in human life. Because we begin at this point it does not follow that we may end there. Experience itself will become a means of education, and as we proceed in our spiritual reading and Christian education we may be able to form higher and clearer conceptions of the divine existence and character, and so may be enabled to create a kind of theology of our own. But the point to be observed is that all this is after-growth, and is not at all necessary to the formation of a really religious character. Because metaphysical questions can be asked, it does not follow that it is necessary to answer them. There is no mental exercise that does not admit of severe metaphysical cross-examination. If we did not act in common life until we were able to answer all the metaphysical questions that could be raised concerning it, we should never act at all. What is will ? What is the origin of ideas ? What is the scope of volition ? What is the final meaning of responsibility ? What is the exact moral relation of one man to another ? All these questions, and many more, instantly present themselves when any undertaking is proposed, and if we were not to move until they were finally settled, we should never move at all. The suggestion, therefore, that men will ask certain questions respecting God, and that we ought to be prepared to answer them, falls to the ground, if there is any force in analogy. We must ask men to be as reasonable in the higher things of life as in the lower, and to adopt certain working principles in order to find the way even to their prior

or ulterior intent and purpose. In adopting this course of inquiry and reasoning, the mind will be strongly supported by reflecting upon the kind of character which is thereby produced. Accepting God,—that is to say, the fact of his existence, the certainty of his government, and the reality of his judgment of human conduct,—what is the kind of character produced by this recognition? We contend that the kind of character so produced is of the highest quality, ennobled by veneration, purified at the very fountain of its motive, and ruled by considerations which involve the claims, rights, and highest interests of other men. If a non-metaphysical acceptance of God ended in looseness or frivolity of character, such an ending would be a powerful answer to the argumentative contention; but when facts all tend the other way—namely, to show that even where there is no metaphysical genius there may be thorough acceptance of the idea of the divine personality and rule, and profoundly religious character and feeling—the whole aspect of the argument is changed. Now up to this point in the Bible we have not had to deal with metaphysicians, philosophers, theologians, as these terms are now understood, but we have had to deal with many noble and righteous men, whose examples may be safely held up for imitation in all lands and all ages. They lived in God; they moved and had their being in him; some of them “walked with God,” and some of them were hardly distinguishable from the very purest examples of piety which even Christian history affords. The people, then, may well come to the conclusion that in the portion of the Bible which we now close, there is certainly the revelation of a creating, sustaining, and directing God—mighty, merciful, good, and gracious; having sympathy with men, pitying their infirmities, burning with anger against their sins, and yet in the very midst of his moral indignation seeking their redemption and restoration.

What would be the idea of the people with regard to

the Providence which is revealed in the Bible up to this point? We need not enter upon minute questions regarding government, relationships between the Governor and the governed, as involving nice questions of moral obligation; we have simply to ask, What would be the impression produced upon the ordinary mind by the perusal of so much of the Scriptures as we have now studied? Is there anything like shape or form in all the history that has passed before us? Is there anywhere a disclosure of a distinct purpose in divine rule? Have things but moved from one chaos to another, aggravating the tumult and confusion as they have passed from phase to phase? Has there been at all events the recognition of a Power which could raise up and put down; which could punish sin and reward righteousness; which could bind kings and princes and give authority to those who were previously without name? Is there anywhere in all this portion of Scripture a sense of centralisation, supremacy, authority? Is there at least the shadow of a throne, high and mighty, above all the affairs of men? I cannot but feel, in coming along all this open Biblical road, that everywhere we have been confronted by the gracious presence of an overruling Providence. The pages have been full of happy inspiration. True, we have had mystery upon mystery, one darkening upon the other like sevenfold night, but again and again we have had occasion to exclaim, Though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Curiously enough, we have seen deliverance come both unexpectedly and suddenly, but with a certainty which no human power could set aside. At the very point where we expected evil to triumph permanently, we have seen the light strike the evil one, and day displace all the horrors of night. We hold these to be simple matters of fact. They have ample correspondence and confirmation in our own consciousness and experience. We cannot account for these things; all things seem to be entangled one within the

other, and hope of reconciliation or harmony there appears to be none ; the enemy is at the very door, and the hour of destruction has already come : yet in a moment deliverance has been wrought, and that which was dark and frowning has become bright, smiling, and hopeful. The common people can understand these things when they cannot enter into the mysteries of government, rulership, and moral relations of developing and sometimes apparently contending degrees. The thing to be kept in mind is what the people as such can understand, and never to tempt them away into fields of mere speculation and conjecture, where, because of want of adequate mental training, they would be sure to fall into deeper and deeper confusion. The people as such must be encouraged to stand upon solid ground, upon the facts which they themselves have known, seen, and handled ; and how tempting soever it may be to proceed from these solid rocks into the upper air of question-asking and speculation, the people must be exhorted to stand within the lines which they themselves have proved, for only within those limits have they adequate answer to the assaults of the enemy. Some men may pass beyond those lines. Here it is that we must always make room for the highly-qualified theologian or metaphysician. He is of unspeakable use, as we have again and again allowed, so long as he keeps within his proper sphere, but he must not sneer at the common people because they cannot philosophise, neither must the common people sneer at him because he sees higher heights than they themselves have yet beheld. The common man and the uncommon thinker belong to one another, are mutually complementary, and therefore they must hold one another in mutual honour.

Another interesting inquiry would relate to the conception of the common people as to the matter of Inspiration, so far as our studies have proceeded. Theories of inspiration have always been rife enough in the Church.



Our contention is that the people as such really cannot settle questions of inspiration, nor ought they to attempt their consideration. Not only are the people unable to settle the great question of inspiration, but even the most learned and gifted professors and teachers have not come to common ground on the question themselves. What the common people can do with regard to the matter of inspiration is to discover the moral tone and purpose of the Book which claims to be inspired. They can put to themselves the great question, What is the moral teaching of this book? What kind of character is this book designed to create and foster? What is the quality of the righteousness on which this book insists? Is this a book which is satisfied with expediency, training, compromise, or being right on the whole or in general? He would be an unwise teacher who denied that there are difficulties in the Pentateuch which even scholars cannot settle. Let us allow that there are discrepancies as to dates and events in the Pentateuch and in the historical books; let us admit that there are many questions on which no light can be thrown; it would be most unwise to rest the question of inspiration or non-inspiration upon such circumstances. The importance of these questions is not for a moment to be denied, but they are not to be regarded as taking rank with the highest moral inquiry and purpose on the part of the book. The heart can always tell what words are inspired when they address themselves to the moral nature. There is not a soul that would not revolt at the idea that a command to do wrong was inspired. Not a man would rise to uphold commandments contrary in spirit to the ten which constitute the law. Were a man to arise and say, The eighth commandment ought to be read, "Thou shalt steal," he would instantly be put down by the common voice of civilised humanity; it would be felt that such a doctrine aimed at the very constitution of life in all its social and dependent relations. Now whilst there are definite lines upon which the inspiration of the Bible can be tested, it may be quite

enough for the common people—that is, for the people as a whole—to rest upon those lines, and not to trouble themselves with the remoter questions which even the most learned men cannot adjust. No fault need be found with the teachers who insist that the word of God is to be found in the Bible, as against the theory that the Bible is itself the word of God. Considerable controversy has arisen respecting this distinction. Let us understand what it is: one teacher says the Bible is the word of God; another teacher says the word of God is to be found in the Bible. In the first case the man undertakes to uphold the doctrine of what is termed plenary or verbal inspiration: he will have it that every letter is inspired, that every word is sacred; in short, that there is nothing whatever, from the beginning of the Bible to the end, that is not immediately and absolutely inspired and directed by God. The other teacher maintains that this is by no means the case, and that it is not necessary that it should be the case in order to prove that the Bible is a divine revelation: he insists that the moral character of the Bible is the best proof of its being inspired; he looks upon all matters of astronomy, geology, military history, local movement, popular rumour, as being merely literary, and as being strictly in accordance with the knowledge and temper of the times; in all these departments he is prepared to find literal discrepancy, or to be confronted with considerable difficulty of many kinds; but he contends that, apart altogether from these incidents and details, there is in the Bible an authoritative revelation of righteousness, truth, and peace to the whole world. The inspiration, therefore, for which the second teacher would contend may be termed moral as apart from literal inspiration: he maintains that there is no difficulty whatever in ascertaining the real moral character of the book, and upon that real moral character he establishes his claim that the Bible is inspired and has become possible as a book only because of direct divine intervention. It is not in our power to settle these contending claims. But what is

there to find fault with in the claim of the man who insists that from beginning to end the God of the Bible requires of man that he walk justly, love mercy, and put his daily trust in God, looking to none other for direction, instruction, and judgment? We continually insist that even in the parables of Christ the local incident or colouring is not to be regarded as part and parcel of the parable: in effect we contend that the truth is within the parable; in other words, that the parable is within the parable, and that we must reach the kernel if we would understand the speaker's meaning. The teachers to whom reference is now made make the same contention with regard to the Bible: they say that the Bible is within the Bible: they say that the Bible contains incident, colouring, and detail of many kinds which really have no essential or vital bearing upon the supreme purpose of the book itself: they are thus enabled further to maintain that whatever may be said regarding the merely external circumstances associated with the development of the Bible, its central purpose remains inviolate and inviolable: from their point of view the Bible contains the very law of God, respecting which there can be no dispute, as to its sublime morality or profound and glorious character. Probably the common people would be prepared to adopt this view without saying anything at all respecting the other, simply because they are not qualified to discuss the other with adequate information and ability. A great point, however, is gained when any man is drawn to confess that the Bible contains and reveals the whole counsel of God regarding human character and human responsibility. It is of infinitely greater importance to establish this doctrine than to establish any other within the whole sphere covered by the term Inspiration. The one sphere does not indeed necessarily exclude the other, nor does the one sphere necessarily include the other. A man may be perfectly orthodox, and say that he is altogether unable to settle the contentions of doctors and critics regarding inspiration, but for himself he has come to the conclusion that, however much

may be taken out of the Bible, its moral integrity is left unimpaired, it enshrines the very wisdom of God, and reveals the only conditions upon which man can walk acceptably with his Maker.

On these three questions of Godhead, Providence, and Inspiration, the people may up to this point be able to form distinct and profitable opinions for themselves. My exhortation must continually be, Prove all things; never allow the priest to dispossess you of your right of private judgment; read the book thoroughly from end to end, and believe that Almighty God never sent a message to the human race which could be understood only by a portion of that race—that whatever the great Father of us all has sent to the human family he has sent in language which cannot be misunderstood except by the perversity and selfishness of man. Wherever we come upon any mystery which is intended to interfere with the development of moral character, we may be sure that that mystery is an invention of priestcraft, and ought to be blown away with indignation and horror. Great and awful mysteries of another kind there must always be. Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? Who can lay a line upon Eternity and say, This is the measure thereof, and such and such number of days exhaust the meaning of eternal duration? Again and again we must stand back in wonder and awe, not knowing where we are or what events are challenging our imagination. But apart from all these mysteries, speculations, conjectures, hypotheses, there are great solid rocks of history, fact, experience, upon which all men can stand, and where they can wait as in a sanctuary for the further revelation of God's kingdom. How foolish would that man be regarded in common life who would not build upon a rock because other men have attempted to build upon a quaking bog! Look at your own life, its form, its progress, its gradual uplifting and purification, and say if within that boundary you have not encouragement enough to pray and hope and serve to

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the end. Religion without mystery would be incomplete religion, and would soon become the merest amusement of frivolous minds. All through the line we have traversed God has kept certain reasons to himself without the faintest hint of revelation. He did not explain to Adam why one tree was forbidden. He did not tell why one sacrifice was accepted and another rejected. In the wilderness he gave symbols which never fully conveyed the meaning of the thing signified. Even when he communed with man it was through the medium of a chosen servant, and not promiscuously to the multitude. But whilst there have been inscrutable mysteries, have there not also been countless mercies? To the mercies we must recur with thankful hearts when the mysteries dazzle and bewilder our helpless Reason. The beasts of the field shall teach us. The rocks shall be full of suggestion. The stars shall shed down their gospel of light. Our own home-life shall witness gratefully to the goodness of God. Thus, whilst the mysteries hide themselves in light unapproachable, the mercies shall sing to us by day and night, and be unto us as glad promises of still better things to come.



# J U D G E S .

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THIS book abounds in human character, and thus differs very happily from the books of ritual through which we have just passed. Innumerable men come and go on this busy stage, each leaving a distinct impress on the memory, even the humblest having some touch of distinction which gives him importance. Think of Ehud the ambidexter, Shamgar the wielder of rough weapons, Deborah the mother in Israel, Barak woman-led, Gideon so majestic in self-control and patient simplicity, of Abimelech the hateful self-seeker, Jotham the father of fabulists, Jephthah despised yet crowned, Manoah domestic and melancholy, his wife quick at spiritual interpretation, Samson an elephant in strength a babe in weakness, Micah the priest, and Benjamin dissolute yet missed and lamented. Then there are innumerable little names, glittering like asteroids on that distant sky, as Othniel and Heber, Sisera and Jael, Tolah and Jair, the woman who stunned Abimelech with a millstone, and the old man who came out of the field at eventide and blessed the wayfarers. A book abounding in character truly! History, Romance, Song, War, Tumult, gather in this array, and it is our business to observe and ponder, consider and learn what we can. The study of this book has been most profitable to my own mind, as a study of human nature under conditions which severely test it at every point, and also a study of that spiritual and mysterious action which we justly name Providence. Though the tumult is great the central line never changes. An unseen but mighty Hand guides the tremendous storm, and is never more evident as to omnipotence than when the history is most confused and bewildering. How many are the servants of Jehovah, and how various in faculty, disposition, and capacity! Who could hold them together in one happy service but the Lord God omnipotent? This consideration opens up the whole subject of the Providence which governs and unites the infinite mass which we call Society. Think of it as a Society that has been kept together thousands upon thousands of years and yet has always seemed to be upon the point of dissolution! Always about to be dissolved yet never dissolving. The dispute never ceases; collision and contention occur every moment; yet in the midst of continual contention there is continual progress. Society has come again and again to

the point of ruin, yet it has always escaped the last peril ; again and again Might has seemed to have Right utterly in its power, yet the Right has thriven in adversity, and clothed itself with new beauty even in the fire ; in a word, human history is a constant crisis, yet it never reaches the point of extinction. Society is marked by the widest contrasts, such as master and servant, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, refined and vulgar ; and the moral distinctions are endless,—you have every variety of temper, purpose, desire, sensibility, and service ; you have the brave and the timid, the generous and the mean, the unsuspecting and the distrustful, the man who faces the world with high courage, and the coward who shrinks in darkness ; you have the earnest soul who prays for his race like an intercessor, and near him (or born of the same mother) one to whom the light gives pain. The nursery is full of infant life, and the hillside alive with childish movement and glee, and on the other side of the same hill you have the dying child, the good man sighing for home, and the bad man ending a wild day in a wilder night. Look abroad still. Yonder are the blind, who know only of morning by hearsay ; the dumb, the imbecile, the mad, and on and on the exciting panorama stretches and palpitates, until the eye is tired by the endless spectacle. Realise, as far as you can, all distances, differences, contrasts, and antagonisms, and then ask, How can all this be accounted for ?

I hold that this is as purely a matter of scientific interest as the formation of rocks or the distribution of plants. I am interested in social man as much as the naturalist is interested in physical man.

This in passing. Now look at your own individual life, and thus bring the mystery nearer home. You had no control over your birth. You had no control over your constitution. You come into a world and assume responsibilities of the most appalling magnitude. You come in a helpless infant, you go out either to heaven or to hell. You learn, you work, you suffer ; you fight, and lose the battle ; you run, and lose the race ; you are just going to drink the cup of joy, and behold it is thrown out of your hand ; the child that is to be your mainstay and comfort dies first ; the man who never prays succeeds in this world better than you, though you pray seven times a day. You cannot get a footing anywhere. The rock melts into water the moment you touch it, and the water becomes a rock again when some other man puts his foot upon it. You are confounded, bewildered, lost.

Now account for all this. Suppose we say that it is all a matter of chance, would that satisfy any thinking, reasonable man ? Look how the suggestion degrades us ! It contradicts the very instincts that make us human. Have we not power to protect ourselves against chance ? We protect ourselves against infection, and against fire and water ; we build bridges, lay telegraphs, and do all manner of wonderful things : how is it that



we cannot overcome so contemptible an agent as chance? Why do we not assemble in solemn congress and get the upper hand of a power that makes everything else so uncertain? If we could bring chance under our control nine-tenths of our troubles would be at an end.

Suppose we say that it is the operation of the law of averages, we have only used a long word for a short one, for after all it comes back to chance put down in figures. Is any sensible man really satisfied with that explanation? Is it enough for me, looking at my disappointments and losses, my trials and griefs, my heart-breaks and temptations, to say that they all fall under the law of averages? We feel that the answer is insufficient. It does not go to the root of the matter. It is a reply that would be put down in politics as a fool's answer, and that would be regarded in business as the road to bankruptcy. How, then, to account for the facts? Suppose that it should be suggested that above all and around all there is an Almighty Providence, that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do? Does not the heart leap at that suggestion and say it is true?

I accept the doctrine of Providence not because I am told to do so without any reason being given, but because the facts of my own daily life make such a doctrine essential; they demand it; they fall to pieces without it; they are lifted up into coherence and meaning and expectation by it.

Observe how this method of reasoning operates. If you start from the point which says, There is a Providence, go and find it; you will meet with many things in the course of your study which will appear to contradict and destroy the theory, and because you have started to prove a theory the difficulties will be all the greater. But if you begin at the point which says, There is human history with all its ups and downs, its ambitions and limitations, its ebbings and flowings, go and account for it, you will be compelled to attribute it to chance or to Providence, and I leave it to any sensible man to say which is the more probable, not to say the more satisfactory, solution.

If we say chance, the answer not only insults our intellectual dignity, it positively contradicts and stultifies itself, for the chance which is so regular, so consistent, so uniform, that in many departments of life it can be made the basis of arithmetical calculation, proves that it is no chance at all. Chance is capricious. Chance is unmanageable. Chance is treacherous. If chance has become law, law is no chance, and it has to be shown how chance chanced to become law, and how having become law it has lost the chance of becoming chance again. No, no. The theory of chance is absurd and untenable. But if we make Providence our answer we still have to face the many difficulties of human history; children die; good men suffer; bad men prosper; the scroll in the hand of pensive Time is written all over with mourning, lamentation, and woe. Let us now note the action.

. Judges i. 7.

“As I have done, so God hath requited me.”

**ADONI-BEZEK.**

**T**HESE words were uttered by Adoni-bezek (king of Bezek). He had conquered seven of the little kingdoms in and around Palestine, and he showed their kings the rough hospitality of cutting off their thumbs and their great toes, and of allowing them to gather their meat under his table. In due time, however, Judah, who succeeded Joshua in the leadership, went up to do the Lord's work and took with him Simeon that they might fight against the Canaanites. In Bezek they slew ten thousand men. There they found the king, and they fought against him, and when he fled they pursued after him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. “And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table : as I have done, so God hath requited me.” This fact is an illustration of a severe yet most holy law. “The Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite.” Nor was this an ancient law only ; it was repeated by Jesus Christ himself : “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” The same doctrine was laid down by the Apostles : “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.” Adoni-bezek shows his wisdom in making this comment upon his own suffering. Though he was a tyrant yet he was not a fool. The difficulty of the spiritual teacher is with heedless men ; all other difficulties may be subdued or even turned to advantage, but heedlessness, inattentiveness, carelessness, who can overcome ?

Set it down as a central and abiding truth that wrong-doers cannot escape divine judgment. “Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” A man may deny this ; he may theoretically disregard it ; but all

history shows that he cannot escape it. At the heart of things is the spirit of judgment. Life appears to be confused, but before the Almighty it has shape and plan and purpose. God overtakes a man at the last, and comes before him with such vividness of action as to constrain the man himself to admit that the punishment is divine and not human. There is an answering voice in the human heart. When a man is suffering from any amputation whatsoever, either physical or social, either ecclesiastical or commercial, let him profoundly reflect upon the whole case and scourge his memory so that nothing may be omitted from the review, and he will find that there is a marvellous law in life whose watchword is: "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth"! "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." Only the fool can be satisfied by tracing his punishments to ill-luck.

Seeing that there is this law of punishment or requital in constant operation, no man should take the law into his own hands. That is the most pitiful form of the attempted readjustment of things. When the reformation is worked out it must come from a greater distance and operate by an infinitely greater sweep. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people." "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me." "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Adoni-bezek acknowledged his punishment as a divine visitation. He did not look upon it as a petty resentment on the part of his enemies; he took a high moral view of his condition. Why have we suffered loss in business? May it not be that we have oppressed the poor and needy? Why are our schemes delayed and thwarted? Is it not because we have been obstinate and unfriendly towards the schemes of others? Why are we held in disesteem or neglect? Is it not because of the contempt with which we have treated our brethren? Let us look at the moral working of things, and see in the results which are forced upon us, not the petty anger of men—something that might have been avoided—but the inevitable judgment of God against which all resistance is vain.

This law does not operate in one direction only. The God who punishes also rewards. "God is not unrighteous to forget

your work and labour of love." "The liberal soul shall be made fat." "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." This is the other side of a law which is full of awful suggestion. The way of the Lord is thus equal. Nothing that we do for him or for his cause goes without reward. Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall be surprised by the approbation of Heaven, and amazed at the degree in which every simple deed of duty or love is magnified by the Judge of the whole earth. But we must not work merely for the sake of a reward, for then all the process would end only in disappointment. It is possible to do good deeds with a selfish hand. If a man shall set himself to convert the whole world, simply in order that he may secure heaven at last, all his efforts will be thrown away and he himself will be cast into outer darkness. The reason is plain. There is no similarity between the motive and the action; they are not only not co-ordinate, they do not belong to the same universe; they can only be regarded as abortive and pitiful attempts to serve God and mammon. Where the motive is right the good deed is always its own reward. We realise heaven in the doing of it. No man ever yet relieved the necessities of poverty without himself being abundantly fed and satisfied by the very act of benevolence. A very curious law is this, yet that it is a law is proved by innumerable instances, and not a single instance to the contrary can be quoted in modification, much less in disproof. It would appear as if eyes were watching us from heaven, noting all the way that we take and all the deeds that we do, and that instantly some communication was set in motion by which our hearts were encouraged and refreshed immediately upon the accomplishment of every good deed. Hence come our holiest raptures, our sublimest ecstasies, the enthusiasms which lift us into the gladness of heaven: hence, too, comes that sweet content which never fails to crown the day's labour done by the hands of the good man. If we would know how happy human life can be, how like God's own life, peaceful with the very quiet of heaven, let us go about doing good, and thus imitate the Son of God.

Then coming back to the other side of the great truth, there

stands before us the solemn fact that though justice be long delayed yet it will be eventually vindicated. Adoni-bezek had run a long course of wickedness: seventy kings had suffered under his cruel knife. It seemed as if all power had been given into his hands. As king after king entered within the shadow of his dominion all courage must have sunk and died. Yet even Adoni-bezek came within the grip of the law and learned that the time of punishment is with the Lord and not with man. We are apt to suppose that after a certain time we have outwitted the law of retribution. When half a lifetime has been lived we say, Surely there can be no revival of the forgotten offence. We pass an act of oblivion regarding our own moral misdeeds. God's hour is coming; a stormy and terrible hour. Adoni-bezek acknowledged his punishment to be just; he saw it to be God's act; so at last every wicked man will own that hell is his proper place. Could there be any comfort in perdition, it would arise from the fact that the punishment there inflicted is just. Surely some such reflection as this alone can enable the criminal to bear the tremendous penalty of life-long servitude. Innocence might enable him to bear it, because of the sureness of an ultimate vindication and reward; and consciousness that the punishment is deserved might mitigate the severity of the penalty, because the conscience would be saying all the while, "As I have done unto others, so hath the Lord requited me." Let us then be solemnised and yet comforted. Life is not a haphazard movement as in some aspects it occasionally appears to be. Above it all is seated the ever-watching and incorruptible Judge. Let us give ourselves no uneasiness about the punishment of offenders; let us do our work honestly and straightforwardly whoever may oppose, and in the long run we shall see that there is a rod for the wicked, and a crown for those who do well. An awful message the pulpit must ever have to deliver to the wicked man: "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished;" "Be sure your sin will find you out." The judgment of the last day may therefore be the briefest of all exercises, forasmuch as every man will be a witness either for or against himself, and will answer the look of the Judge in a way which will signify beyond all misinterpretation either heaven or hell.

## PRAYER

ALMIGHTY God, we bless thee for the wonderful words of our Saviour. We often cannot understand what he saith; yet from what we do understand, we know that the very mystery of his speech is itself a blessing. The noontide of revelation will come, the full light will shine upon all his words; then shall we see how beautiful they are, as flowers of summer, and how rich they are, as sheaves of harvest. Who can find out the Son of God unto perfection? Who can say, This is his meaning, and there is none other? Sooner can we lay a line upon the whole heaven, and measure the height thereof, than we can understand unto perfectness the wisdom of the Son of God. Never man spake like this Man. Verily he is no man only: there is a reach in his arm which is not found in human arms: he raises it to the stars, he lays his hand upon the throne of God, he searches all heaven. His words are full of love, full of mystery, full of grace. We wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth—the words themselves so gracious and made doubly gracious by the tenderness and majesty of his tone. Give us at all times when Christ is the speaker, the hearing ear, the understanding heart, and the obedient will; then shall our hearing be a means of grace, and the sight of Christ by the vision of the soul shall be a ministry of transfiguration: then shall we be like him when we see him as he is. To gather round thy book is our chief delight; this is the very jubilee of time, the hour of joy and growth and liberty. May no man miss the sacredness of the opportunity: may every moment be begrudged that is not spent in eager attention, and may the one desire of every listener be to know what God the Lord hath spoken—the invisible God in heaven, or the visible and human Christ on earth. Thou knowest all the burdens we carry, and with what little strength we bear them. Every perplexity of our life is known unto thee. We are baffled, disappointed, turned back, surprised by the proportion of our foes, and amazed by their uncalculated number; but God is with us, and when the Omnipotent One shall make bare his arm, behold all enemies shall be dispersed and all difficulties overcome. Help any men who are being crushed by their burdens. They dare not tell all the tale of distress; they hide it in their hearts, and grow old by the very concealment of the misery. The Lord look upon all men, read the secret of life, send salvation from the Cross, and help from the sanctuary. Amen

### Judges i. 27-36.

27. Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her

towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns : but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

28. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

29. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer : but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

30. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol ; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.

31. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob :

32. But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land : for they did not drive them out.

33. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath ; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land : nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them.

34. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain : for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley :

35. But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim : yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.

36. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

### TRIBUTARIES.

THE only profitable use we can make of this section is to consider its spiritual applications. We are always engaged in battle or in progress, and, do what we may, we are not always able to carry everything our own way. The signature of defeat is somewhere upon our proudest achievements ; again and again shadows appear, which can only be accounted for by the presence of the enemy. The body remains, and social contact and sensuous appeal ; in a word, the very spirit of evil is continually appearing and reappearing even in the best moods of our life. We want to drive away the enemy, and we but partially succeed. Sometimes we think we have wholly banished him, and behold, he suddenly returns from concealment, and is more malignant and furious than ever. Our life is thus a continual series of surprises, and the surprises are often very stinging disappointments. Again and again we say to our souls, Take your ease, and even venture to be mirthful, for the horse and his rider are

thrown into the sea, and the whole land is cleansed of the pollution of the presence of the enemy ; and whilst the song of triumph and thankfulness is in our mouth, the sea gives up its dead, and the land becomes as foul as ever. When we would do good evil is present with us ; our prayers are punctuated with overtures to the enemy ; even in our supplications we half promise the devil to return, and serve him as eagerly as ever. All this is full of mystery and full of pain. What, then, is to be done ? There remains the sweet and comforting doctrine that even where extinction is impossible tribute may be charged and enforced ; not only so, sometimes tribute is better than extinction. What if in the end it should appear that it is better that we should be conscious of the presence of the enemy than that we should feel too secure in our spiritual position ? What if it should be proved that the enemy himself is to be made tributary to our spiritual greatness and influence ? Even this is within the possibility of the grace and sovereignty of God.

The *world* itself is to be laid under tribute, and must be so laid if the full Christian life is to be lived. The Christian is not removed out of the world, but is set in a totally new relation to everything which the world contains and represents. The world becomes one of two things : it becomes either a limit, or a symbol ; whether we take it in the one sense or in the other will depend upon our spiritual state. To the worldly man the world is enough ; he wants nothing that cannot be found in its gardens, or drawn from its fountains, or descried upon its horizon ; its summer is heaven, its night is Sabbath, its wealth is honour. The worldly man in so reasoning is perfectly consistent with his fundamental conception. Whatever he may do theoretically, he practically accepts but one world, and, accepting that one world, he is bound to make the most of it ; it becomes large to his vision, and valuable to his sense of importance : whatever other worlds there may or may not be is to him a matter of no consequence ; he has found space enough for the exercise of his energy and the satisfaction of his desires. On the other hand, the Christian man cannot be content with this view. However great the world may be in miles and leagues, it becomes smaller and smaller to the Christian as he grows in spiritual relationships. What before



was vast dwindles into insignificance ; what before was important becomes trivial ; and what before had about it the traces of durability becomes transient and uncertain. To the spiritual mind the world is a symbol, and in this view it is of infinite consequence as supplying countless starting-points upon which the sanctified imagination can operate : all light, all force, all beauty, all fruitfulness—yea, and even all darkness, and judgment, and fear, can be turned into texts upon which the Christian imagination dilates, with ever-growing power, and profit to itself. In this sense the Christian man makes the world his tributary. He does not destroy the world, but says to it in effect, You shall give me everything you can supply to stimulate my imagination, to encourage my aspirations, to disclose to me new possibilities, and to hint to me sublime destinies ; the very stones of the field shall be sermons to me, and the running brooks shall be books, and in everything I will find good. The Christian man is thus placed in a right relation to all material nature : it no longer overpowers him by its vastness and brightness ; it has become to him a comparatively little thing in itself, yet most useful as a pedestal, on which he can stand, and from which he can view ultimate issues and the welcoming hospitalities of still wider spaces, even of the heavenly citizenship itself. This was the meaning of Christ's prayer when he said that he did not desire that his disciples should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil in it. This was the meaning of Paul's desire that certain things should be used and not abused. This also is the full interpretation of the policy that men should marry as if they married not, buy and sell as if they bought and sold not, plough and sow as if they ploughed and sowed not : all this constitutes an experience which must be lived in order to be understood ; when set forth in words it is simple contradiction and impossibility, but when advanced upon from the point of actual personal realisation, it becomes a massive and instructive harmony. Every man has to answer whether he will treat the world from a bodily or a spiritual point of view. Let it be fully known that he is at perfect liberty to treat it from either point ; but whichever point he may choose he must accept the responsibility of the election. It cannot be too emphatically declared that spiritual goodness is not forced upon us—in fact, if the

operation admitted of the presence of force, the goodness itself would be destroyed in that proportion. Man has the liberty to choose the wrong, but not the right to choose it. It should be considered an immorality to take any view either of mankind or time or space which is belittling, or which partakes of the nature of reduction to contempt; where the value goes down in things material it should only be because the value of things spiritual has risen in the thought and imagination, in the judgment and reason. Here, then, is comfort for the rich and the mighty. If they account their wealth enough, the world is no longer their tributary, but their master: if they accept their position in the spirit of stewardship and discharge its responsibilities with spiritual fidelity, then the world is made to contribute to their strength and usefulness, and is in very deed held in tribute to their spiritual suzerainty.

Coming into closer quarters, and making the question still more personal, it will be found that it is possible for every man to constitute his own nature into a series of tributaries to his spiritual wealth and force. For example, every passion which agitates the human spirit should be made tributary to moral excellence. Take, for example, the passion of Ambition. Men wish to become more and more, greater and greater, richer and richer, and to exercise an ever-growing influence, and to live in the midst of ever-increasing applause. This desire may be mean or great, according to the use which is made of it; nothing is more contemptible when limited to selfish ends, and nothing more desirable when applied in disinterested directions. There is a holy ambition; there is a fever for power and influence which may burn to the glory of God. Such an ambition is never satisfied with little conquests or small delights; it contemplates the possession of the uttermost parts of the earth in the name of the King, and would hand over to him the whole heathen world as his lot and inheritance. Ambition thus becomes spiritual enthusiasm; the fire of it flames towards heaven with infinite energy. It is not the little ambition which dwindles into meanness and pitiable calculation as to means and ends; it is the heroic ambition which claims all creation as the theatre of its action, and all nature as its assistant in working out the

conquest of peoples and nations, kindreds and tongues for Christ. Take again, for example, the passion of Resentment; that, indeed, is dangerous fire to play with. Some men seem to be naturally and almost incurably resentful; they love to avenge themselves; they are positively delighted when they see how judgment overtakes their personal enemies, and how their foes are dragged in the dust; they do not scruple to call this action providential, or to trace it to divine causes, which seem to recognise with just partiality their own peculiar virtues. Is it possible for resentment to be made tributary to goodness? Yes; even this miracle can be wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ. The resentment itself may not be destroyed, but it may be turned against the sin rather than against the sinner; by this use it is made tributary to the highest purposes. This is the kind of resentment which attests real spiritual growth. At first we burn against the evil-doer. Our animosity may be said to be concrete or personal, and we suppose that resentment is gratified by the punishment of the individual offender; it is enough to satisfy our pride or to satiate our vengeance to see the bad man crushed or even destroyed. Christianity entirely corrects this view of penalty and this use of resentment. Instead of allowing us to fix upon the sinner, as if he in his person comprehended the whole problem and difficulty, it binds us to look at the sin, the boundless quantity, the infinite hugeness, that raises its black form into the heavens and casts a shadow upon the sky. Then resentment is divested of its pettiness, its selfish animosity, its evil humour, and is turned into a divine engine and an expression of the very heart of God against sin, which is the abominable thing which God hates. The man who has so treated his resentfulness has, by the Spirit of the living God, turned that resentfulness into a tributary to all that is best and strongest in his spiritual nature.

Looking at this question from the directly opposite point of view, we shall find that all the higher faculties which distinguish man must be made to pay tribute to the spiritual dignity which makes him immortal. Our higher faculties may either be debased or exalted; that is to say, they may be made to impoverish us or to contribute towards the enlargement and strengthening of our

character. Take, for example, the faculty of *imagination*. How easily we may become its victims! A life of utter falseness may be created or stimulated by the action of fancy. The whole world of deceit lies within the compass of imagination. By the perversion of imagination we tell lies to ourselves, we blot out all moral distinctions, we fail to discriminate between the right and the left, the upward and the downward; and imagination delights to show its genius by the multiplication of its falsehoods. On the other hand, imagination is absolutely essential to the interpretation of nature and revelation. Imagination sees possibilities, reconciles discrepancies, makes the rough places plain, and the high places low, and prepares the way of the Lord in every wilderness. Imagination delivers the soul from the narrowness and deceitfulness of the letter, and leads it into the gracious liberty of the spirit. Imagination is the flying faculty of the mind. Reason walks, halts, pauses to take its breath, looks round in wonder, half-religious, half-misbelieving, and puts down its conclusions haltingly and self-distrustfully; Reason stands by the side of the precipice and shudders at the contemplation of its depth; Reason looks out upon the unmeasured ocean, and wonders how any mariner dare tempt the deceitful waters: Imagination, on the other hand, flies across the abyss, spreads its infinite pinions and hovers over the sea as over a drop of dew; Imagination sees in the darkness as clearly as in the light, and is even more at home amid the multitude of the starry lights than in the companionship of the solitary sun. Men must, therefore, determine what use they will make of their imagination, being assured that it will either tend towards their destruction or towards the enlargement and beauty of their soul's life. Take, again, the high faculty of Wit or Humour, near to which is the kindred faculty, if it may be so called, of Pathos—the wondrous gift of tears. Wit may be turned into a tributary as certainly as may the power of prayer. Christ has room for wit in his great household; but wit must be a servant, not a master: it must teach by laughter what cannot be easily taught by philosophy: it must do by a flash what never could be done by a tedious process. Wit, irony, raillery, humour, pathos, all these may be so used as to loosen the solidity of character, or so employed as to increase its massiveness. Christianity never designed to drive away these faculties from

the possession of man ; on the contrary, it meant man to realise their presence, and turn that presence to the highest use. To lay down the contrary doctrine is to teach that Christianity can only live by the cutting away of one half of our human nature. In this sense, as in all others, Christ is to have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Things which seem to lie farthest away from his Cross, his awful sacrifice, his infinite solemnity, are to be brought into service and laid under tribute ; this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is excellent in counsel and wonderful in working. What is said of imagination and wit, of humour and pathos, may be said also of Eloquence and Music. These latter may be made into seductions that shall lead the soul away from the altar and the Cross : or they may be made into servants of the living God, unfolding his kingdom with all the splendours of expression and all the fascinations of melody. Christ must have these as well as every other faculty of the soul. Eloquence must wait upon him to receive the message, and then must turn that message into persuasive appeal. Music must stand by his side to learn his will, and then make it a life-long study to turn the expression of that will into an unanswerable persuasive brought to bear upon the judgment and the will of the world.

There is still another point of view from which this question of tribute may be regarded. Let us lay it down without misgiving, that all the *practical conditions* of life must be made tributary to Jesus Christ. Our social advantages will either overweight us or enable us to stand upon them as upon a pedestal whence we can view further distances and greater possibilities. It is sad to see manhood crushed by the very respectability of its environment. Are there not men who are overpowered by their own respectability ?—such men, I mean, as have to consider the bearing of any spiritual action or attitude upon their social consequence : they wonder how such and such a course will be regarded in society. Such men are not masters but slaves ; they live for others in the base sense of being ruled by the whims and policies of others, and not in the holy sense of service and sacrifice. What good the rich man might do ! What a contribution of influence the man of honour might make to every Christian cause ! and

the contribution would be the greater in proportion as that cause was shadowed and depressed by the haughtiness of other men. Then there is the condition of *leisure*. Surely leisure ought to be made tributary to the cause of the Saviour. To how many men may not the question be addressed: Why stand ye idle all the day? What a comfort they might be to their churches, to the sick, to the poor, to the ignorant! Even leisure shall be reckoned as an element in the judgment of our life. There are men so toil-bound and toil-driven that they have actually no time to render services of benevolence to their fellow-creatures; from early morning until late at night they are grinding at the wheel, and God knows how their energy is strained and their resources are exhausted, and he will be gentle in his judgment of men so hard driven. But there are others who have no need to toil in this servile fashion, who ought to consider whether they cannot withdraw from certain engagements and devote the time thus saved to more distinctively Christian purposes. There are others who have positively retired, in the general acceptance of the word, from the business of the world, upon whom leisure seems to rest as a burden, who might, were they rightly disposed, be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, centres of strength and security to every good cause, pillars and supports of the very Church of God. The poorest of all poor things it is to have nothing to do. But I deny that any man has a right to the use of these words. When a man says he has nothing to do he simply blinds himself to the reality of his circumstances, or denies the reality of his responsibility. Such a man must be condemned because he uses false language or because he deceives himself by sophisms of the most selfish description. When all our men of wealth and men of leisure bind themselves in a holy bond to consecrate their time to the service of Christ, the poor, and the ignorant, the Church will be marked by an intenser and holier activity. God speed the coming of that time! The Church is cursed by indolence. Christians are doing nothing until they are doing everything. It is not enough for them to criticise, to pass opinions, to offer judgments, and thus indirectly to magnify their own importance; to work, always to work, every one to work, should be the motto of the Church which is blood-redeemed.

Then there is another and final point which is not wanting, indeed, in surprise. Let it never be forgotten that even *suffering* itself may be made tributary to Christian character. We cannot escape suffering; but we can determine the use to which suffering shall be put. It may either be a dark presence to affright us, or a veiled angel to cheer us on our way. But this experience can only come out of real life. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Jesus Christ endured the Cross, despising the shame; and when we inquire into the reason of this sublime contempt, we learn that he was animated by the joy that was set before him. The Apostle Paul rises into one of his noblest raptures as he crushes suffering under his feet and makes it contribute to his Christian steadfastness and joy. He says, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The Apostle James continues in the same strain, saying, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Nor is the voice of the Apostle Peter wanting in this grand testimony as to the tributary position of suffering in the Christian life. His words are: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." And, again, he says, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." Here, then, we have a great tributary system established at the very centre of the Christian life. Nothing is destroyed but sin. Everything else is turned to a holy purpose. We use the world as not abusing it. In the coming and going of its lights and shadows we see a high spiritual symbolism; in the uncertainty of its joys we see how foolish it is for the immortal to attempt to find its satisfactions in the temporary; in all its beauty and fruitfulness we see the beginning of heaven: the morning is a benign encouragement; the night is a gracious

rest; the summer is a hint of paradise, and death itself is a door opening upon heaven. Thus we come into a right relation to all things round about us. Until we knew Christ we stood in a false relation to everything; but now living in Christ and breathing his Spirit, we know exactly what the world is and what it can do, and whilst in some moods we despise its littleness, in others we are enabled to accept every one of its intimations as an assistant to our faith and an increase to the brightness of our hope.

### SELECTED NOTE.

*"But the Amorites would dwell in Mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries"* (Judg. i. 35). We find the Amorites first mentioned in Gen. xiv. 7—"The Amorites that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar," *the cutting of the palm-tree*, afterwards called Engedi, *fountain of the kid*, a city in the wilderness of Judæa not far from the Dead Sea. In the promise to Abraham (Gen. xv. 21) the Amorites are specified as one of the nations whose country would be given to his posterity. But at that time three confederates of the patriarch belonged to this tribe: Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol (Gen. xiv. 13, 24). When the Israelites were about to enter the promised land, the Amorites occupied a tract on both sides of the Jordan. That part of their territories which lay to the east of the Jordan was allotted to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. They were under two kings—Sihon, king of Heshbon (frequently called king of the Amorites), and Og, king of Bashan, who "dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] in [at] Edrei" (Deut. i. 4, compared with Josh. xii. 4, xiii. 12). Before hostilities commenced messengers were sent to Sihon, requesting permission to pass through his land; but Sihon refused, and came to Jahaz and fought with Israel; and Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon (Modjeb) unto Jabbok (Zerka) (Num. xxi. 24). Og also gave battle to the Israelites at Edrei, and was totally defeated. After the capture of Ai, five kings of the Amorites, whose dominions lay within the allotment of the tribe of Judah, leagued together to wreak vengeance on the Gibeonites for having made a separate peace with the invaders. Joshua, on being apprised of their design, marched to Gibeon and defeated them with great slaughter (Josh. x. 10). Another confederacy was shortly after formed on a still larger scale; the associated forces are described as "much people, even as the sand upon the sea-shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many" (Josh. xi. 4). Josephus says that they consisted of 300,000 armed foot-soldiers, 10,000 cavalry, and 20,000 chariots (*Antiq.* v. 1, 18). Joshua came suddenly upon them by the waters of Merom, and Israel smote them until they left none remaining (Josh. xi. 7, 8). Still, after their severe defeats, the Amorites, by means of their war-chariots and cavalry, confined the Danites to the hills, and would not suffer them to settle in the plains: they even succeeded in retaining possession of some of the mountainous parts. "The Amorites would dwell in Mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to *Akrabbim* (the steep of scorpions) from the rock and upwards" (Judg. i. 34-36). It is mentioned as an extraordinary circumstance that in the days of Samuel there was peace between Israel and the Amorites (1 Sam. vii. 14). In Solomon's reign a tribute of bond-service was levied on the remnant of the Amorites and other Canaanitish nations (1 Kings ix. 21; 2 Chron. viii. 8).



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let thy goodness appear unto us as a new light shining from heaven. We know it is as venerable as thyself; still, may it be new to us as the dawning of another day; may we have a new sense of thy goodness, a new feeling of its largeness, and may we answer its appeal with the service and sacrifice of a whole life. Thou dost send the years upon us one by one, that we may work in them, and study thy will, and do what we can to realise thy purpose: enable us to see thy meaning, to trace thy hand, to obey thy will; condescend to fill us continually with the Holy Spirit. We bless thee that we have a religious idea of time: no longer are the hours silent to us; they cry unto us to arise, and work, and suffer, and pray, and hope; we would answer their appeal; we would rise early and toil late, if haply by thy grace we may do thy holy will. For all the helps thou dost give us by the way we bless thee; for the day of rest we especially thank thee: for a moment thou dost drive back the great flood, and still the noises of the world, and give us rest in thy house within the shadow of the altar; whilst we are there may we hear thy voice, and see the image of thy love, and be filled with thy Spirit: then shall the coming week answer our hand; we shall be able to guide its affairs with discretion, with enlarged wisdom which is never baffled, and with Christian hopefulness which gives songs in the night time. Thus would we begin the year in God's strength and in God's fear, hoping continually in God, living in the Son of God, Christ Jesus the Saviour, eating his flesh, drinking his blood, partaking of his Spirit, and entering into the mystery of his love. May no vow that is good be broken; may no purpose that is noble be frustrated; may our will be set steadily in the direction of heaven, and may thine angels come around us as ministering spirits, giving us assistance, light, stimulus, according to the need of the day. Thy mercies towards us have been beyond all number. As for thy compassions, there is no figure by which we can make them known: they are tender beyond all tenderness, they yearn over us with infinite solicitude,—because thy compassions fail not, therefore we are not consumed. We would live upon thy love; we would find everything within that gracious mystery—all aid to read the Bible, all comfort in sorrow, all light in darkness; we would see it become the resurrection and the life in the presence of our dearest dead. According to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, be gracious unto all thy people; give them double in exchange for all thou hast laid upon them, that by multiplied joy they may be enabled to see the meaning of discipline, and by added comfort they may know what thou dost mean by the rod of humiliation. Let our homes be precious in thy sight, our little dwelling-places, where the fire means hospitality, where the door means security, where the window means an outlook upon heaven's light; the Lord grant unto us in

our houses security, protection, comfort, and make our table as a banqueting-table of God, whereto we eat what is good for the soul and drink of the wine of the Saviour's blood. Be with us in our businesses; they are many, trying, fluctuating,—now so hard, now too easy; now a great temptation, and now a violent distress; the Lord help us to get rid of these by working at them patiently and lovingly, in the spirit of heavenly citizenship, and encountering all earthly trials, losses, difficulties, with contempt, because we look for an inheritance incorruptible, which cannot fade away. Regard the children with a father's love. We are all children in thy sight. Thou hast nought but little ones in all the nursery of the universe. But thou knowest to whom we refer to the children. Give them strength of body, brightness of mind, hopefulness of spirit, and open their way in the world, that they may see that all affairs are under God's hand and all issues are with the Lord. Heal the sick, if healing be good for them; and if thou dost not heal the body with health that must again decline, heal the spirit with immortality. Grant a blessing to every heart; specially to those hearts made sore and twice tender by chastisement, loss, bereavement, new visions of the littleness of life, and new glimpses of the possible eternity. In all good things and wise ways and holy resolves strengthen, stablish, settle us; and as for our sins, having first seen them, may we next see the Cross, and in that higher sight we shall lose the memory and the sting of guilt. Amen.

### Judges ii.

#### DIVINE AND HUMAN INFLUENCE.

**D**O not trouble yourselves about the personality or name of this angel that "came up from Gilgal to Bochim." He is always "coming up." Why do we miss great meanings by fastening upon little pedantic points? The angel charged the people with having broken God's conditions, upon which he promised to be with them and keep his covenant with their houses. That angel still lives. Now we call him Memory, or Conscience. What is there in the change of name? He is an angel still. He is the wonderful Presence in life which takes note of all our goings, thoughts, and doings,—an invisible, unslumbering Spirit that, so to say, keeps the covenant in one hand, and our life in the other, and looks to see how the harmony is sustained. If now and then the Spirit should turn from the covenant and say to the life, Think! you are wrong; you are out of course; you have lost step and touch with Heaven—surely we should say the voice is the voice of an angel; it is no common rough tone of accusation, but an appeal spoken sweetly to the innermost heart and thought of the man, and should be answered

according to its own quality. Thus we get great meanings in the ancient records. But if we stand here and ask questions about angels, their history, their figure, the law of their movements—inquiries to which there can be no possible answers—we shall feel ourselves no longer in a flowering garden, golden with the richness of summer, but in a burning and waste wilderness. Give the angel good hearing. Never arrest unduly or impatiently the voice of reproach and accusation, but answer it rationally, fearlessly: if there is nothing in the accusation, the answer will be short and easy; but, contrariwise, if the accusation is really sound and true, consider it, be not afraid of it, and with reverent familiarity interrogate it, apply it, and escape from its honest charges by better behaviour.

The people having heard the accusation, “lifted up their voice and wept. And they called the name of that place *Bochim*”—a place of weeping, a place of many tears. So they were not lost. This is the value of emotion: its presence indicates that the heart is not utterly dead to all solemn appeal and heavenly judgment. However fickle the life—and the best life is fickle—let us thank God if we can feel the tone of accusation, the language of reproach, and answer it even with the feeble answer of tears. Oftentimes tears are the best words. Were we to answer the accusation of the angel with words, we should get into controversy, and controversy lies at an infinite distance from repentance. When we lose speech we may gain power. It is better to bow down the head in silent, tearful sorrow, when the accusation is poured down upon us, than to attempt to answer it by petty excuses, or by inventing replies which are as feeble as they are dishonest.

So the people cry, and begin again. They were human. In this respect we ourselves are of the same race. Our days represent but a series of evil actions and late repentances. A singular mixture is life:—prayer, and blasphemy; high-handed rebellion, and meek humiliation; great vows, majestic in their moral nobleness, and lies of which lost spirits might be ashamed.

In the seventh verse we come to a more human aspect of the exciting history:—

“And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel.”

Here is a great principle—the principle that those who have seen God's works,—that is to say, who have had real experience of them—never go wrong; not only do they never go wrong themselves, but they keep other people right. Joshua and the leaders who were his contemporaries and survivors “had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel”—not only seen them with the bodily eye, for many had so seen them and denied them, but seen them with the inner eye, the eye of faith and love and thankfulness. The moment you get into a generation that has not seen religious verifies, you get into an age of scepticism or religious feebleness. We cannot live upon tradition; we cannot be courageous because of something which happened to other people: there must be personal contact with divine realities, an individual touch, a present and indestructible consciousness of God's nearness and of the reality of things; then there will be courage and testimony, and service and sacrifice. The men who have been in slavery know the value of freedom. To those who have only heard of slavery “by the hearing of the ear,” freedom is a theme for poets,—weave it into song, beat it into music, turn it into picture, for the men have only heard of slavery as men might hear of a storm that gathered and burst a thousand years ago. It is so with religious persecution. The men who have made the nations great are the men who have actually seen trouble and felt it. Other men are not competent to speak about them, and it is impertinence for such men even to offer an opinion upon them. The men who felt the pressure of the steel, who paid blood as the price of every hymn they sang and every prayer they prayed, were not likely to be taken up with new-fangled notions, or to be seduced by cheap temptations: they “had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel;” they did not, as in romantic poetry, pay the blood of some other man for their liberties, they paid their own. Yet the children of such men will arise and ask insane and pointless questions, and join the posterity of the very people who slew their fathers, and dug their graves. Nor is this to be wondered at. We cannot live on the experience of other people for long. Whilst the exciting anecdote is ringing in our ears we may make some answer superficially heroic: only as we suffer can we profess; only as we have seen can we speak;

only as prayer has been answered can we vindicate its authority and utility. Marvellous it is to watch how people deport themselves in all these relations. There is no hereditary piety; there is no hereditary heroism: we need to see for ourselves before we can speak with authoritative tone to others. That is the secret of authority. When the heart speaks, when the sufferer testifies, when the victim makes oath and says,—I saw it, felt it, knew it,—that is the true authority; not an announcement made in cold blood and on the sunny side of a successful controversy, but an announcement made with the pathos of personal suffering and with the emphasis of personal loss. It is distressing and discouraging that people should lose their own history; that sons and daughters of heroes should sink into drivelling commonplace; that heroic fires should die into white ashes. Every generation must have its own experience, must keep steadily along the line of its own facts: the moment the life fritters into words, controversies, theories, and schemes, the all-sustained and all-sanctifying energy is lost.

What a noble influence may be exerted by one consecrated life! "The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua." We have had similar experience. We say: Since the leader died the followers have gone sadly astray. Or we say: Had the leader lived, it would not have been thus; he would have kept us together; his gracious domination would have ruled us aright; our reverence for him amounted to a species of religion. Or we say: Since the just critic died things have become demoralised; he was a just judge; he was generous withal; he saw the best side of every man, and took the kindest view of every subject: but he was so strong, so true, so honest; his voice was a judgment, his look was an approbation or a disfavour; everything about him was of a noble, healthy, beautiful kind; since he died there is no judge in the land. So we may come by an examination of our own experience to understand many of these old biblical incidents.

What a compliment is this to Joshua! How little, perhaps, did Joshua know what he was doing! If you ask for a eulogium upon Joshua, where will you find it? Is it set forth in any special form? Can we turn to a given page and say, Behold the

eulogy spoken by the most eloquent lips of the time ; see how paragraph follows paragraph, how climax heightens above climax, till the noble panegyric makes one feel how good a thing it was to live in the days of old ? There is no such page, there is no such eulogy ; but read this seventh verse and say whether it is not praise enough for any son of man :—" And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua." That is the only eulogium worth having : a great social influence, a sublime, beneficent action, operating all the time and upon everybody, and yet the man himself saying little and seldom seen. There are many eulogies : some in noble words that can only be credited by the imagination ; some in out-of-the-way actions and silent deeds and subtle influences which can only be fully comprehended by a kindred spirit—yea, even by God himself. Let us thank God for our leader. The father is a Joshua in the family. So long as he lives there will be no controversy amongst the children : they all love him, so that one word of his will be final ; were there tumult in the house he could by one sentence settle it,—not by arbitrary authority, but because of something in his quality not to be defined or measured, something that begets a magnificent moral reverence and trust. So it is in business, so in the State, so in the Church, so everywhere. The one true life may be keeping a thousand other lives in the right direction.

A beautiful picture is given in the eighth verse :—

"And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old,"

Was he two men then ? Yes : he was "the son of Nun"—our little earthly relations must not be ignored—he was also "the servant of the Lord"—our great religious relations must be regarded with thankfulness. A medal this with two sides : on the one side "Joshua the son of Nun"—some plain good soul unknown to fame, but with a sweet heart, a good honest mind, plain enough as to his position and manners, but great in his greater son ; on the other side of the medal, "Joshua the servant of the Lord." Realise all the relations of life. The higher our service for the Lord the readier are we to think of the old folks at home—the people that thought of us, and nursed us, and sat up long nights with us, and were strength to our weakness and

eyes to our blindness, and that went near to telling many lies in describing our imaginary excellences and virtues; people who died for us by living for us; the people that saw themselves in us magnified and glorified. They must not be dropped out of the reckoning. The greater you are the more are you indebted to those who went before you. Then comes the second and greater and eternal title—"the servant of the Lord," the slave of God, the bondman of Christ. Live the complete life; not only the natural, physical, social life, but that other and higher life which is indicated by the words "the servant of the Lord." How few *serve* the Lord of heaven! How many profess to do so! To serve God is not to assent to propositions, to attend a certain place of worship, to pass through a given routine of ceremony; it is to live in him, to him, for him; to live, move, and have our being in God, to have nothing that is not his, and to do nothing that he bids us not. It is easy to describe ourselves as servants of God; it is difficult to realise the sublime position.

Joshua gone. All that generation gathered to their fathers:—"There arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel"—a blind generation, utterly poor, historically penniless; men without anything that was more than one day old. These are the weights which time has to carry; these are the burdens of the ages; these are the men who let history die. What men should we be if we realised our history! Could we see the past as it ought to be seen, it would be like a cloud of spirits, a great army of angels, a sky shaded rather than darkened by heroic spirits, master souls that ruled their time. The other generation is always coming—the poor, penniless generation, the non-related generation; the generation that thinks every man a separate atom, or individual without any relation to the sum-total of things,—this is the generation that loses religion. Why? Because religion is historical. Religion binds man fast to the past. Religion does not incline itself towards the future in some selfishly expectant attitude; it lies back upon the past, and by the past seizes the future. We should be ashamed of some people—the people that talk mincingly, vain-gloriously, with affectation, with superficiality, who look upon life as a thing

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begun yesterday, and to be enjoyed to-day, and left to-morrow; they make us sore of heart; we feel poor in their presence; they have not seen "the great works of the Lord;" they have not bowed down to some worthy leadership and accepted its discipline and chastisement; they have influence only for a moment because they speak of things that endure but for a moment. Let us pray for the preservation of heroic memories. Let us remember that we never could have had a Bible to read if some men had not printed it as with their blood and bound it with their martyrdom. Let us think that we could not meet in many a Protestant church if there had not been men who counted not their lives dear unto them that they might stand up for liberty and defy the whole brood of hell. Now we ask little questions about things that our fathers died for! We now use the liberty they bought to praise the very tyranny which killed them.

So the generations come and go :—

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth" (vv. 11-13).

These are the incredible incidents of history; these are the fables we should laugh at if we did not know them to be true in our own experience! The people "followed other gods," "the gods of the people that were round about them"—the fashionable gods, the popular deities, the little divinities that ruled the little time. Beware of all visible gods. Beware of any god that can be known. We accept the reproach of God's unknowableness, because to know God would be to be God.

How did the Lord answer them? He could not answer them in words. There are times when words are useless. The answer is in the fourteenth verse :—

"And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies."



He took the pith out of them ; he watered down their muscle until it became flabby ; he confused their minds until they reeled at noonday and stumbled like drunken men ; he set all heaven on fire against them ; the horizon burned them, scorched them, and they withered away : they who might have been the foremost princes crouched behind, they who might have worn white robes were lying crushed in the dust. God's anger was hot against them, and it will be hot against any corresponding generation in the world. Forsake God, take up with idols, follow the fashions, yield to the spirit of the times, forsake prayer, and regard the Bible as only some ancient document, and your business will leave you, your fields will not yield half their increase, the enemy will laugh at you. They who forsake the altar shall be forsaken of God. It is a covenant that binds us, and a covenant with two sides : to trifle with it on the human side is to have judgment poured down through it from the divine side. O lands of the earth, O peoples of the day and of every clime, if you would have plentiful harvest-fields, thriving businesses, happy homes, joyous times, forget not the living God. "Let the people praise thee, O God ; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase"—a bountiful harvest shall follow in the wake of a praying, active, sacrificing Church.

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### SELECTED NOTE.

"*And they called the name of that place Bochim*" (Judg. ii. 5).—Bochim (*the weepings*) was the name given to a place (probably near Shiloh, where the tabernacle then was) where an "angel of the Lord" reprovèd the assembled Israelites for their disobedience in making leagues with the inhabitants of the land, and for their remissness in taking possession of their heritage. This caused the bitter weeping among the people for which the place took its name.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast heard the prayers of thy saints, and answered them with great love. We ourselves know this, and our hope in God is as a strong trust. We know when we have prayed unto thee, because the answer is in our hearts whilst we are yet speaking. We know the heavenly Presence; we can tell when we have reached thy throne: behold, thou dost come to us and turn our prayers into sweet replies in the very act of offering our supplications at thy throne. We are thankful as we look back upon the years that are gone. We will think of thy mercy, and not of our sin; we will dwell upon the lovingkindness of God, and not upon the rebellion of our own hearts. The years have been full of thy mercies; thy compassions glitter in them like jewels: thou truly hast been good unto Israel, even to them that are of a clean heart; and thou hast also been kind unto the unthankful and to the evil: whilst thy rain and thy sunshine have fallen upon the good, they have not been withheld from the unjust. We look onward with hope. Thou wilt not forsake us in the seventh trouble; thou wilt redeem thy covenant to its utmost letter, yea, thou wilt add to it and exceedingly multiply thy grace towards us. Keep us in the holy way; show us the sanctuary that is on high, and may our hearts desire to be in it night and day; may we measure all things by its weights and balances and standards: then shall we know when we are right and when God is pleased. Give us to see more and more of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, Son of man, Son of God. He was the express image of his Father, the very brightness of his glory. May we study his words profitably, lovingly, seeking out their meaning with earnest hearts and receiving the same in all its fulness. We commend one another to thy tender care. Thou knowest what we need most—in ourselves, in our houses, in our businesses. Thou knowest the serpent that is pleading with us, telling us the lies we like to hear. Thou knowest the weak point in the character, where the assault tells most immediately and most disastrously. Thou knowest every trap set for our feet, and gin and snare, cunningly laid, that we may be taken and overthrown. We know nothing about it ourselves. We look on, and see nothing but a great cloud. We will therefore trust in the living God, putting our hand into his and asking to be led and directed and sustained by the eternal Spirit. Whether our days be many or few, may they be bright with thy presence, and wealthy with honest and good service. Where there is a difference between man and man, oh heal the controversy and restore the love; where there is difficulty at home, dissolve the perplexity; where there is sorrow because of the family—wandering, unfilial, broken—speak some new parable that shall bring the wanderers all back again, or

the old parable, but with the sweetness of a new tone. Be with those who are in trouble on the sea—that great, weary, unfriendly, threatening sea. Be with those who are in deeper trouble—the trouble of mind and heart, who are suffering from the sting of accusation and remorse, and the bitterness of just reproach;—yea, according to our varied necessity do thou come to us, and love us, and heal us, and do us good.

We pray every prayer at the Cross, and we feel it not to be a prayer until we have spoken the crowning name of Jesus—Jesus Christ—Immanuel—God with us. Amen.

### Judges iii. 9-11.

9. And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

10. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim.

11. And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

### OTHNIEL.

**A** GREAT prayer marks a historical point in the life of any man or any people. We know when we have prayed. The people who ask questions in a controversial tone about prayer never prayed themselves, and so long as they are in that spirit they cannot pray. This exercise is not to be explained to outsiders; this is an inner mystery. The publican knew that he had prayed when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He needed not to ask any man whether a prayer had been offered, for he himself, the contrite suppliant, had the answer in his heart before the last word escaped his lips. We are dull indeed if we do not know when we have struck a full chord. Something in us says, That is right. We have uttered many words, and at the end we have said, That is not prayer; the words are devout, the phrases are devotional, they would read well in print, some good spirits might turn them into prayer, but we who uttered them did not pray. Why then debate about this matter, or talk about it as if it were subject for analysis and definition and formal treatment of any kind? We know when we have touched the hem of Christ's garment by the healing that instantly takes place in the spirit. Answers in detail may require long time to work out, but the great answer is in the healed heart, the comforted soul, the quieted and resigned spirit. Other replies there may or may

not be,—all these must be left : the great answer to prayer is an answer to the soul which the soul only can hear and apply.

“When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord”—an energetic term is that—“cried.” It was a piercing shout of the heart. The words did not come out of the mouth only ; they were hardly in the mouth at all ; they shot from the heart within—the burning, lowly, broken heart. We know a cry when we hear it or when we utter it ; there is fire in it, a touch of immortality, a strange ghostliness. Truly in such case the voice is the man, the tone is the prayer. There are calls to which we pay no heed. We say they are calls expressive of merriment or folly, or intended to play upon our credulity ; we know them to be hollow and meaningless ; but there are cries we must answer, or get somebody else to answer : they come so suddenly, they strike the very soul so truly, there is so much of real earnestness in them, that if we ourselves are frightened by their energy we tell the next person we meet where the trouble is, where sorrow cries for help, where weakness pleads for assistance. You cannot talk about prayer in cold blood. This is not a subject to be discussed in current conversation, passing along the thoroughfare, or upon some quiet occasion : you have dragged the subject to a base level ; you are speaking about it as if you were masters of the situation : you can only speak about prayer whilst you are praying, and then you will never speak about it controversially but sympathetically and confirmingly ; and when the heart has really cried—that sharp cry which cuts the clouds—you will know that the heart in its agony has touched God’s love. Turn away, then, from those who would make prayer a matter of controversy and inquiry and analysis and vivisection ; it is not to be so treated ; it is a secret masonry with a password all its own between the soul and the soul’s God.

The prayer was answered :—“The Lord raised up a deliverer.” The answer came in a human form. That is a remarkable circumstance. The answer might have come otherwise ; but God delights in incarnations. He aims at something in all these human leaderships ; he is conducting a process of evolution. Many a man bearing the title of Leader has come before us, and each has, so far as he has been faithful to his vocation, been an incarnation

of God's thought and purpose and will. The matter cannot end here. All these are temporary incarnations, but charged with infinite suggestiveness, and always leading the mind to higher expectation—subtler, deeper yearnings for some broader and brighter disclosure of the divine personality. But we must not anticipate. The Bible is given to us in pages, and every page must be read, and there must be no vain haste. This is still God's method, to answer by incarnation. A friend is sent who has the key of the gate which you cannot open; a brother is met who speaks the word your poor heart most needed to hear; an occasion is created suddenly or unconsciously, and it shapes itself into a temple, becomes a holy sanctuary, a sphere of radiant revelation. This is what we mean by providence. Why has not every man an equal influence over us? Because every man is not sent to our life with a special message. There are men who can sing, there are men who can preach, there are men who can read the Bible and read it as it were into inspiration as to its influence upon the hearer,—these Othniels are God's creations; in a sense,—God's presence, divine incarnations.

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.” There is no mistaking that Spirit. It was not an awakening of anything that was in the man himself, but a descent from heaven of the Supreme Influence.—Othniel, a common man yesterday to all observation, is to-day an inspired man, “a little lower than God.” As a consequence the man was not vainglorious. No inspired man can be conceited. He does not know that he is great. He knows that he is the instrument of God. The most inspired of men have said, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” Inspiration means modesty; genius means retirement, self-obliviousness, disregard of circumstance or applause. The inspired life is the unconscious life. To us who look on, the inspired man is great, wonderful,—we cannot understand the miracle; to himself he is but a child in God's house, quite a little one, hardly able to walk, asking questions by his looks of wonder, praying himself into ever-deepening lowliness. The poet does not know that he is a poet in the sense which is applauded by those who understand not his spirit; he breathes

his poetry. Paul breathed his Christianity; to him to live was Christ, to breathe was to pray, to look was to rejoice. We shall know when the Church is inspired by its lowliness. Find men who are fretful, peevish, always susceptible to offence, complaining men, "ill-used" men; and you will find men who know nothing about the Spirit of Christ: their money perish with them; their patronage would be a great shadow laid upon the Church. The Church must be healthy in her goodness, mighty in her inspiration. Othniel could not communicate his power. Inspiration is not an article of barter. Nor could Othniel keep his inspiration without conditions. Everything we have we hold upon certain understandings of an eternal kind: they need not be expressed; they are unwritten, but indelible; they cannot be seen with the eyes, nor can they be blotted out by the hand: they belong to the necessity of things, the fitness and harmony of the universe. Whatever we hold we hold upon our good behaviour. We are tenants at will. The greatest Othniel in the Church would be cast out of heaven if he allowed his purity to be spotted, his honour to be stained, his stewardship to be tampered with. Not one of us is essential to God. The first archangel holds his mighty wings on his good behaviour: let him lie, or touch the forbidden tree, and his great wings would fall powerless, his eye would be smitten with death. "Once inspired always inspired" is no doctrine of the Scriptures. We stand or fall by our spiritual relation to the divine. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and let the chief of the apostles keep himself in constant check lest when his mightiest discourse is ended he himself become a castaway. We live in character. Our immortality—blissful, heavenly—is in our relation to Christ. We have no independence, no charter entitling us to invent a morality of our own; we are measured by eternal standards, we are judged in the court of the Infinite Righteousness.

Othniel had a special work to do: he was raised up to deliver Israel, to destroy the power of the king of Mesopotamia; and having done that work he died. When shall we come to know that every man is called to one work, particularly if not exclusively?

Herein do we not judge one another harshly and unjustly?

The work of Othniel was not a manifold work ; he was not a multitudinous genius, able to see behind and before, on the right and on the left, and to be equally strong by day and by night ; he was not so much a statesman as a deliverer ; he was mighty in war, he might be but second in counsel. Each man, therefore, must find out his own faculty, and be just to it ; if he fail in discovering it, then he will be unjust to his true self. If you are aiming to be some other self, you will fail and be unfaithful to God's purpose. One man is sent to do business, to show how business ought to be done, to make commerce a religion. Another man is sent to sing, to make us glad, to show us by tones that there must be some other world—to touch our highest sensibilities and move our noblest impulses, and comfort us in our distresses and make new stars for the darkness of the night ; let him keep his singing robes on, rising high up in the sky so that everybody may hear him and answer him with electric joy : he has a great vocation, has that singing man ; he helps even the commerce of the world. Another man is sent to pray. He must live upon his knees. He knows how to speak human want in human words. He never says one word too much, never one word too little ; he knows the measure of the sorrow, he knows where the burden presses most heavily, he knows where the heart's sore is most painful ; and his is surely a holy vocation. Let him keep at the altar ; never let him rise from his posture of prayer. He will do us good, and not evil. He, too, though seemingly so far away from the world's real strife, is helping the world in its most prosaic servitude. When the Church acknowledges this doctrine, the Church will receive more from her leaders, teachers, and supporters. We must not live a divided life : " This one thing I do " must be the motto of every man. Nor must there be judgment of one another, saying, You should do this, or do that. Let alone ! Touch not the prerogative of God !

We, too, needed a deliverer. We had given up the idea of self-emancipation. Once we thought we could break our own manacles and fetters, and set ourselves free, and sing the songs of liberty. We tried, we tried often, we all tried,—we failed, we all failed. When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, God's eye pitied and God's arm wrought salvation. " Who

is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength ? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." It is the joy of the Christian Church to believe that there is only one Redeemer, one Lord, one Christ, one Advocate, one Paraclete. This is the gospel. This is the good news itself. When we preach it, we shatter all idols of a selfish kind ; we say to Invention, to Genius, You are of no use here : you cannot break a link, you cannot shed a light upon this infinite gloom. Preaching Christ, we denounce all other helpers and deliverers, except in some secondary and related capacity. There is one Son of God ; there is one Cross ; there is one atonement ; there is but one hope. We read history, and recognise deliverers, and are thankful when they appear, and we doubt not the reality of their deliverances : why should we in the presence of Jesus Christ forget to adore and forget to trust ? They who have known most about Christ have most to say in his favour. Those who have not known Christ are not asked for their opinion about him. We do not ask the blind to pronounce upon colours, or seek from the deaf a criticism upon music : Christians alone can testify in this court, and their evidence is conclusive because it is sustained by character and can be tested and appreciated. Who is looking for a deliverer ? let him turn his eyes to the Son of God. Who is saying in the bitterness of his soul, "O, that I might be saved from this horrible distress and delivered from this unfathomable abyss ?" let him turn his eyes to the Son of God. Who is mourning sin, having felt its bitterness and seen its abominableness ? let him turn his eyes to the Son of God. He came to deliver, to emancipate, to save : "this Man receiveth sinners." He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. Let us feel this, believe this, and commit our souls unto Christ as unto a faithful Creator.



### Judges iii. 15.

“But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded : and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.”

#### EHUD.

A DELIVERER with a lefthand seems to be a contradiction in terms or a piece of practical irony. The Divine Being, in sending Ehud in reply to the cry of the children of Israel, seems to mock the very prayer which he answers. Such a reply is full of subtle suggestion, to the effect that the Israelites really need not have made such a cry about their circumstances, because even in their forlorn condition a lefthanded man would show himself to be equal to the occasion. When we pray to God for help it is with some idea that an angel will be sent, and that all Heaven's artillery will be placed at our disposal that we may resist or destroy the foe. Instead of an angel there comes a man with a lefthand, or as he is elsewhere called an “ambidexter”—that is, a man who can use both hands with equal ease. Has not God continually disappointed the expectation of people in the matter of leadership? Again and again it appears in sacred history as if the leader were altogether unlikely to accomplish his task either by reason of bodily infirmity or mental incapacity. What was Moses but a stammering shepherd? And was not Christ himself regarded with disdain because of the lowliness of his origin? Between these two great captaincies a number of others will be found illustrative of the same principle.

On the matter of lefthandedness we are reminded of the boast of Hector: “Many a Greek hath bled by me, and I can shift my shield from right to left.” In another part of the book of Judges we read respecting the children of Benjamin: “Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded ; every

one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss." Plato recommended all his soldiers to acquire equal facility in the use of both hands, but these very references show that lefthandedness is quite a peculiarity. We do not remark upon a man that he has the use of his right hand, that he writes with it, points with it, or performs the usual duties of life with it ; but when a man is lefthanded the incident instantly strikes us as a peculiarity. All these peculiarities are noticed in the Bible. We have already seen that men were known in many instances by little circumstances or trifling peculiarities. All such identifications lead us to the great consolatory doctrine that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. All kinds of men are made use of in the Bible. There is no peculiarity, however strange, that may not be used as an instrument for the promotion of truth and goodness, or the defence of right and weakness. No man should be discouraged because of his peculiarities, for in truth though in some respects his weakness, they may in other respects be his strength. It has been noticed by close observers of human affairs that almost every cripple is endowed with some speciality of power which gives him pre-eminence among his fellows. What he wants in dignity he may make up in skill. The very infirmity which drives him into solitude may be the occasion of his acquiring richer learning, or training his insight to profounder and clearer views of providence and humanity. Men ought not therefore to be discouraged because of peculiarities however striking.

Does not the text throw us back upon the oft-recurring doctrine that the many may be dependent upon the one? All the ciphers are turned into value by the single unit that is placed at their head. Without that unit they would be simply nothing, but with that unit they become millions strong. The children of Israel were many, even a great host, numerous enough to turn their desires into a great noise which they dignified by the name of prayer. Why then did they not work out their own deliverance? Have we not been wrong on this subject of majorities? Is there not a quality as well as a quantity to be considered in estimating human influence? Eglon, king of Moab, had oppressed Israel, yet as soon as Ehud was raised up their liberation was effected, and the sorrows and burdens of

eighteen years were forgotten when the deliverer appeared upon the scene. There is unquestionably a philosophy of monopoly in the matter of human influence. One man keeps the key of secrets. Another man speaks the word which inspires the courage of dejected hearts. Another man is blessed with farsightedness and can see the very spectre of deliverance when it first appears upon the distant horizon. Another man has such richness of character as to be a tower of strength in the day of shaking and desolation. One man may be in a better position than a great number of men can possibly be. The individual moves rapidly from place to place; he can move noiselessly; he can take his own time for the making of certain observations; above all things, he can keep his own counsel; for who does not know that whispering is the ruin of confidence and the very annihilation of strength? The Ehuds of society find that their power lies in their individuality. They know the difference between leading the crowd and consulting it. In all great leaderships consultation must be a kind of compliment and in no wise a necessity. At a critical point in important affairs it is the one man who must decide the course of the journey or the policy of the battle. Is it then altogether well with the great man? Probably not. We see his greatness and admire his elevation and wonder about his gifts, but we forget that all high qualities bring with them severe taxation, and that power is the measure of responsibility. It may be that to obey is easier than to direct. Certainly the responsibility is of a higher grade. Beyond all question he who cannot obey cannot rule. The men pray for a deliverer, and a deliverer is given in answer to prayer; their business should be to receive the deliverer, hold him in honour, obey his commandments, and do all that within them lies to consolidate his power. All this is true in merely political directions. The great statesman keeps his party together. The great professor unites and glorifies the university. The brilliant commander makes his army as the heart of one man. But these are exceptional cases and can hardly be quoted for daily purposes. There is, however, a truth in connection with this doctrine that is constantly available in all the practical conditions of life, and that truth is that the good man who is also wise may command a deep and gracious influence in social affairs. Goodness is always influential; not

necessarily in the sense of continuousness, without break or interruption, for there are times when goodness itself is silenced, but always in the sense of appearing at critical times and under circumstances which give its word infinite weight and consequence. In illustration of this, read the account in the Acts of the Apostles of a shipwreck, in which Paul took command of all things and was more than captain. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted : but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." Covet earnestly the best gifts.

We are very dainty about our instruments. In this matter we have committed the most mischievous errors in the administration of Church affairs and the appointment of spiritual ministries. Who ever prayed God to send a lefthanded man to save the country? Who has not been disappointed when a lefthanded man actually came and said he had been sent to do the work? The prayers which the Church sends to heaven for ministers are prayers in many instances which the Divine Being can only reject with contempt. Our prayer asks that God would send into the Christian ministry men of great intellectual capacity, men of burning eloquence, men capable of receiving the highest educational culture, men able to address the most gifted classes of society ; what is all this but dictating to God or making our own conception of the situation the measure of God's bounty? All such prayers are impertinences. The consolation is that God pays no heed to them but sends the kind of men who can do the work after his own will and in defiance of many preconceptions on the part of men. Let us pray God to make his own choice, to send whom he will—king or peasant, man of stammering tongue or eloquent speech ; he must choose the labourers, and thrust them forth into his own harvest. It must not be supposed that a man is necessarily an Ehud simply because he is lefthanded. In this direction our thoughts need to be continually guarded. We may see the lefthandedness and generalise too broadly concerning it. The peculiarity must have something behind it, for in itself it is nothing. We must not reason that because Ehud was lefthanded every lefthanded man is an Ehud. Bunyan was a tinker, but it does not follow that every tinker is a Bunyan. There is a danger of mistaking an eccentricity for a

law and setting up false or inadequate standards of judgment, Moses stammered or was of slow speech. It does not follow that every stutterer is a Moses. Do not magnify the peculiarity, and certainly do not disdain it. We say about some men that appearances are not in their favour. Were appearances in favour of this lefthanded man? We imagine that we show our sagacity by discovering in a candidate for favour some littleness or infirmity or awkwardness which disentitles him to confidence. "Look not on the height of his stature."—"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Paul was aware that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible, at least in the estimation of those who looked upon him with evil eyes. The great instance is of course always to be found in the Son of God himself. He had no form nor comeliness, and there was no beauty that men should desire him. He was as a root out of a dry ground. He took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man. Like the psalmist he was "a reproach of men, and despised of the people." Thus we are brought again to the great doctrine which he himself laid down: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

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### SELECTED NOTE.

Ehud, of the tribe of Benjamin, was one of the "judges" of Israel, or rather of that part of Israel which he delivered from the dominion of the Moabites by the assassination of their king Eglon. These were the tribes beyond the Jordan, and the southern tribes on this side the river. Ehud obtained access to Eglon as the bearer of tribute from the subjugated tribes, and being lefthanded, or rather ambidextrous, he was enabled to use with a sure and fatal aim a dagger concealed under a part of his dress, where it was unsuspected, because it would there have been useless to a person employing his right hand. The Israelites continued to enjoy for eighty years the independence obtained through this deed of Ehud (Judg. iii. 15-30).

### Judges iii. 31.

“And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad : and he also delivered Israel.”

### SHAMGAR.

SHAMGAR was the third judge in Israel. He was at the beginning a labouring man, a tiller of the ground, and it is thought that on account of the exploit recorded of him in the text he was raised to dignity. According to the Song of Deborah (Judges v. 6) life was very insecure at that time :—“In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.” What is termed an “ox goad” in the text is literally “a thing to teach oxen.” Ox goads have always been regarded as formidable instruments some eight feet long and pointed with a strong, sharp iron head. The Thracian king Lycurgus is said to have chased the Bacchanals with an ox goad. According to Ellicott’s Bible—“The Athenians in their painting of Marathon represent the gigantic rustic Echetlus, who was supposed to have slain so many Persians with his ploughshare.” A traveller who had seen Eastern ploughing thus writes : “It was observable that in ploughing they used goads of an extraordinary size ; upon measuring several I found them about eight feet long, and at the bigger end six inches in circumference. They were armed at the lesser end with a sharp prickle for driving the oxen, and at the other end with a small spade or paddle of iron, strong and massy, for cleansing the plough from the clay which encumbers it in working.” Shamgar was working in the field with one of those goads when six hundred Philistines made their appearance but so vigorously did he wield it that not a man of the whole crowd escaped with his life. According to the authority already quoted, “it has been most needlessly assumed that he slew them single-

handed, and not, as is probable, at the head of a band of peasants armed with the same rude weapons as himself . . . . But the question here is merely one of interpretation, and nothing is more common in Scripture, as in all literature, than to say that a leader personally did what was done under his leadership."

One of the most obvious lessons deducible from this incident is that we should not complain of our tools when we have hard work to do. When the work is done badly we are apt to blame the tools. Shamgar used an ox goad ; Samson wielded the jawbone of an ass ; David had but a sling and stone. Sometimes we think what wonders we should do if we had better instruments. The bad writer blames his pen. The unskilful carver grumbles at his knife. The unsuccessful preacher says that he could do better if his church were in a better locality, or if some rearrangement of woodwork could be made. Who ever blames himself for failure ? Or even if blaming himself, who does not suggest that he could have done much better if the tools had been more distinctly adapted to the service he had to accomplish ? Our success in the great battles of life depends more upon spirit, intelligence, devotedness, and enthusiasm, than upon merely mechanical arrangements. What is a feeble instrument in the hands of one man is a mighty instrument in the hands of another, simply because the spirit of that other burns with holy determination to accomplish the work that has to be done. There is one thing which ought to be noticed with special care, the proper noticing of which will greatly enlarge the charitableness of our social judgments ; namely, men should work with those instruments which they can handle most skilfully. Shamgar knew how to use the ox goad, and David knew how to use the sling and stone. Other instruments may be far heavier, keener, and likelier altogether, but if we are not accustomed to them why should we run the risk of a failure ? Men are strong in proportion as they keep within the circle of their own tried ability and experience. The instrument may be the grandest in the world, but if we do not know how to handle it we can accomplish infinitely better results with instruments which expose themselves to the contempt of advanced civilisation. There are preachers who could do incalculable good if they would confine

themselves to the subjects which they understand and to language which is spoken by the people whom they address. The moment such preachers begin to talk finely they lose all their ease and power, and stumble like men who are endeavouring to speak in a foreign tongue. How foolish it would be to ridicule the instrument when the results are so obviously good! Look at the six hundred dead men; look at the slain giant; look at the prostrate walls of Jericho. The rule applies to every department of life. Why set up some arbitrary standard of judgment when the results are open to scrutiny and estimate? This rule should be applied to preaching. Why say that the sermons are not skillfully proportioned or expressed according to the usages of the schools, and therefore are not valuable sermons, when sinners are being converted and believers are being edified through their instrumentality? Let the result determine everything. Whilst military critics might be unfavourably criticising the ox goad, Shamgar was standing rejoicingly over six hundred defeated foes. This is the best answer of the Church to unfriendly criticism. When souls are converted, when households are reconstructed, when lives are inspired and encouraged, when clouds of distress and fear are driven away, the Church may well point to such results and be stirred to multiplied efforts rather than be deterred by the criticism of men who pay more attention to instruments than to results. God hath chosen the weak things of this world to throw down the things that are mighty. We are not called upon to defend this divine method; it is enough for us to know that it is God's way, and to accept it and obey it with loving thankfulness. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." "All this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's." He who fights for the right has God upon his side. If God be for us, who can be against us? The army on the other side is but a multitude of shadows; one ray of light from the rising sun shall disperse the host of emptiness. What meaner instrument can there be than the Cross of Christ? Hath it not pleased God, by the foolishness of the thing that is preached, to save them that believe? Were not Peter and John accounted unlearned and ignorant men? Are not the highest things hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed



unto babes? Such is the way of God, that no flesh should glory in his presence. All these thoughts are necessary to comfort the earnest worker against the pitiful criticism which is directed against Christian service. There are men so skilled in the use of bitter words that they might even discourage Shamgar himself by dwelling upon the ugliness and the unwieldiness of the weapon which he used. They might laugh him into a kind of shame. The thing to be done is to point men to the results which they have been enabled to secure, and to ask them to trust the instruments which have served them in good stead in the day of opposition and conflict. David said concerning the sword of Goliath—"Give me that; there is none like it." Do not easily give up tried methods, proved instruments, machineries and utilities which have been of service in the time of war. The same rule applies to trusty comradeships. We fight better in the society of some men than we could do in the society of others: we know their voices in the dark: we know their touch even when they do not say a word to us: we can depend upon them when the strain is greatest. New methods should be well studied in secret before they are tried in public, or they may bring their patrons to disappointment and chagrin. The Cross of Christ will stand when all things fail. Let us be determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified. God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our speech and our preaching should not be with enticing words of man's wisdom but with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. The instrument indeed is mean enough. To the Jews it is a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; nevertheless it works its daily miracles and finds in renewed hearts and brightened lives the only needful proof of its divinity and sanction.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy word is full of love. It draws us towards thee with a sweet compulsion. It is a word of grace, of light, of pity, and tenderness. Thy word knows us; it is familiar with our nature, and all the mystery thereof, and it speaks to us in music, in thunder, in judgment, in sharp exhortation, and in tender consolation; it is in very deed a wondrous word, coming all the way from heaven, and yet touching our hearts as the light touches the flower. We bless thee for thy word, for thy house, and for everything that is specially thine. We know that all things are thine: but some things seem to be twice thine, specially and wholly thine—the Lord's Day, the Lord's Book, the Lord's Portion, the Lord's own Spirit. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us! May it abide with us—a sun that never sets, a gracious presence that never tires, a gift that grows by giving. We bless thee for all the love we have seen in all the way of life. The way of life has been made beautiful by thy love; even the uphill parts have been rendered quite easy because of thy sustaining grace; and the winding ways and the dark valleys have not been so fearsome when we have come to them, because thou didst go before us and prepare a path. Thy comforts have been our strength; thy grace has been our sun and our shield, and we have good hope of heaven. We pray thee to regard us as sinners, and have pity upon us, yea, mercy—saving pity and redeeming mercy, such as we have seen in Christ Jesus thy Son, bleeding, dying, rising, praying for us. If thou hast freely delivered him up for us all, thou wilt with him also freely give us all things; so we shall have no necessity; we shall carry no burden, because, though the weight be great, the strength shall be more than equal to it. Let the whole year be a new year—new in thought, new in resolve, and new in sacrifice: thus shall the years not take away from our strength, but add to it, and make us younger as they fly, because bringing us nearer to the land where there is no sin, no death. Be this our good hope in Christ Jesus; in this hope may we stand together as Christian students and worshippers, growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let our prayer prevail in heaven; let us have the answer hidden in our heart, a secret treasure, a great, yea, an infinite prize. Amen.

### Judges iv., v.

#### DEBORAH AND HER SONG.

THE fourth and fifth chapters bring into view quite a host of secondary characters, such as Jabin and his chief captain, Sisera; Deborah and Barak; Heber, and Jael his wife;

and in the great song of triumph and judgment names come and go with flashes of colour full of history and criticism. Sometimes we are told of a song that the words are nothing—the tune is everything. That may be a happy circumstance as regards some songs, but that criticism has no place in reference to the Song of Deborah; it is all words, all thoughts, all spiritual music. This song has in it something more than tune. If we do not know the words we shall never understand the music. Poor is the singing in which you cannot hear every word; it is then but a performance, it is but a vocal trick; we must hear every word, every syllable, every sentiment, and judge whether the music is worthy of the great intellectual conception. It is so with the Song of Deborah. We shall find in it words as well as tune. Jabin, king of Canaan, had held Israel in oppression twenty years. Jabin had resources which astounded people who lived in the hill country. Among the mountains chariots were no use; the bow and arrow were everything, but the chariot could not be driven over a craggy steep or unfathomable abyss. Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and he made the plain of Esdraelon tremble as they rolled along. People who peeped down out of the crags, and saw the nine hundred chariots rolling in the plain of Jezreel, thought Jabin a mighty king, and obeyed his behest with meekest submission. Do not blame Jabin for oppressing the children of Israel twenty years. Jabin did not begin the oppression. Do not let us ruin ourselves by looking at second causes, and pouring out our denunciations upon the king of Hazor in Canaan. He, like many other poor kings, had nothing to do with it except instrumentally. There is but one King. It pleases us to call men kings and rulers, but there is only one sovereignty; the Lord reigneth, and there is room for none other; his throne fills the universe, and his kingdom ruleth over all. Jabin was an unconscious minister of God. Many men occupy that relation to Heaven who are not aware of it. The Lord has many servants at his threshold: he maketh the wrath of man to praise him; he finds music in strange places, and brings all kinds of instruments into the band that plays the music of his purpose. No doubt, Jabin thought himself a great man over Israel—lord and ruler and oppressor. Probably he counted Israel among his riches; in adding up his little store he

put Israel down at a plain price, and said, "Israel is mine, and is worth so much in the coming and going of things." He did not know what he was talking about. The reason why Jabin had anything to do with Israel was that Israel had done "evil in the sight of the Lord" (iv. 1). It is putting the case too lightly to say that Israel "did evil in the sight of the Lord." That might have been a first offence, and twenty years' penal servitude under a king without a harp, was a heavy sentence for a first violation. But we have missed the explanatory word. How often we do this in reading the Scriptures! How prone we are to leave out the key-word, and thus create confusion for ourselves! The text literally reads, "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord." How great the emphasis which ought to be laid upon the word "again"! It may not mean a second time or a third time; it may be the thousandth time for aught the word "again" says to the contrary. Israel did evil upon evil, as if building a black temple with black stones, and purposing to consecrate it to the service of the devil. Twenty years' servitude was a small penalty. God did not plead against Israel with his great power when he sentenced Israel to this period of oppression and sorrow. How readily we look at the oppression and forget the sin! This is characteristic of human nature. We pity the sorrow; we would even count the tears of human distress, and make a great number of them, and turn that number into a plea for Heaven's mercy. We are wrong. We have started the argument from the wrong end; the point of view is false; the perspective is out of line: the whole vision suffers from wrong drawing and colouring. We have nothing to do with the oppression. We must look at causes. We must say,—How did this come to pass? and in answering that inquiry we shall vindicate Eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men. We are moved more by the oppression than by the sin. That is a test of our own spiritual quality. Men are more frequently annoyed than they are wronged. Many men suffer more from an assault made upon their self-conceit than an assault made upon the proofs of eternal righteousness. Hence men resent what are termed personalities, whilst they look benignantly, if not approvingly, upon sin in the abstract—violated law that hurts the vanity of no

man. All this is indicative of character. Here we see what Sin really is. It binds the sinner to his outrages against God ; it endeavours to modify its own force and gravity, and it seeks to turn attention to outside matters, accidents, passing phases, and temporary troubles. Were we of God's mind and of Christ's heart we should dwell upon the evil, the evil twice done and twice repeated, and continued until it has become a custom—a custom so established that the repetition of it brings with it no new sensation. But we will look at accidents and circumstances, rather than probe into real causes, profound and true origins.

A new period dawned in Israel. Deborah the wife of Lapidoth was judge. Great questions are settled by events. There was no inquiry as to whether it was meet that a woman should be a judge. Israel needed a mother, and Deborah was a mother in Israel. If we make questions of these subjects, we shall entertain one another with wordy controversies : but when the true Deborah comes, she comes of right, and sits a queen, without a word. There is a fitness of things—a subtle and unchangeable harmony—and when its conditions are satisfied, the satisfaction is attested by a great content of soul. As Deborah sat under her palm-tree in Mount Ephraim, no man said : Why are we judged by a woman ? The answer was in her eyes : she looked divine ; the vindication was in her judgment : when she spake, the spirit of wisdom seemed to approve every tone of her voice. There is a spirit in man : he knows when the right judge is upon the bench ; the poorest listener can tell when he is in the presence of Justice ; the unsophisticated heart knows when attempts are being made to quibble and wriggle and misrepresent, and to substitute the jingle of words for the music of righteousness. The people came up to the famous old palm-tree, and told their tale to Deborah day by day, until the motherly heart began to ache, and her trouble was very great. She saw, as motherly eyes only can see, how the wrinkles were deepening, how the faces were not so plump as they used to be, how strong men were bending under invisible burdens. She said : By the help of Heaven we will see more clearly into this. A hundred miles away in the north there lived a man, Barak by name—"Barak," which is, by interpretation, "the lightning"—and on Barak

Deborah fixed her heart as on the hope of Israel. She sent for him ; but he said No. She said in effect, You must come. But he said in reply, You do not know the case as a soldier knows it ; Jabin has nine hundred chariots of iron, and the plain of Jezreel seems to have been made into a way on purpose, for them to roll in ; if it were Jabin only, I might attempt the task, but think of nine hundred chariots of iron ! Deborah said, You must come, for the time has arrived ; Heaven's hour of deliverance has struck ; and I look to you to espouse the cause of Israel. Barak said, No, I cannot, except on one condition. Deborah said, Name your terms ; what are they ? Then replied Barak, My terms are that you go along with me. Instantly she said, I am ready to go. And Deborah, a mother in Israel, became the soldier of Israel, and Barak was her humble servant. The news soon spread. Sisera was on the alert. This was the very thing he had been longing for. When a man has nine hundred chariots of iron he wants something for them to do. Kings who have standing armies are bound to create occasions of war ; hence the injustice, the turpitude, the hellishness of battle. Sisera was the chief captain, and the nine hundred chariots of iron were under his direction, and he said, Now Esdraelon shall tremble under this weight of iron, and Israel shall be crushed as a fly upon a wheel. " Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing ? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh " at them, and laugh again at their chariots, though they be iron in quality and nine hundred in number. The chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, yea, thousand of thousands. The battle is the Lord's, not ours. But the Lord will not loose his chariots upon Jabin and his nine hundred curricles. There is a river on the field of battle, Kishon by name, quite a little silver threadlet in summer, but soon swollen by tributaries from the hills ; and a river once getting charge of a plain makes swift work in its progress. The rains had fallen, all the hills seemed to pour out their treasures of water, the stream expanded, the water burst and flowed over the plain, and the nine hundred could not move. They were overcome by water ! Kishon was more than all Jabin's iron

host. Then came awful doings—men slaying one another. As for Sisera, the captain of all the iron chariots, he fled—ran away like a hound that had seen a tiger, and pantingly he came to a woman's tent, and said to Jael, the wife of Heber the Canaanite, Can you give me shelter? What are nine hundred chariots when the Lord is against them? What are all the chariots of the earth as against the sea? They could be sunk in the Atlantic, and the great ocean not know that they had descended to its depths. Jael said, Come in. And Sisera went in to come out no more. "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is my son's chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?" At that moment Sisera was lying in the tent of Jael with an iron nail through his head. Sisera had chariots of iron—Jael had but one nail, but the hammer must have been God's. There is no defence of Jael's conduct. Viewed in the light of our morality, it was base in and out—bad, corrupt, horrible. As she walks softly, the softlier, the deadlier, and takes the nail and the hammer, she is the picture of incarnate depravity. This we say, unless there be some law which takes up all our laws and moves them into greater meanings through infinite orbits. There are greater laws that take up all our local movements and relations, and set them in new attitudes and invest them with new values; but of these laws we know nothing, and it is right that we should speak frankly about the ancient morality as represented in the action of Jael, and that Christian teachers should condemn it within the limits which are known to them. A woman began the war and a woman ended it, judging by the literal history. The inspiration of deliverance was a divine inspiration. Wherever there is a movement towards freedom, that movement began in heaven. Wherever any oppressed man, conscious of his sin and penitent for it, lifts himself up in an attitude of independence and looks his oppressor in the face with a calm determination to be free, there is a distinctively divine act. God is the God of liberty. He permits slavery or uses it, and may sanctify the use to higher issues and advantages; but beneath the oppression, below all the trouble, there is that spirit which is akin to his own, which asserts itself and says:—I cannot always live under this cloud, or carry this weary load; I will be free. When such

a word is spoken reverently, solemnly, honestly, it is neither more nor less than the living voice of the living God.

Now Deborah sings. She seems almost to excel Moses in song. There is hardly such a piece of composition in all known literature. It has everything in it. This is a manifold song. Some persons have points of power, individual faculties of notable strength; but this woman seems to have all human faculties, and all human faculties in their largest proportions. She praises the people for their willing offering of themselves (v. 2). She recognised the spontaneous action of the people; they wanted to be free. She also regards kings as occupying a subordinate position:—"Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes" (v. 3). They had to receive the news, not to create the event; they had to hear of it next day, not to plan it the day before. Who can tell the ways of Providence? God setteth up the poor amongst princes, he plungeth the princes down into meanest places; the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. God shall have the record and the register written, and rewritten and redistributed, so there shall be no vanity in Israel, no conceit in the hosts of Christ. There is, too, a tone of judgment in the song. Deborah could not forget who had forsaken her on the day of trial. She said: Reuben was not there—"For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart." Reuben abode among the sheepfolds, and listened to the bleating of the flocks, and let the woman go out alone to fight the chariots of Jabin. "For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." Gilead was not with me; he "abode beyond Jordan": Dan was not with me; he "remained in ships": Asher got behind the creeks and the crags, and peeped out, and then withdrew: "Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field." So Deborah makes mention of severe troubles even in the roll of her triumphal song. She did not confuse things. She was not so lost in enthusiasm and transport, as to forget whether Reuben was present, and Gilead and Dan; nor did she neglect Zebulun and Naphtali. This woman's song is reason set to music, judgment in rapture—yea, say in rhapsody, but judgment still, awarding to the good that which is good, to the evil that which they deserve, and thus setting forth in song a picture of the ultimate and final judgment.



Meroz was cursed even in song. Why? Meroz was in the heart of the country; Meroz might have struck the first blow, and Meroz did nothing:—"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." The Lord might have been torn to pieces for aught that Meroz did. The winding up of all things shall be a great song, a triumphant burst of music; but moral distinctions will not be forgotten in those jubilant strains. Then it will be known who did his duty, who remained at home, who was content with criticism, and who hazarded his life that his Christ might be made more widely known.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

The song of triumph which was composed in consequence of the great victory over Sisera, is said to have been "sung by Deborah and Barak." It is usually regarded as the composition of Deborah, and was probably indited by her to be sung on the return of Barak and his warriors from the pursuit.

Deborah, the prophetess, was wife of Lapidoth. She dwelt, probably, in a tent, under a well-known palm-tree, between Ramah and Bethel, where she judged Israel (Judg. iv. 4, 5). This probably means that she was the organ of communication between God and his people, and probably on account of the influence and authority of her character, was accounted in some sort as the head of the nation, to whom questions of doubt and difficulty were referred for decision. In her triumphal song she says:—

"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,  
In the days of Jael the ways lay desert,  
And high-way travellers went in winding by-paths.  
Leaders failed in Israel, they failed,  
Until that I Deborah arose,  
That I arose, a mother in Israel."

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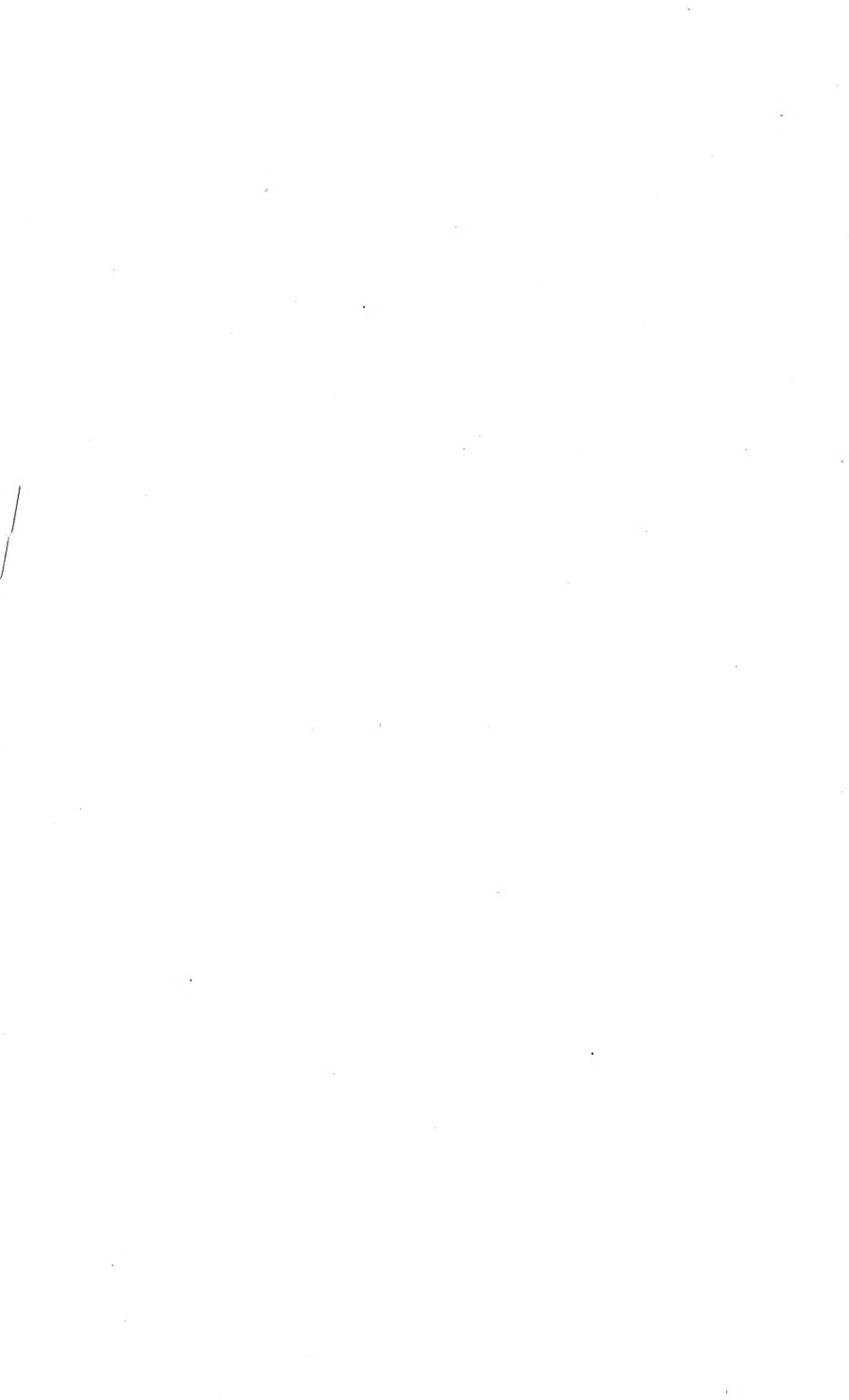
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