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W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

*Editor of "The Expositor"*

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

BY

ROBERT A. WATSON, M.A., D.D.



NEW YORK

A. C. ARMSTRONG AND SON

51 EAST TENTH STREET

1894

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# THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

BY THE REV.

ROBERT A. WATSON, M.A., D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"GOSPELS OF YESTERDAY," "JUDGES AND RUTH," "THE BOOK OF JOB,"  
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# I

## INTRODUCTORY

TO summon from the past and reproduce with any detail the story of Israel's life in the desert is now impossible. The outlines alone remain, severe, careless of almost everything that does not bear on religion. Neither from Exodus nor from Numbers can we gather those touches that would enable us to reconstruct the incidents of a single day as it passed in the camp or on the march. The tribes move from one "wilderness" to another. The hardship of the time of wandering appears unrelieved, for throughout the history the doings of God, not the achievements or sufferings of the people, are the great theme. The patriotism of the Book of Numbers is of a kind that reminds us continually of the prophecies. Resentment against the distrustful and rebellious, like that which Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah express, is felt in almost every portion of the narrative. At the same time the difference between Numbers and the books of the prophets is wide and striking. Here the style is simple, often stern, with little emotion, scarcely any rhetoric. The legislative purpose reacts on the historical, and makes the spirit of the book severe. Seldom does the writer allow himself respite from the grave task of presenting Israel's duties and delinquencies, and exalting the

majesty of God. We are made continually to feel the burden with which the affairs of the people are charged; and yet the book is no poem: to excite sympathy or lead up to a great climax does not come within the design.

Nevertheless, so far as a book of incident and statute can resemble poetry, there is a parallel between Numbers and a form of literature produced under other skies, other conditions—the Greek drama. The same is true of Exodus and Deuteronomy; but Numbers will be found especially to bear out the comparison. The likeness may be traced in the presentation of a main idea, the relation of various groups of persons carrying out or opposing that main idea, and the Puritanism of form and situation. The Book of Numbers may be called eternal literature more fitly than the *Iliad* and *Æneid* have been called eternal poems; and the keen ethical strain and high religious thought make the movement tragical throughout. Moses the leader is seen with his helpers and opponents, Aaron and Miriam, Joshua and Hobab, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Balak and Balaam. He is brought into extremity; he despairs and appeals passionately to Heaven; in an hour of pride he falls into sin which brings doom upon him. The people, murmuring, craving, suffering, are always a vague multitude. The tent, the cloud, the incense, the wars, the strain of the wilderness journey, the hope of the land beyond—all have a dim solemnity. The occupying thought is of Jehovah's purpose and the revelation of His character. Moses is the prophet of this Divine mystery, stands for it almost alone, urges it upon Israel, is the means of impressing it by judgments and victories, by priestly law and ceremony, by the very example of his own failure in sudden trial. With a graver and bolder

purpose than any embodied in the dramatic masterpieces of Greece, the story of Numbers finds its place not in literature only, but in the development of universal religion, and breathes that Divine inspiration which belongs to the Hebrew and to him alone among those who speak of God and man.

The Divine discipline of human life is an element of the theme, but in contrast to the Greek dramas the books of the exodus are not individualistic. Moses is great, but he is so as the teacher of religion, the servant of Jehovah, the lawgiver of Israel. Jehovah, His religion, His law, are above Moses. The personality of the leader stands clear; yet he is not the hero of the Book of Numbers. The purpose of the history leaves him, when he has done his work, to die on Mount Abarim, and presses on, that Jehovah may be seen as a man of war, that Israel may be brought to its inheritance and begin its new career. The voice of men in the Greek tragedy is, as Mr. Ruskin says, "We trusted in the gods; we thought that wisdom and courage would save us. Our wisdom and courage deceive us to our death." When Moses despairs, that is not his cry. There is no Fate stronger than God; and He looks far into the future in the discipline He appoints to men, to His people Israel. The remote, the unfulfilled, gleams along the desert. There is a light from the pillar of fire even when the pestilence is abroad, and the graves of the lustful are dug, and the camp is dissolved in tears because Aaron is dead, because Moses has climbed the last mountain and shall never again be seen.

In respect of content, one point shows likeness between the Greek drama and our book—the vague conception of death. It is not an extinction of life,

but the human being goes on into an existence of which there is no definite idea. What remains has no reckoning, no object. The recoil of the Hebrew is not indeed piteous, and fraught with horror, like that of the Greek, although death is the last punishment of men who transgress. For Aaron and Moses, and all who have served their generation, it is a high and venerated Power that claims them when the hour of departure comes. The God they have obeyed in life calls them, and they are gathered to their people. No note of despair is heard like that in the *Iphigenia in Aulis*,—

“He raves who prays  
To die. 'Tis better to live on in woe  
Than to die nobly.”

Dying as well as living men are with God; and this God is the Lord of all. Immense is the difference between the Greek who trusts or dreads many powers above, beneath, and the Hebrew realising himself, however dimly, as the servant of Jehovah the holy, the eternal. This great idea, seized by Moses, introduced by him into the faith of his people, remained it may be indefinite, yet always present to the thought of Israel with many implications till the time of full revelation came with Christ, and He said: “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” The wide interval between a people whose religion contained this thought, in whose history it is interwoven, and a people whose religion was polytheistic and natural is seen in the whole strain of their literature and life. Even Plato the luminous finds it impossible to overpass the

shadows of pagan interpretations. "In regard to the facts of a future life, a man," said Phædo, "must either learn or find out their nature; or, if he cannot do this, take at any rate the best and least assailable of human words, and, borne on this as on a raft, perform in peril the voyage of life, unless he should be able to accomplish the journey with less risk and danger on a surer vessel—some word Divine." Now Israel had a Divine word; and life was not perilous.

The problem which appears again and again in Moses' relation with the people is that of the theocratic idea as against the grasping at immediate success. At various points, from the start in Egypt onwards, the opportunity of assuming a regal position comes to Moses. He is virtually dictator, and he might be king. But a rare singleness of mind keeps him true to Jehovah's lordship, which he endeavours to stamp on the conscience of the people and the course of their development. He has often to do so at the greatest risk to himself. He holds back the people in what seems the hour of advance, and it is the will of Jehovah by which they are detained. The Unseen King is their Helper and equally their Rhadamanthine Judge; and on Moses falls the burden of forcing that fact upon their minds.

Israel could never, according to Moses' idea, become a great people in the sense in which the nations of the world were great. Amongst them greatness was sought in despite of morality, in defiance of all that Jehovah commanded. Israel might never be great in wealth, territory, influence, but she was to be true. She existed for Jehovah, while the gods of other nations existed for them, had no part to play without

them. Jehovah was not to be overborne either by the will or the needs of His people. He was the self-existent Lord. The Name did not represent a supernatural assistance which could be secured on terms, or by any authorised person. Moses himself, though he entreated Jehovah, did not change Him. His own desire was sometimes thwarted; and he had often to give the oracle with sorrow and disappointment.

Moses is not the priest of the people : the priesthood comes in as a ministering body, necessary for religious ends and ideas, but never governing, never even interpreting. It is singular from this point of view that the so-called Priests' Code should be attributed confidently to a caste ambitious of ruling or practically enthroned. Wellhausen ridicules the "fine" distinction between hierocracy and theocracy. He affirms that government of God is the same thing as rule of priest; and he may affirm this because he thinks so. The Book of Numbers, as it stands, might have been written to prove that they are not equivalent; and Wellhausen himself shows that they are not by more than one of his conclusions. The theocracy, he says, is in its nature intimately allied to the Roman Catholic Church, which is, in fact, its child; and on the whole he prefers to speak of the Jewish Church rather than the theocracy. But if any modern religious body is to be named as a child of the Hebrew *theocracy*, it must not be one in which the priest intervenes continually between faith and God. Wellhausen says again that "the sacred constitution of Judaism was an artificial product" as contrasted with the broadly human indigenous element, the real idea of man's relation to God; and when a priesthood, as in later Judaism, becomes the governing body, God is, so far, dethroned. Now Moses

did not give to Aaron greater power than he himself possessed, and his own power is constantly represented as exercised in submission to Jehovah. A theocracy might be established without a priesthood; in fact, the mediation of the prophet approaches the ideal far more than that of the priest. But in the beginnings of Israel the priesthood was required, received a subordinate place of its own, to which it was throughout rigidly confined. As for priestly government, that, we may say, has no support anywhere in the Pentateuch.

The Book of Numbers, called also "In the wilderness," opens with the second month of the second year after the exodus, and goes on to the arrival of the tribes in the plains of Moab by the Jordan. As a whole it may be said to carry out the historical and religious ideas of Exodus and Leviticus: and both the history and the legislation flow into three main channels. They go to establish the separateness of Israel as a people, the separateness of the tribe of Levi and the priesthood, and the separateness and authority of Jehovah. The first of these objects is served by the accounts of the census, of the redemption of the first-born, the laws of national atonement and distinctive dress, and generally the Divine discipline of Israel recorded in the course of the book. The second line of purpose may be traced in the careful enumeration of the Levites; the minute allocation of duties connected with the tabernacle to the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites; the special consecration of the Aaronic priesthood; the elaboration of ceremonials requiring priestly service; and various striking incidents, such as the judgment of Korah and his company, and

the budding of Aaron's almond twig. Lastly, the institution of some cleansing rites, the sin offering of chap. xix. for example, the details of punishment that fell upon offenders against the law, the precautions enjoined with regard to the ark and the sanctuary, together with the multiplication of sacrifices, went to emphasise the sanctity of worship and the holiness of the unseen King. The book is sacerdotal ; it is marked even more by a physical and moral Puritanism, exceedingly stringent at many points.

The whole system of religious observance and priestly ministration set forth in the Mosaic books may seem difficult to account for, not indeed as a national development, but as a moral and religious gain. We are ready to ask how God could in any sense have been the author of a code of laws imposing so many intricate ceremonies, which required a whole tribe of Levites and priests to perform them. Where was the spiritual use that justified the system, as necessary, as wise, as Divine ? Inquiries like these will arise in the minds of believing men, and sufficient answer must be sought for.

In the following way the religious worth and therefore the inspiration of the ceremonial law may be found. The primitive notion that Jehovah was the exclusive property of Israel, the pledged patron of the nation, tended to impair the sense of His moral purity. An ignorant people inclined to many forms of immorality could not have a right conception of the Divine holiness ; and the more it was accepted as a commonplace of faith that Jehovah knew them alone of all the families of the earth, the more was right belief towards Him imperilled. A psalmist who in the name of God reproves "the wicked" indicates the danger : "Thou

thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Now the priesthood, the sacrifices, all provisions for maintaining the sanctity of the ark and the altar, and all rules of ceremonial cleansing, were means of preventing that fatal error. The Israelites began without the solemn temples and impressive mysteries that made the religion of Egypt venerable. In the desert and in Canaan, till the time of Solomon, the rude arrangements of semi-civilised life kept religion at an everyday level. The domestic makeshifts and confusion of the early period, the frequent alarms and changes which for centuries the nation had to endure, must have made culture of any kind, even religious culture, almost impossible to the mass of the people. The law in its very complexity and stringency provided a needful safeguard and means of education. Moses had been acquainted with a great sacerdotal system. Not only would it appear to him natural to originate something of a like kind, but he would see no other means of creating in rude times the idea of the Divine holiness. For himself he found inspiration and prophetic power, in laying the foundation of the system; and once initiated, its development necessarily followed. With the progress of civilisation the law had to keep pace, meeting the new circumstances and needs of each succeeding period. Certainly the genius of the Pentateuch, and in particular of the Book of Numbers, is not liberating. The tone is that of theocratic rigour. But the reason is quite clear; the development of the law was determined by the necessities and dangers of Israel in the exodus, in the wilderness, and in idolatrous, seductive Canaan.

Opening with an account of the census, the Book of Numbers evidently stood, from the first, quite distinct

from the previous books as a composition or compilation. The mustering of the tribes gave an opportunity of passing from one group of documents to another, from one stage of the history to another. But the memoranda brought together in Numbers are of various character. Administrative, legislative, and historical sources are laid under contribution. The records have been arranged as far as possible in chronological order; and there are traces, as for instance in the second account of the striking of the rock by Moses, of a careful gathering up of materials not previously used, at least in the precise form they now have. The compilers collected and transcribed with the most reverent care, and did not venture in any case to reject. The historical notices are for some reason anything but consecutive, and the greater part of the time covered by the book is virtually passed over. On the other hand some passages repeat details in a way that has no parallel in the rest of the Mosaic books. The effect generally is that of a compilation made under difficulties by a scribe or scribes who were scrupulous to preserve everything relating to the great lawgiver and the dealings of God with Israel.

Recent criticism is positive in its assertion that the book contains several strata of narrative; and there are certain passages, the accounts of Korah's revolt and of Dathan and Abiram, for instance, where without such a clew the history must seem not a little confused. In a sense this is disconcerting. The ordinary reader finds it difficult to understand why an inspired book should appear at any point incomplete or incoherent. The hostile critic again is ready to deny the credibility of the whole. But the honesty of the writing is proved by the very characteristics that make some statements

hard to interpret and some of the records difficult to receive. The theory that a journal of the wanderings was kept by Moses or under his direction is quite untenable. Dismissing that, we fall back on the belief that contemporary records of some incidents, and traditions early committed to writing, formed the basis of the book. The documents were undoubtedly ancient at the time of their final recension, whensoever and by whomsoever it was made.

By far the greater part of Numbers refers to the second year after the exodus from Egypt, and to what took place in the fortieth year, after the departure from Kadesh. Regarding the intermediate time we are told little but that the camp was shifted from one place to another in the wilderness. Why the missing details have not survived in any form cannot now be made out. It is no sufficient explanation to say that those events alone are preserved which struck the popular imagination. On the other hand, to ascribe what we have to unscrupulous or pious fabrication is at once unpardonable and absurd. Some may be inclined to think that the book consists entirely of accidental scraps of tradition, and that inspiration would have come better to its end if the religious feelings of the people had received more attention, and we had been shown the gradual rise of Israel out of ignorance and semi-barbarism. Yet even for the modern historical sense the book has its own claim, by no means slight, to high estimation and close study. These are venerable records, reaching back to the time they profess to describe, and presenting, though with some traditional haze, the important incidents of the desert journey.

Turning from the history to the legislation, we have to inquire whether the laws regarding priests and

Levites, sacrifices and cleansings, bear uniformly the colour of the wilderness. The origins are certainly of the Mosaic time, and some of the statutes elaborated here must be founded on customs and beliefs older even than the exodus. Yet in form many enactments are apparently later than the time of Moses; and it does not seem well to maintain that laws requiring what was next to impossible in the wilderness were, during the journey, given and enforced as they now stand by a wise legislator. Did Moses require, for instance, that five shekels, "of the shekel of the sanctuary," should be paid for the ransom of the first-born son of a household, at a time when many families must have had no silver and no means of obtaining it? Does not this statute, like another which is spoken of as deferred till the settlement in Canaan, imply a fixed order and medium of exchange? For the sake of a theory which is intended to honour Moses as the only legislator of Israel, is it well to maintain that he imposed conditions which could not be carried out, and that he actually prepared the way for neglect of his own code?

It is beyond our range to discuss the date of the compilation of Numbers as compared with the other Pentateuchal books, or the age of the "Jehovistic" documents as compared with the "Priests' Code." This, however, is of less moment, since it is now becoming clear that attempts to settle these dates can only darken the main question—the antiquity of the original records and enactments. The assertion that Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers belong to an age later than Ezekiel is of course meant to apply to the present form of the books. But even in this sense it is misleading. Those who make it themselves assume

that many things in the law and the history are of far older date, based indeed on what at the time of Ezekiel must have been immemorial usage. The main legislation of the Pentateuch must have existed in the time of Josiah, and even then possessed the authority of ancient observance. The priesthood, the ark, sacrifice and feast, the shewbread, the ephod, can be traced back beyond the time of David to that of Samuel and Eli, quite apart from the testimony of the Books of Moses. Moreover, it is impossible to believe that the formula "The Lord said unto Moses" was invented at a late date as the authority for statutes. It was the invariable accompaniment of the ancient rule, the mark of an origin already recognised. The various legislative provisions we shall have to consider had their sanction under the great ordinance of the law and the inspired prophetism which directed its use and maintained its adaptation to the circumstances of the people. The religious and moral code as a whole, designed to secure profound reverence towards God and the purity of national faith, continued the legislation of Moses, and at every point was the task of men who guarded as sacred the ideas of the founder and were themselves taught of God. The entire law was acknowledged by Christ in this sense as possessing the authority of the great lawgiver's own commission.

It has been said that "the inspired condition would seem to be one which produces a generous indifference to pedantic accuracy in matters of fact, and a supreme absorbing concern about the moral and religious significance of facts." If the former part of this statement were true, the historical books of the Bible, and, we may say, in particular the Book of Numbers, would deserve no attention as history. But nothing is

more striking in a survey of our book than the clear unhesitating way in which incidents are set forth, even where moral and religious ends could not be much served by the detail that is freely used. The account of the muster-roll is a case in point. There we find what may be called "pedantic accuracy." The enumeration of each tribe is given separately, and the formula is repeated, "by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of the names from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war." Again, the whole of the seventh chapter, the longest in the book, is taken up with an account of the offerings of the tribes, made at the dedication of the altar. These oblations are presented day after day by the heads of the twelve tribes in order, and each tribe brings precisely the same gifts—"one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one he-lamb of the first year for a burnt offering; one male of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five he-lambs of the first year." Now the difficulty at once occurs that in the wilderness, according to Exod. xvi., there was no bread, no flour, that manna was the food of the people. In Numb. xi. 6 the complaint of the children of Israel is recorded: "Now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all: we have nought save this manna to look to." In Josh. v. 10 ff. it is stated that, after the passage of the Jordan, "they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of

Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn in the self-same day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land." To the compilers of the Book of Numbers the statement that tribe after tribe brought offerings of fine flour mingled with oil, which could only have been obtained from Egypt or from some Arabian valley at a distance, must have been as hard to receive as it is to us. Nevertheless, the assertion is repeated no less than twelve times. What then? Do we impugn the sincerity of the historians? Are we to suppose them careless of the fact? Do we not rather perceive that in the face of what seemed insuperable difficulties they held to what they had before them as authentic records? No writer could be inspired and at the same time indifferent to accuracy. If there is one thing more than another on which we may rely, it is that the authors of these books of Scripture have done their very utmost by careful inquiry and recension to make their account of what took place in the wilderness full and precise. Absolute sincerity and scrupulous carefulness are essential conditions for dealing successfully with moral and religious themes; and we have all evidence that the compilers had these qualities. But in order to reach historical fact they had to use the same kind of means as we employ; and this qualifying statement, with all that it involves, applies to the whole contents of the book we are to consider. Our dependence with regard to the events recorded is on the truthfulness but not the omniscience of the men, whoever they were, who from traditions, records, scrolls of law, and venerable memoranda compiled this Scripture as we have it.

They wrought under the sense of sacred duty, and found through that the inspiration which gives perennial value to their work. With this in view we shall take up the various matters of history and legislation.

Recurring now, for a little, to the spirit of the Book of Numbers, we find in the ethical passages its highest note and power as an inspired writing. The standard of judgment is not by any means that of Christianity. It belongs to an age when moral ideas had often to be enforced with indifference to human life; when, conversely, the plagues and disasters that befell men were always connected with moral offences. It belongs to an age when the malediction of one who claimed supernatural insight was generally believed to carry power with it, and the blessing of God meant earthly prosperity. And the notable fact is that, side by side with these beliefs, righteousness of an exalted kind is strenuously taught. For example, the reverence for Moses and Aaron, usually so characteristic of the Book of Numbers, is seen falling into the background when the Divine judgment of their fault is recorded; and the earnestness shown is nothing less than sublime. In the course of the legislation Aaron is invested with extraordinary official dignity; and Moses appears at his best in the matter of Eldad and Medad when he says, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them." Yet Numbers records the sentence pronounced upon the brothers: "Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." And more severe is the form of the

condemnation recorded in chap. xxvii. 14: "Because ye rebelled against My word in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes." The moral strain of the book is keen in the punishment inflicted on a Sabbath-breaker, in the destination to death of the whole congregation for murmuring against God—a judgment which, at the entreaty of Moses, was not revoked, but only deferred—and again in the condemnation to death of every soul that sins presumptuously. On the other hand, the provision of refuge cities for the unwitting man-slayer shows the Divine righteousness at one with mercy.

It must be confessed the book has another note. In order that Israel might reach and conquer Canaan there had to be war; and the warlike spirit is frankly breathed. There is no thought of converting enemies like the Midianites into friends; every man of them must be put to the sword. The census enumerates the men fit for war. The primitive militarism is consecrated by Israel's necessity and destiny. When the desert march is over, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh must not turn peacefully to their sheep and cattle on the east side of Jordan; they must send their men of war across the river to maintain the unity of the nation by running the hazard of battle with the rest. Experience of this inevitable discipline brought moral gain. Religion could use even war to lift the people into the possibility of higher life.

## II

### *THE CENSUS AND THE CAMP*

#### I. THE MUSTERING

NUMBERS i. 1-46

FROM the place of high spiritual knowledge, where through the revelation of God in covenant and law Israel has been constituted His nation and His Church, the tribes must now march with due order and dignity. The sense of a Divine calling and of responsibility to the Highest will react on the whole arrangements made for the ordinary tasks and activities of men. Social aims may unite those who have them in common, and the emergencies of a nation will lay constraint on patriotic souls. But nothing so binds men together as a common vocation to do Gōd's will and maintain His faith. These ideas are to be traced in the whole account of the mustering of the warriors and the organisation of the camp. We review it feeling that the dominating thought of a Divine call to spiritual duty and progress is far from having control of modern Christendom. Under the New Covenant there is a distribution of grace to every one, an endowment of each according to his faith with priestly and even kingly powers. No chief men swear fealty to Christ on behalf of the tribes that gather to His standard; but each believer devotes himself to the service and

receives his own commission. Yet, while the first thought is that of personal honour and liberty, there should follow at once the desire, the determination, to find one's fit place in the camp, in the march, in the war. The unity is imperative, for there is one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling. The commission each receives is not to be a free-lance in the Divine warfare, but to take his right place in the ranks; and that place he must find.

The enumeration, as recorded in chap. i., was not to be of all Israelites, but of men from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war. From Sinai to Canaan was no long journey, and fighting might soon be required. The muster was by way of preparation for conflicts in the wilderness and for the final struggle. It is significant that Aaron is shown associated with Moses in gathering the results. We see not only a preparation for war, but also for the poll tax or tithe to be levied in support of the priests and Levites. A sequel to the enumeration is to be found in chap. xviii. 21: "And unto the children of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the tent of meeting." The Levites again were to give, out of what they received, a tenth part for the maintenance of the priests. The enactment when carried into effect would make the support of those who ministered in holy things a term of the national constitution.

Now taking the census as intended to impress the personal duties of service in war and contribution for religious ends, we find in it a valuable lesson for all who acknowledge the Divine authority. Not remotely may the command be interpreted thus. Take the sum

of them, that they may realise that God takes the sum of them and expects of every man service commensurate with his powers. The claim of Jehovah went side by side with the claim on behalf of the nation, for He was Head of the nation. But God is equally the Head of all who have their life from Him ; and this numbering of the Hebrews points to a census which is accurately registered and never falls short of the sum of a people by a single unit. Whoever can fight the battle of righteousness, serve the truth by witness-bearing, aid in relieving the weak, or help religion by personal example and willing gift—every possible servant of God, who is also by the very possession of life and privilege a debtor of God, is numbered in the daily census of His providence. The measure of the ability of each is known. “To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” The Divine regard of our lives and estimate of our powers, and the accompanying claim made upon us, are indeed far from being understood ; even members of the Church are strangely ignorant of their duty. But is it thought that because no Sinai shrouded in awful smoke towers above us, and now we are encamped at the foot of Calvary, where one great offering was made for our redemption, therefore we are free in any sense from the service Israel was expected to render ? Do any hold themselves relieved from the tithe because they are Christ’s freemen, and shirk the warfare because they already enjoy the privileges of the victors ? These are the ignorant, whose complacent excuses show that they do not understand the law of Divine religion.

True, the position of the Church among us is not of the kind which the Mosaic law gave to the priesthood in Israel. Tithes are gathered, not from those only

who are numbered within the Church and acknowledge obligation, but also from those outside, and always by another authority than that of Divine commandment. In this way the whole matter of the support of religion is confused in these lands both for members of the national Churches and for those beyond their borders. Successfully as the old Hebrew scheme may once have wrought, it is now hopelessly out of line with the development of society. The census does not in any way determine what a national Church can claim. Aaron does not stand beside Moses to watch the enrolment of the tribes, families, and households as they come to be numbered. Yet, by the highest law of all, which neither Church nor State can alter, the demand for service is enforced. There is a warlike duty from which none are exempt, from which there is no discharge. Although the ideal of an organised humanity appears as yet far off in our schemes of government and social melioration, providentially it is being carried into effect. Laws are at work that need no human administration. By the Divine ordinance generous effort for the common good and the ends of religion is made imperative. Obedience brings its reward: "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Neglect is also punished: the sure result of selfishness is an impoverished life.

The census is described as having been thoroughly organised. Keil and Delitzsch think that the registering may have taken place "according to the classification adopted at Jethro's suggestion for the administration of justice—viz., in thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens." They also defend the total of six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty, which is precisely the same as that reached apparently nine months

before. It is an obvious explanation of what appears a perplexing agreement, that the enumeration may have occupied nine months. But the number is certainly large, much larger than the muster-rolls of the Book of Judges would lead us to expect, if we reckon back from them. Nor can any explanation be given that is satisfactory in all respects. We may shrink from interfering with these numerical statements carefully set down thousands of years ago. Yet we feel that the haze of remoteness hangs over this roll of the tribes and all after-reckonings based upon it.

Of the twelve princes named in chap. i. 5-15, as overseers of the census, Nahshon, son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah, has peculiar distinction. His name is found in the genealogy of David given in the Book of Ruth (chap. iv. 20). It also appears in the "book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matt. i.) and the roll of Joseph's ancestry recorded by St. Luke. One after another in that honourable line which gave the Hebrews their Psalmist and the world its Saviour is but a name to us. Yet the life represented by the name Nahshon, spent mainly in the wilderness, had its part in far-off results; and so had many a life, not even named—the hard lives of brave fathers and burdened mothers in Israel, who, on the weary march through the desert, had their sorrow and pain, their scanty joy and hope. Far away is the endurance of those Hebrew men and women, yet it is related to our own religion, our salvation. The discipline of the wilderness made men of courage, women great in faith. Beneath their feet the Arabian sand burned, above them the sun flamed; they heard alarms of war, and followed the pillar of smoke for their appointed time, looking, even when they knew they looked in vain,

for the land beyond of which Jehovah had spoken. Unaware of their nation's destiny, they toiled and suffered to serve a great Divine plan which in the course of the ages came to ripeness. And the thought brings help to ourselves. We too have our desert journey, our duty and hardship, with an outlook not merely personal. It is our privilege, if we will take it so, to aid the Divine plan for the humanity that is to be, the great brotherhood in which Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Like a prince of Judah, or a humble nameless mother in Israel, each may find abiding dignity of life in doing well some allotted part in the great enterprise.

The age of service fixed for the men of the tribes may yield suggestions for our time. It is not of warlike service we have to think, but of that which depends on spiritual influence and intellectual power. And we may ask whether the limits on one side and the other have any parallel for us. Young men and women, having reached the age of bodily and mental vigour, are to hold themselves enrolled in the ranks of the army of God. There is a time of learning and preparation, when knowledge is to be acquired, when the principles of life are to be grasped, and the soul is to find its inspiration through personal faith. Then there should come that self-consecration by which response is made to the claim of God. Neither should that be premature, nor should it be deferred. When an aimless, irresolute adolescence is followed by years of drifting and experimenting without clear religious purpose, the best opportunity of life is thrown away. And this far too frequently occurs among those on whom parental influence and the finest Christian teaching have been expended. The time arrives when

such young men and women should begin to serve the Church and the world ; but they are still unprepared because they have not considered the great questions of duty, and seen that they have a part to play on the field of endeavour. It is true, no time can be fixed. The public service of Christ has been begun by some in very early youth ; and the results have justified their adventure. From the humble tasks they first undertook they have gone on steadily to places of high responsibility, never once looking back, learning while they taught, gaining faith while they imparted it to others. Each for himself or herself, in this matter of supreme importance, must seek the guidance and realise the vocation of God. But delay is often indulged, and the twentieth, even the thirtieth year, passes without a single effort in the holy service. One could wish for a Divine conscription, a command laid on every one in youth to be ready at a certain day and hour to take the sword of the Spirit.

On the other side also many need to reconsider. No time was fixed for the end of the services to which the Israelites were summoned. As long as a man could carry arms he was to hold himself ready for the field. Not the increasing cares of his family, not the disinclination which comes with years, was to weigh against the ordinance of Jehovah. But service now, however cheerfully it may be rendered in early manhood and womanhood, is often renounced altogether when knowledge and power are coming to ripeness with the experience of life. Doubtless there are many excuses to be made for heads of households who are leaving their young folk to represent them in religion, and pretty much in everything outside the mere maintaining of existence or the enjoyment of it.

The demands of public service all round are sometimes quite out of proportion to the available time and strength. Yet the Christian duty never lapses ; and it is a great evil when the balance is wanting between old and young, tried and untried.

## 2. THE TRIBE OF LEVI

### NUMBERS i. 47-54

The tribe of Levi is not numbered with the rest. No warlike service, no half-shekel for the sanctuary, is to be exacted from the Levite. His contribution to the general good is to be of another kind. Pitching their tents about the tabernacle, the men of this tribe are to guard the sanctuary from careless or rude intrusion, and minister unto it, taking charge of its parts and furniture, dismantling it when it is to be removed, setting it up again when another stage of the march is over.

In this order it is implied that, although according to the ideal of the Mosaic law Israel was to be a holy nation, yet the reality fell very far short of it. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy : for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 1, 2). Again and again this command of consecration is given. But neither in the wilderness, nor throughout the pre-exilic history, nor after the Babylonian affliction had purged the nation of idolatry, was Israel so holy that access to the sanctuary could be allowed to the men of the tribes. Rather, as time went by, did the need for special consecration of those about the temple become more evident. Although by statute the tribe of Levi was well provided for, it cannot be said that the life of the Levite was at

any time enviable from a worldly point of view ; at the best it was a kind of honourable poverty. Something else than mere priest-craft upheld the system which separated the whole tribe ; something else made the Levites content with their position. There was a real and imperative sense of need to guard the sanctities of religion, a jealousy for the honour of God, which, originating with Moses and the priesthood, was felt throughout the whole nation.

As we have seen, the scheme of Israel's religion required this array of servants of the sanctuary. Under Christianity the ideal of the life of faith and the manner of worship are entirely different. A way into the holy place of the Divine presence is now open to every believer, and each may have boldness to enter it. But even under Christianity there is a general failure from holiness, from the spiritual worship of God. And as among the Hebrews, so among Christians, the need for a body of guardians of sacred truth and pure religion has been widely acknowledged. Throughout the Church generally down to the Reformation, and still in countries like Russia and Spain, we may even say in England, the condition of things is like that in Israel. A people conscious of ignorance and secularity, feeling nevertheless the need of religion, willingly supports the "priests," sometimes a great army, who conduct the worship of God. There is nothing to wonder at here, in a sense ; much, indeed, for which to be thankful. Yet the system is not the New Testament one ; and those who endeavour to realise the ideal are not to be branded and scorned as schismatics. They should be honoured for their noble effort to reach and use the holy consecration of the Christian.

### 3. THE CAMP

#### NUMBERS ii

The second chapter is devoted to the arrangement of the camp and the position of the various tribes on the march. The front is eastward, and Judah has the post of honour in the van; at its head Nahshon son of Amminadab. Issachar and Zebulun, closely associated with Judah in the genealogy as descended from Leah, are the others in front of the tabernacle. The right wing, to the south of the tabernacle, is composed of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, again connected by the hereditary tie, Gad by descent from the "handmaid of Leah." The seniority of Reuben is apparently acknowledged by the position of the tribe at the head of the right wing, which would sustain the first attack of the desert clans; for dignity and onerous duty go together. The rear is formed by Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, connected with one another by descent from Rachel. Northward, on the left of the advance, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali have their position. Standards of divisions and ensigns of families are not forgotten in the description of the camp; and Jewish tradition has ventured to state what some of these were. Judah is said to have been a lion (compare "the lion that is of the tribe of Judah," Rev. v. 5); Reuben, the image of a human head; Ephraim, an ox; and Dan an eagle. If this tradition is accepted, it will connect the four main ensigns of Israel with the vision of Ezekiel in which the same four figures were united in each of the four living creatures that issued from the fiery cloud.

The picture of the great organised camp and orderly

march of Israel is interesting ; but it presents a contrast to the disorganised, disorderly condition of human society in every land and every age. While it may be said that there are nations leagued in creed, allied by descent, which form the van ; that others, similarly connected more or less, constitute the right and left wings of the advancing host ; and the rest, straggling far behind, bring up the rear—this is but a very imaginative representation of the fact. No people advances as with one mind and one heart ; no group of nations can be said to have a single standard. Time and destiny urge on the host, and all is to be won by steady resolute endeavour. Yet some are encamped, while others are moving about restlessly or engaged in petty conflicts that have nothing to do with moral gain. There should be unity ; but one division is embroiled with another, tribe crosses swords with tribe. The truth is that as Israel came far short of real spiritual organisation and due disposition of its forces to serve a common end, so it is still with the human race. Nor do the schemes that are occasionally tried to some extent promise a remedy for our disorder. For the symbol of our most holy faith is not set in the midst by most of those who aim at social organisation, nor do they dream of seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly. The description of the camp of Israel has something to teach us still. Without the Divine law there is no progress, without a Divine rallying-point there is no unity. Faith must control, the standard of Christianity must show the way ; otherwise the nations will only wander aimlessly, and fight and die in the desert.

### III

#### *PRIESTS AND LEVITES*

##### I. THE PRIESTHOOD

NUMBERS iii. 1-10

IN the opening verse of this chapter, which relates to the designation of the priesthood, Moses is named, for once, after his brother. According to the genealogy of *Exod. vi.*, Aaron was the elder; and this may have led to the selection of his as the priestly house—which again would give him priority in a passage relating to the hierarchy. If Moses had chosen, his undoubted claims would have secured the priestly office for his family. But he did not desire this; and indeed the duties of administrative head of the people were sufficiently heavy. Aaron was apparently fitted for the sacerdotal office, and without peculiar qualifications for any other. He seems to have had no originating power, but to have been ready to fall in with and direct the routine of ceremonial worship. And we may assume that Moses knew the surviving sons of Aaron to be of the stamp of their father, likely to inaugurate a race of steady, devoted servants of the altar.

Yet all Aaron's sons had not been of this quiet disposition. Nadab and Abihu, the two eldest, had sinned presumptuously, and brought on themselves the doom of death. No fewer than five times is their fall

referred to in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Whatever that strange fire was which they put in their censers and used before the Lord, the judgment that befell them was signal and impressive. And here reference is made to the fact that they died without issue, as if to mark the barrenness of the sacrilegious. Did it not appear that inherent disqualification for the priesthood, the moral blindness or self-will which was shown in their presumptuous act, had been foreseen by God, who wrote them childless in His book? This race must not be continued. Israel must not begin with priests who desecrate the altar.

Whether the death of those two sons of Aaron came by an unexpected stroke, or was a doom inflicted after judgment in which their father had to acquiesce, the terrible event left a most effectual warning. The order appointed for the incense offering, and all other sacred duties, would thenceforth be rigidly observed. And the incident—revived continually for the priests when they studied the Law—must have had especial significance through their knowledge of the use and meaning of fire in idolatrous worship. The temptation was often felt, against which the fate of Nadab and Abihu set every priest on his guard, to mingle the supposed virtue of other religious symbols with the sanctities of Jehovah. Who can doubt that priests of Israel, secretly tempted by the rites of sun-worship, might have gone the length of carrying the fire of Baal into Jehovah's temple, if the memory of this doom had not held back the hand? Here also the degradation of the burnt offering by taking flame from a common fire was by implication forbidden. The source of that which is the symbol of Divine purity must be sacredly pure.

Those who minister in holy things have still a corresponding danger, and may find here a needed warning. The fervour shown in sacred worship and work must have an origin that is purely religious. He who pleads earnestly with God on behalf of men, or rises to impassioned appeal in beseeching men to repent, appearing as an ambassador of Christ urged by the love of souls, has to do not with symbols, but with truths, ideas, Divine mysteries infinitely more sacred than the incense and fire of Old Testament worship. For the Hebrew priest outward and formal consecration sufficed. For the minister of the New Testament, the purity must be of the heart and soul. Yet it is possible for the heat of alien zeal, of mere self-love or official ambition, to be carried into duties the most solemn that fall to the lot of man; and if it is not in the Spirit of God a preacher speaks or offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving, if some other inspiration makes him eloquent and gives his voice its tremulous notes, sin like that of Nadab and Abihu is committed, or rather a sin greater than theirs. With profound sorrow it must be confessed that the "strange fire" from idolatrous altars too often desecrates the service of God. Excitement is sought by those who minister in order that the temperament may be raised to the degree necessary for free and ardent speech; and it is not always of a purely religious kind. Those who hear may for a time be deceived by the pretence of unction, by dramatic tones, by alien fire. But the difference is felt when it cannot be defined; and on the spiritual life of the ministrant the effect is simply fatal.

The surviving sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar, were anointed and "consecrated to minister in the

priest's office." The form of designation is indicated by the expression, "whose hand he filled to exercise priesthood." This has been explained as referring to a portion of the ceremony described in Lev. viii. 26 f. "And out of the basket of unleavened bread, that was before the Lord, he took one unleavened cake, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat, and upon the right thigh: and he put the whole upon the hands of Aaron, and upon the hands of his sons, and waved them for a wave offering before the Lord." The explanation is scarcely satisfactory. In the long ceremony of consecration this incident was not the only one to which the expression "filling the hand" was applied; and something simpler must be found as the source of an idiomatic phrase. To fill the hand would naturally mean to pay or hire, and we seem to be pointed to the time when for the patriarchal priesthood there was substituted one that was official, supported by the community. In Exod. xxviii. 41 and in Lev. viii. 33, the expression in question is used in a general sense incompatible with its reference to any particular portion of the ceremony of consecration. It is also used in Judges xvii., where to all appearance the consecration of Micah's Levite implied little else than the first payment on account of a stipulated hire. The phrase, then, appears to be a mark of history, and carries the mind back to the simple origin of the priestly office.

Eleazar and Ithamar "ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father." So far as the narrative of the Pentateuch gives information, there were originally, and during the whole of the wilderness journey, no other priests than Aaron and his sons. Nadab and Abihu having died, there re-

mained but the two besides their father. Phinehas the son of Eleazar appears in the history, but is not called a priest, nor has he any priestly functions. What he does is indeed quite apart from the holy office. And this early restriction of the number is not only in favour of the Pentateuchal history, but partly explains the fact that in Deuteronomy the priests and Levites are apparently identified. Taking at their very heaviest the duties specially laid on the priests, much must have fallen to the share of their assistants, who had their own consecration as ministers of the sanctuary. It is certain that members of the Levitical families were in course of time admitted to the full status of priests.

The direction is given in ver. 10, "Thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall keep their priesthood; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." This is rigorously exclusive, and seems to contrast with the statements of Deuteronomy, "At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister unto Him and to *bless in His name* unto this day" (x. 8); and again, "The priests the Levites, even all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and His inheritance" (xviii. 1); and once more, "Moses wrote the law and delivered it unto the priests, the sons of Levi, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel" (xxxii. 9). Throughout Deuteronomy the priests are never called sons of Aaron, nor is Aaron called a priest. Whether the cause of this apparent discrepancy is that Deuteronomy regarded the arrangements for the priestly service in

a different light, or that the distinction of priests from Levites fell into abeyance and was afterwards revived, the variation cannot be ignored. In the book of Joshua "the children of Aaron the priest" appear on a few occasions, and certain of the duties of high priest are ascribed to Eleazar. Yet even in Joshua the importance attached to the Aaronic house is far less than in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers; and the expression "the priests the Levites" occurs twice. If we regard the origin of the Aaronic priesthood as belonging to the Mosaic period, then the wars and disturbances of the settlement in Canaan must have entirely disorganised the system originally instituted. In the days of the judges there seems to have been no orderly observance of those laws which gave the priesthood importance. Scattered Levites had to do as they best could what was possible in the way of sacrifice and purification. And this confusion may have begun in the plain of Moab. The death of Aaron, the personal insignificance of his sons, and still more the death of Moses himself, would place the administration of religious as well as secular affairs on an entirely different footing. Memoranda preserved in Leviticus and Numbers may therefore be more ancient than those of Deuteronomy; and Deuteronomy, describing the state of things before the passage of Jordan, may in regard to the priesthood reflect the conditions of a new development, the course of which did not blend with the original design till after the captivity.

The tribe of Levi is, according to ver. 6 ff., appointed to minister to Aaron, and to keep his charge and that of the congregation before the "tent of meeting," to do the service of the tabernacle. For all the necessary

work connected with the sanctuary the Levites are "wholly given unto Aaron on behalf of the children of Israel." It was of course in accordance with the patriarchal idea that each clan should have a hereditary chief. Here, however, an arbitrary rule breaks in. For Aaron was not by primogeniture head of the tribe of Levi. He belonged to a younger family of the tribe. The arrangements made by Moses as the representative of God superseded the succession by birthright. And this is by no means the only case in which a law usually adhered to was broken through. According to the history the high-priesthood did not invariably follow the line of Eleazar. At a certain point a descendant of Ithamar was for some reason raised to the dignity. Samuel, too, became virtually a priest, and rose higher than any high-priest before the captivity, although he was not even of the tribe of Levi. The law of spiritual endowment in his case set the other aside. And is it not often so? The course of providence brings forward the man who can guide affairs. While his work lasts he is practically supreme. It is useless to question or rebel. Neither in religion nor in government can the appeal to Divine right or to constitutional order alter the fact. Korah need not revolt against Moses; nor may Aaron imagine that he can push himself into the front. And Aaron, as head of the tribe of Levi, and of the religious administration, is safe in his own position so long only as his office is well served. It is to responsibility he is called, rather than to honour. Let him do his duty, otherwise he will surely become merely a name or a figure.

## 2. THE FIRST-BORN

NUMBERS iii. 11-13, 40-51

These two passages supplement each other and may be taken together. Jehovah claims the first-born in Israel. He hallowed them unto Himself on the day when He smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt. They are now numbered from a month old and upward. But instead of their being appointed personally to holy service, the Levites are substituted for them. The whole account supplies a scheme of the origin of the sacerdotal tribe.

It has been questioned whether the number of the first-born, which is 22,273, can in any way be made to agree with the total number of the male Israelites, previously stated at 603,550. Wellhausen is specially contemptuous of a tradition or calculation which, he says, would give an average of forty children to each woman. But the difficulty partly yields if it is kept in view that the Levites were separated for the service of the sanctuary. Naturally it would be the heir-apparent alone of each family group whose liability to this kind of duty fell to be considered. The head of a household was, according to the ancient reckoning, its priest. In Abraham's family no one counted as a first-born but Isaac. Now that a generation of Israelites is growing up sanctified by the covenant, it appears fit that the presumptive priest should either be devoted to sacerdotal duty, or relieved of it by a Levite as his substitute. Suppose each family had five tents, and suppose further that the children born before the exodus are not reckoned, the number will not be found at all disproportionate. The absolute number remains a difficulty.

Dr. Robertson Smith argues from his own premises about the sanctity of the first-born. He repudiates the notion that at one time the Hebrews actually sacrificed all their first-born sons; yet he affirms that "there must have been some point of attachment in ancient custom for the belief that the Deity asked for such a sacrifice."<sup>1</sup> "I apprehend," he proceeds, "that all the prerogatives of the first-born among Semitic peoples are originally prerogatives of sanctity; the sacred blood of the kin flows purest and strongest in him (Gen. xlix. 3). Neither in the case of children nor in that of cattle did the congenital holiness of the first-born originally imply that they must be sacrificed or given to the Deity on the altar, but only that if sacrifice was to be made, they were the best and fittest because the holiest victims." The passage in Numbers may be confidently declared to be far from any such conception. The special fitness for sacrifice of the first-born of an animal is assumed: the fitness of the heir of a family, again, is plainly not to *become* a sacrifice, but to offer sacrifice. The first-born of the Egyptians died. But it is the life, the holy activity of His own people, not their death, God desires. And this holy activity, rising to its highest function in the first-born, is according to our passage laid on the Levites to a certain extent. Not entirely indeed. The whole congregation is still consecrated and must be holy. All are bound by the covenant. The head of each family group will still have to officiate as a priest in celebrating the passover. Certain duties, however, are transferred for the better protection of the sanctities of worship.

The first-born are found to exceed the number of

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<sup>1</sup> "Religion of the Semites," p. 445.

the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three; and for their redemption Moses takes "five shekels apiece by the poll; after the shekel of the sanctuary." The money thus collected is given unto Aaron and his sons.

The method of redemption here presented, purely arbitrary in respect of the sum appointed for the ransom of each life, is fitly contrasted by the Apostle Peter with that of the Christian dispensation. He adopts the word *redeem*, taking it over from the old economy, but says, "Ye were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers." And the difference is not only that the Christian is redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, but this also, that, while the first-born Israelite was relieved of certain parts of the holy service which might have been claimed of him by Jehovah, it is for sacred service, "to be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices," Christians are redeemed. In the one case exemption, in the other case consecration is the end. The difference is indeed great, and shows how much the two covenants are in contrast with each other. It is not to enable us to escape any of the duties or obligations of life Christ has given Himself for us. It is to make us fit for those duties, to bring us fully under those obligations, to purify us that we may serve God with our bodies and spirits which are His.

A passage in Exodus (xiii. 11 f.) must not be overlooked in connection with that presently under consideration. The enactment there is to the effect that when Israel is brought into the land of the Canaanites every first-born of beasts shall be set apart unto the Lord, the firstling of an ass shall be redeemed with a

lamb or killed, and all first-born children shall be redeemed. Here the singular point is that the law is deferred, and does not come into operation till the settlement in Canaan. Either this was set aside for the provisions made in Numbers, or these are to be interpreted by it. The difficulties of the former view are greatly increased by the mention of the "shekel of the sanctuary," which seems to imply a settled medium of exchange, hardly possible in the wilderness.

In Numb. viii. 18, 19, the subject of redemption is again touched, and the additions are significant. Now the service of the Levites "in the tent of meeting" is by way of atonement for the children of Israel, "that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary." Atonement is not with blood in this case, but by the service of the living substitute. While the general scope of the Mosaic law requires the shedding of blood in order that the claim of God may be met, this exception must not be forgotten. And in a sense it is the chief instance of atonement, far transcending in expressiveness those in which animals were slaughtered for propitiation. The whole congregation, threatened with plagues and disasters in approaching God, has protection through the holy service of the Levitical tribe. Here is substitution of a kind which makes a striking point in the symbolism of the Old Testament in its relation to the New. The principle may be seen in patriarchal history. The ten in Sodom, if ten righteous men could have been found, would have saved it, would have been its atonement in a sense, not by their death on its behalf but by their life. And Moses himself, standing alone between God and Israel, prevails by his pleading and saves the nation from its doom.

So our Lord says of His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Their holy devotion preserves the mass from moral corruption and spiritual death. Again, "for the elect's sake," the days of tribulation shall be shortened (Matt. xxiv. 22).

The ceremonies appointed for the cleansing and consecration of the Levites, described in viii. 5-26, may be noticed here. They differed considerably from those enjoined for the consecration of priests. Neither were the Levites anointed with sacred oil, for instance, nor were they sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices; nor, again, do they seem to have worn any special dress, even in the tabernacle court. There was, however, an impressive ritual which would produce in their minds a consciousness of separation and devotion to God. The water of expiation, literally of *sin*, was first to be sprinkled upon them, a baptism not signifying anything like regeneration, but having reference to possible defilements of the flesh. A razor was then to be made to pass over the whole body, and the clothes were to be washed, also to remove actual as well as legal impurity. This cleansing completed, the sacrifices followed. One bullock for a burnt offering, with its accompanying meal offering, and one for a sin offering were provided. The people being assembled towards the door of the tent of meeting, the Levites were placed in front of them to be presented to Jehovah. The princes probably laid their hands on the Levites, so declaring them the representatives of all for their special office. Then Aaron had to offer the sacrifices for the Levites, and the Levites themselves as living sacrifices to Jehovah. The Levites laid their hands on the bullocks, making them their substitutes for the symbolic purpose. Aaron and his sons slew the

animals and offered them in the appointed way, burning the one bullock upon the altar, around which its blood had been sprinkled, of the other burning only certain portions called the fat. Then the ceremony of waving was performed, or what was possible in the circumstances, each Levite being passed through the hands of Aaron or one of his sons. So set apart, they were, according to viii. 24, required to wait upon the work of the tent of meeting, each from his twenty-fifth to his fiftieth year. The service had been previously ordered to begin at the thirtieth year (iv. 3). Afterwards the time of ministry was still further extended (1 Chron. xxiii. 24-27).

Such is the account of the symbolic cleansing and the representative ministry of the Levites; and we see both a parallel and a contrast to what is demanded now for the Christian life of obedience and devotion to God. Purification there must be from all defilement of flesh and spirit. With the change which takes place when by repentance and faith in Christ we enter into the free service of God there must be a definite and earnest purging of the whole nature. "As ye presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification" (Rom. vi. 19). "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry, . . . put ye also away all these: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man" (Col. iii. 5, 8, 9). Thus the purity of heart and soul so imperfectly represented by the cleansings of the Levites

is set forth as the indispensable preparation of the Christian. And the contrast lies in this, that the purification required by the New Testament law is for all, and is the same for each. Whether one is to serve in the ministry of the Gospel or sweep a room as for God's cause, the same profound purity is needful. All in the Kingdom of God are to be holy, for He is holy.

### 3. LEVITICAL SERVICE

NUMBERS iii. 14-39; iv

The sacred service of the Levites is described in detail. There are three divisions, the Gershonites, the Kohathites, the Merarites. The Gershonites, from a month old and upward, number 7,500; the Kohathites, 8,600; the Merarites, 6,200. Eleazar, son of Aaron, is prince of the princes of the Levites.

The office of the Kohathites is of peculiar sanctity, next to that of Aaron and his sons. They are not "cut off" or specially separated from among the Levites (iv. 18); but they have duties that require great care, and they must not venture to approach the most holy things till preparation has been made by the priests. The manner of that preparation is fully described. When order has been given for the setting forward of the camp, Aaron and his sons cover the ark of the covenant first with the veil of the screen, then with a covering of sealskin, and lastly with a cloth of blue; they also insert in the rings the long staves with which the ark is to be carried. Next the table of shewbread is covered with a blue cloth; the dishes, spoons, bowls, and cups are placed on the top, over them a scarlet cloth, and above that a sealskin covering; the staves of the table are also placed in readiness. The

candlestick and its lamps and other appurtenances are wrapped up in like manner and put on a frame. Then the golden altar by itself, and the vessels used in the service of the sanctuary by themselves are covered with blue cloth and sealskin and made ready for carriage. Finally, the great altar is cleansed of ashes, covered up with purple cloth and sealskin, and its staves set in their rings. When all this is done the sons of Kohath may advance to bear the holy things, never touching them lest they die.

The question arises, why so great care is considered necessary that none but the priests should handle the furniture of the sanctuary. We have learned to think that a real religion should avoid secrecy, that everything connected with it should be done in the open light of day. Why, then, is the shrine of Jehovah guarded with such elaborate precaution? And the answer is that the idea of mystery appears here as absolutely needful, in order to maintain the solemn feelings of the people and their sense of the holiness of God. Not only because the Israelites were rude and earthly, but also because the whole system was symbolic, the holy things were kept from common sight. In this respect the worship described in these books of Moses resembled that of other nations of antiquity. The Egyptian temple had its innermost shrine where the arks of the gods were placed; and into that most holy place with its silver soil the priests alone went. But even Egyptian worship, with all its mystery, did not always conceal the arks and statues of the gods. When those gods were believed to be favourable, the arks were carried in procession, the images so far unveiled that they could be seen by the people. It was entirely different in the case of the

sacred symbols and instruments of Hebrew worship, according to the ideal of the law. And the elaborate precautions are to be regarded as indicating the highest tide-mark of symbolised sanctity. Jehovah was not like Egyptian or Assyrian or Phœnician gods. These might be represented by statues which the people could see. But everything used in His worship must be kept apart. The worship must be of faith; and the ark which was the great symbol must remain always invisible. The effect of this on the popular mind was complex, varying with the changing circumstances of the nation; and to trace it would be an interesting piece of study. It may be remembered that in the time of most ardent Judaism the want of the ark made no difference to the veneration in which the temple was held and the intense devotion of the people to their religion. The ark was used as a talisman in Eli's time; in the temple erected after the captivity there was no ark; its place in the holy of holies was occupied by a stone.

The Gershonites had as their charge the screens and curtains of the tabernacle, or most holy place, and the tent of meeting or holy place, also the curtains of the court of the tabernacle. The boards, bars, pillars, and sockets of the tabernacle and of the court were to be entrusted to the Merarites.

In the whole careful ordering of the duties to be discharged by these Levites we see a figure of the service to be rendered to God and men in one aspect of it. Organisation, attention to details, and subordination of those who carry out schemes to the appointed officials, and of all, both inferior and superior, to law—these ideas are here fully represented. Assuming the incapacity of many for spontaneous effort, the principle

that God is not a God of confusion but of order in the churches of the saints may be held to point to subordination of a similar kind even under Christianity. But the idea carried to its full limit, implies an inequality between men which the free spirit of Christianity will not admit. It is an honour for men to be connected with any spiritual enterprise, even as bearers of burdens. Those who take such a place may be spiritual men, thoughtful men, as intelligent and earnest as their official superiors. But the Levites, according to the law, were to be bearers of burdens, menials of the sanctuary from generation to generation. Here the parallel absolutely fails. No Christian, however cordially he may fill such a place for a time, is bound to it in perpetuity. His way is open to the highest duties and honours of a redeemed son of God. In a sense Judaism even did not prevent the spiritual advancement of any Levite, or any man. The priesthood was practically closed, but the office of the prophet, really higher than that of the priest, was not. From the routine work of the priesthood men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel were called by the Spirit of God to speak in the name of the Highest. The word of the Lord was put into their mouths. Elijah, who was apparently of the tribe of Manasseh, Amos and Daniel, who belonged to Judah, became prophets. The open door for the men of the tribes was into this calling. Neither in Israel nor in Christendom is priesthood the highest religious function. The great servants of God might well refuse it or throw aside its shackles.

## IV

### *DEFILEMENT AND PURGATION*

#### NUMBERS v

THE separation of Israel as a people belonging to Jehovah proceeded on ideas of holiness which excluded from privilege many of the Hebrews themselves. The law did not ordain that in cases of defilement there might be immediate purification by washing or sacrifice. So far as ceremonial uncleanness was concerned, we may think this might have been provided for, and moral offences alone might have involved the offender in continued defilement. But just as idolatry, blasphemy, and murder caused pollution which could not be removed by sacrifice, but only by the capital punishment of the guilty, so certain bodily conditions and defects, and certain diseases, chiefly leprosy and those akin to it, were held to cause a defilement which could not be purged by any ceremony. A high standard of bodily health and purity was required for the priesthood; a lower standard was to be applied to the people. And the system declaring the uncleanness of many animals, and of the person under various conditions, touched at countless points the life of society. An Israelite who was unclean for one or other of a hundred reasons could not approach the sanctuary. He had his portion in God after a sense;

yet for a time, it might be for life, the peculiar blessings of holy fellowship were denied him. He could celebrate no feast. He had no share in the great atonement. The precautions and terms to be observed were of such a nature that if the law had been at any time stringently enforced a very large percentage of the people would have been denied access to the altar.

It may appear a strange thing that the precept, "Ye shall be holy ; for I am holy," was affixed not only to moral duties but with almost the same force to ceremonial duties. We can understand this, however, when we trace the result of the priestly ordinances. They created religious care and feeling ; and the end was gained not so much by directing attention, as we now do, to faults of conduct, defects of will, sins of injustice, impurity, intemperance, and the like, but by keeping up a scrupulous attention to matters not, properly speaking, either moral or immoral, not ethical as we say, which were yet declared to be of moment in religion. The moral law did its part. But to make the enforcement of moral statutes, many of which bore on desire and will, the only means of urging the fear of God, would have resulted practically in a very bare and desultory cultus. Among a comparatively rude people like the Israelites it would have been absurd to institute a religion consisting of "morality touched by emotion." For the mass of people still it is equally hopeless. There must be ordinances of prayer, praise, sacrament, and the duties which reach Godward through the Church. The value of the whole ceremonial system of the Mosaic law is clear from this point of view ; and we need not wonder in the least at the nature of many provisions which, without grasp of the principle, we might reckon irksome and useless. The origin of some

of the statutes is apparently hygienic ; others again reach back to customs and beliefs of a very primitive world. But they are made part of the sacred law in order to enforce the conviction that the judgment of God enters into the whole of life, follows men wherever they go, decides as to their state with relation to Him hour by hour, almost moment by moment. The ceremonial law was a constant and strenuous lesson in regard to the omnipresence of God, and the oversight of human affairs by Him. It created a conscience of God's existence, His control, His superintendence of each life. And for a certain stage of the education of Israel this could be achieved in no other way. The moral and spiritual progress of a people, depending on the recognition of the authority of One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, depends also, of necessity, on the sense of His oversight of human life at every point.

## I. EXCLUSION FROM THE CAMP

### NUMBERS v. 1-4

The rigidness of the law which excluded lepers from the camp and afterwards from the cities had its necessity in the presumed nature of their disease. Leprosy was regarded as contagious, and practically incurable by any medical appliances, requiring to be kept in check by strenuous measures. Care for the general health meant hardship to the lepers ; but this could not be avoided. From friends and home they were sent forth to live together as best they might, and spend what remained of life in almost hopeless separation. The authority of Moses is attached to the statute of exclusion, and there can be no doubt of

its great antiquity. In Leviticus there are detailed enactments regarding the disease, some of which contemplate its decay and provide for the restoration to privilege of those who had been cured. The ceremonies were complicated, and among them were sacrifices to be offered by way of "atonement." The leper was alienated from God, severed from the congregation as one guilty in the eye of the law (Lev. xiv. 12); and there can be no wonder that with this among other facts before him the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the law as having a mere "shadow of the good things to come."

And yet, in view of the malignant nature of the disease and the peril it caused to the general health, we must admit the wisdom of segregating those afflicted with leprosy. That Israel might be a robust people capable of its destiny, a rule like this was needful. It anticipated our modern laws made in harmony with advanced medical science, which require segregation or isolation in cases of virulent disease.

It has been affirmed that leprosy was from the first regarded as symbolic of moral disease, and that the legislation was from this point of view. There is, however, no evidence to support the theory. Indeed the conception of moral evil would have been confused rather than helped by any such idea. For although evil habits taint the mind and vice ruins it as leprosy taints and destroys the body; although the infectious nature of sin is fitly indicated by the insidious spread of this disease—one point in which there is no resemblance would make the symbol dangerously misleading. A few here and there were attacked by leprosy, and these with their blotched disfigured bodies were easily distinguished from the healthy.

But this was in contrast with the secret moral malady by which all were tainted. The teaching that leprosy is a type of sin would make, not for morality, but for hypocrisy. The symptoms of a bad nature, like the signs of leprosy, would be looked for and found by every man in his neighbour, not in his own heart. The hypocrite would be encouraged in his self-satisfaction because he escaped the judgment of his fellow men. But the disease of sin is endemic, universal. The whole congregation was by reason of that excluded from the sanctuary of God.

According to the idea which underlies the priest law, leprosy did not typify sin; it meant sin. In no single place, indeed, is this directly affirmed. Yet the belief connecting bodily afflictions and calamities with transgressions implied it, and the fact that guilt offerings had to be made for the leper when he was cleansed. Again, in the cases of Miriam, of Gehazi, and of Uzziah, the punishment of sin was leprosy. Under the conditions of climate which often prevailed, the germs of this disease might rapidly be developed by excitement, especially by the excitement of immoral rashness. Here we may find the connection which the law assumes between leprosy and guilt, and the origin of the statute which made the intervention of the priests necessary. In their poor dwellings beyond camp and city wall the lepers lay under a double reproach. They were not only tainted in body but appeared as sinners above others, men on whom some divine judgment had fallen, as the very name of their disease implied. And not till One came who did not fear to lay His hand on the leprous flesh, whose touch brought healing and life, was the pressure of the moral condemnation taken away. Of many cases of leprosy He would have said,

as of the blindness He cured: "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents."

Now is the law to be charged with creating a class of social pariahs? Is there any reason for saying that in some way the legislation should have expressed pity rather than the rigour which appears in the passage before us and other enactments regarding leprosy? It would be easy to bring arguments which would seem to prove the law defective here. But in matters of this kind civilization and Christian culture could not be forestalled. What was possible, what in the conditions that existed could be carried into effect, this only was commanded. These old enactments sprang out of the best wisdom and religion of the age. But they do not represent the whole of the Divine will, the Divine mercy, even as they were contemporaneously revealed. Add to the statutes regarding leprosy the other, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and those that enjoined kindness to the poor and provision for their needs, and the true tenor of the legislation will be understood. According to these laws there were to be no pariahs in Israel. It was a sad necessity if any were excluded from the congregation of God's people. The laws of brotherhood would insure for the wretched colony outside the camp every possible consideration. Denied access to God in festival and sacrifice, the lepers appealed to the humane feelings of the people. With their pathetic cry, "Unclean, unclean!" their loose hair and rent clothes, they confessed a miserable state that touched every heart. As time went on, the law of segregation was interpreted liberally. Even in the synagogues a place was set apart for the lepers. The kindly disposition promoted by the Mosaic institutions was shown thus, and in many other ways.

The lepers banished outside the camp remind us of those who have for no wrong-doing of their own to endure social reproach. Were sometimes good men and women among the Hebrews, men with kind hearts, good mothers and daughters, attacked by this disease and compelled to betake themselves to the squalid tents of the lepers? That decree of rigorous precaution is outdone by the strange fact that under the providence of God, in His world, the best have often had to undergo opprobrium and cruelty; that Jesus Himself was crucified as a malefactor, bore the curse of him that "hangeth upon a tree." We see great suffering which is not due to moral delinquency; and we see the sting of it taken quite away. The stern ordinances of nature have light thrown upon them from a higher world. "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." For our sakes He was the object of brutal mockery, the sufferer, the sacrifice.

Besides the lepers and those who had an issue, every one who was unclean by reason of touching a dead body was to be excluded from the camp. This provision appears to rest on the idea that death was no "debt of nature," but unnatural, the result of the curse of God. Associated, however, in the statute before us with leprosy, defilement from the dead may have been decreed to prevent the spread of disease. Many maladies too well known to us have an infectious character; and those who were present at a death would be most exposed to their influence. Pathological explanations do not by any means account for all the kinds and causes of defilement; but exclusion from the camp is the special point here; and the cases may be classed together as having a common origin. The notion that some demon or fallen spirit was at work both in pro-

ducing leprosy and in causing death, was involved in the customs of some barbarous tribes and entered into the beliefs of the Egyptians and Assyrians. This explanation, however, is too remote and alien from Judaism to be applied to these statutes regarding uncleanness, at least in the form they have in the Mosaic books. The few hints surviving in them, as where a bird was to be allowed to fly away when the leper was pronounced clean, cannot be permitted to fix a charge of superstition on the whole code.

A singular point in the statute regarding uncleanness "by the dead" is that the word נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) stands apparently for the dead body. Of this some other explanation is needed than the free transference of meanings in Hebrew. Here and elsewhere in the Book of Numbers (vi. 11; ix. 6, 7, 10; xix. 13), as well as in various passages in Leviticus, defilement is attributed to the *nephesh*. Commonly the word means *soul* or animal life-principle. When connected with death it corresponds to our word "ghost," as in Job xi. 20; Jer. xv. 9. Now the law was that not only those who touched a dead body, but all present in a house when death took place in it, were unclean. The question occurs whether the *nephesh*, or soul escaping at death, was believed to defile. As if in doubt here a rabbi said, "The body and the soul may plead successfully not guilty by charging their sinful life each upon the other. The body may say: 'Since that guilty soul parted with me, I have been lying in the grave as harmless as a stone.' The soul may plead: 'Since that depraved body separated from me, I flutter about in the air like an innocent bird.'" Is it not possible that the *nephesh* meant the effluvium of the dead body, the active element which, springing from

corruption, diffused uncleanness through the whole house of death? It seems quite in harmony with other uses of the word, and with the idea of defilement, to interpret "was unclean by the *nephesh*," "sinned by the *nephesh*," as technical expressions carrying this meaning. The passage Numb. xix. 13 is peculiarly instructive—*כָּל־הַנִּגָּע בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־רָמַת*—"Every one coming in contact with the dead, with the *nephesh* of a man who has died." To translate, "with the corpse of a man who has died," would fix on the language the fault of tautology. In Psalm xvii. 9 *nephesh* has the meaning of *deadly*, that is to say *breathing death*; and the idea here points to the meaning suggested.

The reason given for the banishment of the unclean is the presence of God in the congregation—"That they defile not their camp, in the midst whereof I dwell." All that are unhealthy, and those who have been in contact with death, which is the result of irremediable disease or accident, must be withdrawn from the precincts that belong to the Holy God. Human maladies are in contrast with the Divine health, death is in contrast to the Divine life. Here the whole scope of the legislation regarding defilement has its highest range of suggestion. It was a part of moral education to realise that God was separate from all distortion, wasting, and decay. In glad and deathless power He reigned in the midst of Israel. From the living God man received life which had to be kept pure and disciplined. Among the Egyptians it was held to be sacrilege when the operator, in the process preparatory to embalming, opened a human body. He who made the incision was driven out of the room by his assistants with abuse and violence. Quite different

is the idea of the Mosaic law which makes the holiness belong entirely to God, and requires of men the preservation of the clean life He has given. Every statute suggests that there is a tendency in the creature to fall away from purity and become unfit for fellowship with the Most Holy.

## 2. ATONEMENT FOR TRESPASS

### NUMBERS v. 5-10

The enactment of this passage refers to the sin of theft or any other breach of the eighth commandment which involved trespass not only against man, but also against God—"When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit to do a trespass against the Lord, and that soul be guilty; then shall they confess their sin which they have done." The statute supplements one given in Lev. vi. 1-4, omitting some details, but adding the provision that if the person defrauded has died, restitution shall be made to the *goël*, and if there is no surviving relation, to the priest. The cases specified in Leviticus are those of false dealing in regard to a deposit or a bargain, robbery, oppression,—probably in the way of withholding hire from a labourer,—finding what was lost and denying it; but in each instance false swearing is added to the offence and constitutes it a trespass against the Lord. Restitution to man must be made by returning the amount and one-fifth in addition; to God by bringing a ram without blemish, with which the priest makes atonement.

In this statute the punishment does not seem severe. But the penalty is imposed after confession when the offence has been for some time undetected. The

ordinary law required for the theft of an ox, if the animal had not been slaughtered, double restitution; and if it had been slaughtered or sold, fivefold restitution. In the case of a sheep slaughtered or sold the restitution was to be fourfold. Confession of the theft, according to the present statute, diminishes the penalty.

Noticeable particularly is the provision for atonement, which is nowhere else admitted in connection with a serious breach of the moral law. Any offence against the first four commandments was to be punished with death; so also were murder, adultery, and certain other crimes. It might have been expected that false swearing by any one in regard to theft or valuables intrusted to him would add to his guilt. Here, however, by means of the ram of atonement even that offence is apparently expiated. Possibly the confession is held to mitigate the crime. Still the nature of the statute is surprising and exceptional.

### 3. THE WATER OF JEALOUSY

NUMBERS v. 11-31

The long and remarkable statute regarding the water of jealousy seems to have been interposed to prevent, by means of an ordeal, that cruel practice of peremptory divorce which had been in vogue at some period among the Hebrews. The position given to woman by the old customs must have been exceedingly low. Under polygamy a wife was in constant danger of suspicions and accusations she had no means of removing. The whole scope of this enactment and the means used for deciding between the husband and a suspected wife point to the frequency and

general groundlessness of charges made by men in the "hardness of their hearts," or by other women in the hardness of theirs.

The ordeal to which the wife was to be subjected was twofold. One point was the imprecation of the Divine curse upon herself if she had been guilty. This oath was administered in terms and with ceremonies fitted to produce the most profound impression. She is set "before the Lord"—probably in the court of the sanctuary. Her hair is loose. She has the offering of jealousy in her hand—the tenth part of an ephah of barley-meal. The priest holds a basin of the "water of jealousy." The terms of the curse with its frightful consequences are not only repeated in her hearing, but written on a scroll which is dropped into the water. The second thing is her drinking of the "water of jealousy," "holy water" mingled with dust from the floor of the sanctuary, and with the terms of the curse. The nature of the ordeal was such that few guilty persons would have braved it. The only thing which appears wanting is a provision for the punishment of the man whose wife had passed the terrible test. Since the punishment of this crime was death, and he made the accusation without cause, his own judgment should have followed. Here, however, deference had to be paid to the notions of the time, as our Lord clearly indicates. The absolute right, the just equality between husband and wife, could not be established. Nor indeed, with all our progress, is it yet secured.

The ordeal of the water of jealousy must have saved many an innocent life from wreck. In one sense it was part of a system designed to maintain a high standard of morality, and in that system it had a place

which at the time could not be filled in any other way. The main stress lies on the oath of purgation ; and to the present day in certain ecclesiastical courts this is in use for the purpose of bringing to an end processes not otherwise capable of solution. It must be noted that our marriage laws, lax as they are thought to be, do not give to a husband anything like the power or allow divorce with anything like the facility admitted by the Mosaic law as some of the Rabbis interpreted it. And this ordeal was of such a nature that if those in use throughout Europe only a century ago or thereby, in the trial of witches for instance, be compared with it, we can at once see its superiority. Those barbarous tests, not used by the vulgar alone, but by religious men and Church authorities, made escape from false accusation next to impossible. Here there is absolutely nothing required which could in any sense injure or imperil an innocent woman. She might take her oath, see it written, and drink the water without the least fear or hesitation. The beneficence of the law is strongly marked along with its wisdom. It was a wonderful provision for the time.

## V

*NAZIRITISM: THE BLESSING OF AARON*

## NUMBERS vi

1. **T**HE custom of Naziritism, which tended to form a semi-religious caste, is obscure in its origin. The cases of Samson and Samuel imply that before birth some were bound in terms of this vow by their parents. In the passage before us nothing whatever is said as to the reasons which the law recognised for the practice of Naziritism. We may believe, however, that it was from the first, like many votive customs, distinctly religious. One who had been delivered from some danger or restored to health might adopt this method of showing his thankfulness to God. It is impossible to connect Naziritism with any sacerdotal duty. A man under the vow had no function, no privilege, that in the least approached that of the priest. Nor can we trace any parallel between the Nazirite rule and that of the fakirs of India or the dervishes of Egypt and Arabia, whose poverty is their mark of consecration. There is, however, some resemblance to the vow of the Arab pilgrim, who, on his way to the holy place, must not cut or dress his hair, and must abstain from bloodshed. The prophet Amos (ii. 11) claims that God had raised up young men to be Nazirites, and he places their influence almost on a level

with that of the prophets as a means of blessing to the people. We may believe, therefore, that they helped both morality and religion; and the conditions of their vow seem to have given them fine bodily health and personal appearance.

When the Nazirite vow was undertaken for a term, say thirty, sixty, or a hundred days, the law assumed its religious character, prescribed the conditions to be observed, the means of removing accidental defilement, and the ceremonies to be performed when the period of separation closed. Any man might devote himself without appealing to the priest or going through any religious rite; and in general his own conscience was depended on to make him rigidly attentive to his vow. There was to be no monastic association of Nazirites, no formal watch kept over their conduct. They mingled with others in ordinary life, and went about their business as at other times. But the unshorn hair distinguished them; they felt that the eye of God as well as the eyes of men were upon them, and walked warily under the sense of their pledge. The discharge which had to be given by the priest was a further check; it would have been withheld if any charge of laxity had been made against the Nazirite. The ceremonies of release were of a kind fitted to attract general attention.

The modern pledge of abstinence bears in various points resemblance to the Nazirite vow. We can easily believe that indulgence in strong drink was one of the principal sins against which Naziritism testified. And as in ancient Israel that body of abstainers from the fruit of the vine, honourably known as a caste, acknowledged by the Divine law, formed a constant check on intemperance, so the existence of a large

class among ourselves, bound to abstinence, aids most effectually in restraining the drinking customs of the present age. When we add to the approval of Nazirism which is before us here the fact that priests in the discharge of their ministry were required to forego the use of wine, the sanction of Hebrew legislation on its moral side may certainly be claimed for the total abstinence pledge. No doubt the circumstances differ greatly. Wine was the common beverage in Palestine. It was in general so slightly intoxicating that the use of it brought little temptation. But our distilled liquors and fermented drinks are so strongly alcoholic, so dangerous to health and morals, that the argument for abstinence is now immensely greater than it was among the Hebrews. Not only as an example of self-restraint, but as a safeguard against constant peril, the pledge of abstinence deservedly enjoys the sanction of the Churches of Christ.

On the other hand, the pledge of the total abstainer, like the vow of the Nazirite, carries with it a certain moral danger. One who, having come voluntarily under such a pledge, allows himself to break it, suffers a serious loss of spiritual power. The abstainer, like the Nazirite, is his own witness, his own judge. But if his pledge has been sacredly undertaken, solemnly made, any breach of it is an offence to conscience, a denial of obligation to God which must react on the will and life. It was not by using strong drink that Samson broke his vow of Nazirism, but in a far less serious manner—by allowing his hair to be cut off. Still his case is an instructive parable. The Spirit of the Lord passed from him; he became weak as other men, the prey of his enemies. The man who has come under the bond of total abstinence, especially in a

religious way, and breaks it, becomes weaker than others. To confess his fault and resume his resolution may not lift him up again. The will is less capable, the sense of sacredness less imperative and potent.

It is hard to say why the peculiar defilement caused by touching a dead body or being present at a death is that alone on which special attention is fixed in the Nazirite law (vi. 9 ff.). One would have expected the other offence of using wine to be dealt with rather than mere accidents, so to speak. We can see that the law as it stands is one of many that must have preceded the prophetic period. If Amos, for example, had influenced the nature of the legislation regarding Naziritism, it would have been in the direction of making drunkenness rather than ceremonial uncleanness a special point in the statutes. From beginning to end of his prophecy he makes no distinct reference to ceremonial defilement. But injustice, intemperance, disaffection to Jehovah, are constantly and vehemently denounced. Hosea, again, does refer to unclean food, the necessity of eating which would be part of Israel's punishment in exile. But he too, unless in this casual reference, is a moralist—cares nothing, so far as his language goes, for the contact with dead bodies or any other ceremonial defilement. Judging a Nazirite, he would certainly have regarded sobriety and purity of life as the tests of consecration—drunkenness and neglect of God as the sins that deserved punishment. Hosea's condemnation of Israel is: "They have left off to take heed to Jehovah. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding." In Ezekiel, whose schemes of worship and of priestly work are declared to have been the origin of the Priests' Code, the same tendency is to be found. He

has a passage regarding unclean foods, which assumes the existence of statutes on the subject. But as a legislator he is not concerned with ceremonial transgressions, the defilement caused by dead bodies, and the like. Take into account the whole of his prophecy, and it will be seen that the new heart and the right spirit are for Ezekiel the main things, and the worship of the temple he describes is to be that of a people not ceremonially consecrated, but spiritually pure, and so in moral unity with God. He adopts the old forms of worship along with the priesthood, but his desire is to give the ritual an ethical basis and aim.

The statute which applies to the discharge of the Nazirite from his rule (vi. 13-21) is exceedingly detailed, and contains provisions which on the whole seem fitted to deter rather than encourage the vow. The Nazirite could not escape from obligation as he had entered upon it, without priestly intervention and mediation. He had to offer an oblation,—one he-lamb of the first year for a burnt offering; one ewe-lamb of the first year for a sin offering; and for peace offerings a ram, with a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil; and meal offerings and drink offerings. These had to be presented by the priest in the prescribed manner. In addition to the possible cost of repeated cleansings which might be needful during the period of separation, the expense of those offerings must have been to many in a humble station almost prohibitory. We cannot help concluding that under this law, at whatever time it prevailed, Naziritism became the privilege of the more wealthy. Those who took the vow under the appointed conditions must have formed a kind of puritan aristocracy.

The final ceremonies included burning of the hair, which was carefully removed at the door of the tent of meeting. It was to be consumed in the fire under the peace offering, the idea being that the obligation of the vow and perhaps its sanctity had been identified with the flowing locks. The last rite of all was similar to that used in the consecration of priests. The sodden shoulder of the ram, an unleavened cake, and an unleavened wafer were to be placed on the hands of the Nazirite, and waved for a wave offering before the Lord—thereafter, with other parts of the sacrifice, falling to the priest. After that the man might drink wine, perhaps in a formal way at the close of the ceremonies.

To explain this elaborate ritual of discharge it has been affirmed that the idea of the vow "culminated in the sacrificial festival which terminated the consecration, and in this attained to its fullest manifestation." If this were so, ritualism was indeed predominant. To make such the underlying thought is to declare that the abstinence of the Nazirite from strong drink and dainties, to which a moralist would attach most importance, was in the eye of the law nothing compared to the symbolic feasting with God and the sacerdotal functions of the final ceremony. Far more readily would we assume that the ritual of the discharge was superfluously added to the ancient law at a time when the hierarchy was in the zenith of its power. But, as we have already seen, the final rites were of a kind fitted to direct public attention to the vow, and may have had their use chiefly in preventing any careless profession of Naziritism, tending to bring it into contempt.

One other question still demands consideration: What was meant by the "sin offering" which had to

be presented by the Nazirite when he had unintentionally incurred uncleanness, and the sin offering which had to be offered at the time of his discharge—what, in short, was the idea of sin to which this oblation corresponded? The case of the Nazirite is peculiarly instructive, for the point to be considered is seen here entirely free from complications. The Nazirite does not undertake the obligation of his vow as an acknowledgment of wrong he has done, nor does he place himself under any moral disadvantage by assuming it. There is no reason why in becoming a Nazirite or ceasing to be a Nazirite he should appear as a transgressor; rather is he honouring God by what he does. Suppose he has been present at a death which has unexpectedly taken place—that involves no moral fault by which a man's conscience should be burdened. Deliberately to touch a dead body might, under the law, have brought the sense of wrongdoing; but to be casually in a defiled house could not. Yet an atonement was necessary (vi. 11). It is expressly said that a sin offering and a burnt offering must be presented to "make atonement for him, for that he sinned by reason of the dead." And again, when he has kept the terms of his vow to the last, honouring Jehovah by his devotion, commending morality by his abstinence, maintaining more rigidly than other Israelites the idea of consecration to Jehovah, he cannot be released from his obligation till a sin-offering is made for him. There is no moral offence to be expiated. Rather, to judge in an ordinary human way, he has carried obedience farther than his fellow-Israelites.

The whole circumstances show that the sin offering has no reference to moral pollution. The idea is not

that of removing a shadow from the conscience, but taking away a taint of the flesh, or, in certain cases, of the mind which has become aware of some occult injury. A clear division was made between the moral and the immoral; and it was assumed that all Israelites were keeping the moral commandments of the law. Then moral persons were divided into those who were clean and those who were unclean; and the ceremonial law alone determined the conditions of undefiled and acceptable life. If the law declared that a sin offering was necessary, it meant not that there had been immorality, but that some specified or unspecified taint lay upon a man. No doubt there were principles according to which the law was framed. But they might not be apparent; and no man could claim to have them explained. Now with regard to Naziritism, the idea was that of a vivid and pure form of life to which a man might attain if he would discipline himself. And it seems to have been understood that in returning from this to the common life of the race an apology, so to speak, had to be made to Jehovah and to religion. The higher range of life during the term of separation was peculiarly sensitive to invasions of earthly circumstance, and especially of the defilement caused by death; and for anything of this sort there was needed more than apology, more than trespass-offering. The Nazirite going back to ordinary life was regarded in more senses than one as a sinner. The conditions of his vow had been difficult to keep, and, presumably, had been broken. He was all the more under the suspicion of defilement that he had undertaken special obligations of purity. A peculiar form of mysticism is involved here, an effort of humanity to reach transcendental holiness. And the law seemed

to give up each experiment with a sigh. In the story of Samson we have only the popular pictorial elements of Naziritism. The statutes convey hints of deeper thought and feeling.

Generally speaking the whole system of purification enjoined by the ceremonial law, the constant succession of cleansings and sacrifices, must have appeared to be arbitrary. But it would be a mistake to suppose that there was no esoteric meaning, no purpose beyond that of keeping up the sense of religious duty and the need of mediation. Some intangible defilement seems to have been associated with everything mundane, everything human. The aim was to represent sanctity of a transcendent kind, the nature of which no words could express, for which the shedding of blood alone supplied a sufficiently impressive symbol.

2. The blessing which the priests were commissioned to pronounce on the people (vi. 24-26) was in the following terms:—

“Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee:

Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

By means of this threefold benediction the name of Jehovah was to be put upon the children of Israel—that is to say, their consecration to Him as His accepted flock and their enjoyment of His covenant grace were to be signified. In a sense the invocation of this blessing was the highest function of the priest: he became the channel of spiritual endowment in which the whole nation shared.

It is a striking fact that the distinctive ideas conveyed

in the three portions of the blessing—Preservation, Enlightenment, Peace—bear a relation, by no means fanciful, to the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. First are invoked the providential care and favour of God, as Ruler of the universe, Arbiter among the nations, Source of creaturely life, Upholder of human existence. Israel as a whole, and each individual Israelite as a member of the sacred community, should in terms of the covenant enjoy the guardianship of the Almighty. The idea is expanded in Psalm cxxi. :—

11 “Jehovah is thy keeper :  
 Jehovah is thy shade upon thy right hand.  
 The sun shall not smite thee by day,  
 Nor the moon by night.  
 Jehovah shall keep thee from all evil ;  
 He shall keep thy soul.  
 Jehovah shall keep thy going out and thy coming in,  
 From this time forth and for evermore.”

And in almost every Psalm the theme of Divine preservation is touched on either in thanksgiving, prayer, or exultant hope.

a “For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah ;  
 And they shall abide there, and have it in possession.  
 The seed also of His servants shall inherit it ;  
 And they that love His name shall dwell therein.”

Often sorely pressed by the nations around, their land made the battle-field of empires, the Hebrews could comfort themselves with the assurance that Jehovah of Hosts was with them, that the God of Jacob was their refuge. And each son of Abraham had his own portion in the blessing.

“I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress,  
 My God in whom I trust.”

The keynote of joyful confidence in the unseen King was struck in the benediction which, pronounced by Aaron and by the high-priests after him, associated Israel's safety with obedience to all the laws and forms of religion.

The second member of the blessing indicates under the figure of the shining of Jehovah's face the revelation of enlightening truth. Here are implied the unfolding of God's character, the kindly disclosure of His will in promise and prophecy, the opening to the minds of men of those high and abiding laws that govern their destiny. There is a forth-shining of the Divine countenance which troubles and dismays the human heart: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." But here is denoted that gracious radiance which came to its fulness in Christ. And of this Divine shining Jacob Boehme writes: "As the sun in the visible world ruleth over evil and good, and with its light and power and all whatsoever itself is, is present everywhere, and penetrates every being, and yet in its image-like [symbolic] form doth not withdraw again to itself with its efflux, but wholly giveth itself into every being, and yet ever remaineth whole, and nothing of its being goeth away therewith: thus also it is to be understood concerning Christ's power and office which ruleth in the inward spiritual world visibly, and in the outward world invisibly, and throughly penetrateth the faithful man's soul, spirit, and heart. . . . And as the sun worketh through and through an herb so that the herb becometh solar (or filled with the virtue of the sun, and as it were so converted by the sun that it becometh wholly of the nature of the sun): so Christ ruleth in the resigned will in soul and body over all evil inclinations, over Satan's introduced lust, and generateth the

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man to be a new heavenly creature and wholly floweth into him.”<sup>1</sup>

For the Hebrew people that shining of the face of God became spiritual and potent for salvation less through the law, the priesthood, and the ritual, than through psalm and prophecy. Of the revelation of the law Paul says, “The ministration of death written and engraven on stones came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly upon the face of Moses, for the glory of his face.” With such holy and awful brightness did God appear in the law, that Moses had to cover his face from which the splendour was reflected. But the psalmist, pressing towards the light with fine spiritual boldness and humility, could say, “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psalm xxvii. 8); and again, “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Psalm lxxx. 7). And in an oracle of Isaiah (liv. 8), Jehovah says, “In overflowing wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness shall I have mercy on thee.”

In the third clause of the benediction the peace of God, that calm of mind, conscience, and life which accompanies salvation, is invoked. From the trouble and sorrow and tumult of existence, from the fear of hostile power, from evil influences seen and unseen, the Divine hand will give salvation. It seems indeed to be the meaning that the gracious regard of God is enough. Are His people in affliction and anxiety? Jehovah's look will deliver them. They will feel calmly safe as if a shield were interposed between them and the

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<sup>1</sup> “Concerning the Holy Baptism,” chap. i.

keen arrows of jealousy and hatred. "In covert of Thy presence shalt Thou hide them from the plottings of man: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Their tranquillity is described by Isaiah: "In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee . . . no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall use against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of Me, saith the Lord."

The peace of the human soul is not, however, entirely provided for by the assurance of Divine protection from hostile force. A man is not in perfect tranquillity because he belongs to a nation or a church defended by omnipotence. His own troubles and fears are the main causes of unrest. And the Spirit of God, who cleanses and renews the soul, is the true Peace-giver. "To win true peace a man needs to feel himself directed, pardoned, and sustained by a supreme power, to feel himself in the right road, at the point where God would have him to be—in order with God and the universe." In his heart the note of harmony must be struck deep and true, in profound reconciliation and unity with God. With this in view the oracles of Ezekiel connect renewal and peace. "I will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live . . . I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them . . . and I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore."

The protection of God the Father, the grace and truth of the Son, the comfort and peace of the Spirit—were these, then, implied in Israel's religion and included

in this blessing of Aaron? Germinally, at least, they were. The strain of unity running through the Old and New Testaments is heard here and in the innumerable passages that may be grouped along with the threefold benediction. The work of Christ, as Revealer and Saviour, did not begin when He appeared in the flesh. As the Divine Word He spoke by every prophet and through the priest to the silent congregations age after age. Nor did the dispensation of the Spirit arise on the world like a new light on that day of Pentecost when the disciples of Christ were gathered in their upper chamber and the tongues of fire were seen. There were those even in the old Hebrew days on whom the Spirit was poured from on high, with whom "judgment dwelt in the wilderness, and righteousness in the fruitful field: and the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." He who is our peace came in the appointed time to fill with eternal meaning the old benedictions, and set our assurance on the immovable rock of His own sacrifice and power.

## VI

### *SANCTUARY AND PASSOVER*

#### I. THE OFFERINGS OF THE PRINCES

##### NUMBERS vii .

THE opening verses of the chapter seem to imply that immediately after the erection of the tabernacle the gifts of the princes were brought by way of thank offering. The note of time, "on the day that Moses had made an end of setting up the tabernacle," appears very precise. It has been made a difficulty that, according to the narrative of Exodus, a considerable time had elapsed since the work was finished. But this account of the oblations of the princes, like a good many other ancient records incorporated in the present book, has a place given it from the desire to include everything that seemed to belong to the time of the wilderness. All incidents could not be arranged in consecutive order, because, let us suppose, the Book of Exodus to which this and others properly belonged was already complete. Numbers is the more fragmentary book. The expression, "on the day," must apparently be taken in a general sense as in Gen. ii. 4: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven." In Numb. ix. 15 the same note of time, "on the day that the tabernacle was reared up," marks

the beginning of another reminiscence or tradition. The setting up of the tabernacle and consecration of the altar gave occasion presumably for this manifestation of generosity. But the offerings described could not be provided immediately; they must have taken time to prepare. Golden spoons of ten shekels' weight were not to be found ready-made in the camp; nor were the oil and fine flour to be had at a day's notice. Of course the gifts might have been prepared in anticipation.

The account of the bringing of the offerings by the princes on twelve successive days, one Sabbath at least included, gives the impression of a festival display. The narrator dwells with some pride on the exhibition of religious zeal and liberality, a fine example set to the people by men in high position. The gifts had not been asked by Moses; they were purely voluntary. Considering the value of precious metals at the time, and the poverty of the Israelites, they were handsome, though not extravagant. It is estimated that the gold and silver of each prince would equal in value about seven hundred and thirty of our shillings, and so the whole amount contributed, without regarding the changed value of the metals, would be equivalent to some four hundred and thirty-eight pounds sterling. In addition there were the fine flour and oil, and the bullocks, rams, lambs, and kids for sacrifice.

It is an obvious remark here that spontaneous liberality has in the very form of the narrative the very highest commendation. Nothing could be more fitted to create in the minds of the people respect for the sanctuary and the worship associated with it than this hearty dedication of their wealth by the heads of the tribes. As the people saw the slow processions moving

day by day from the different parts of the camp, and joined in raising their hallelujahs of joy and praise, a spirit of generous devotion would be kindled in many hearts. It appears a singular agreement that each prince of a tribe gave precisely the same as his neighbour. But by this arrangement one was not put to shame by the greater liberality of another. Often, as we know, there is in giving, quite as much of human rivalry as of holy generosity. One must not be outdone by his neighbour, would rather surpass his neighbour. Here all appears to be done in the brotherly spirit.

Does the author of Numbers present an ideal for us to keep in view in our dedication of riches to the service of the Gospel? It was in full accord with the symbolic nature of Hebrew religion that believers should enrich the tabernacle and give its services an air of splendour. Almost the only way for the Israelites to honour God in harmony with their separation from others as His people, was that of making glorious the house in which He set His name, the whole arrangements for sacrifice and festival and priestly ministration. In the temple of Solomon that idea culminated which on this occasion fixed the value and use of the princes' gifts. But under Christianity the service of God is the service of mankind. When the thought and labour of the disciples of Christ are devoted to the needs of men there is a tribute to the glory of God. "It has been said—it is true—that a better and more honourable offering is made to our Master in ministry to the poor, in extending the knowledge of His name, in the practice of the virtues by which that name is hallowed, than in material gifts to His temple. Assuredly it is so: woe to all who think that any other kind or manner of offering

may in any way take the place of these.”<sup>1</sup> The decoration of the house used for worship, its stateliness and charm, are secondary to the upbuilding of that temple of which believing men and women are the eternal stones, for basement, pillar, and wall. In the development of Judaism the temple with its costly sacrifices and ministries swallowed up the means and enthusiasm of the people. Israel recognised no duty to the outside world. Even its prophets, because they were not identified with the temple worship, were in the main neglected and left to penury. It is a mistaken use of the teaching of the Old Testament to take across its love of splendour in sanctuary and worship, while the spread of Christian truth abroad and among the poor is scantily provided for.

But the liberality of the leaders of the tribes, and of all who in the times of the old covenant gave freely to the support of religion, stands before us to-day as a noble example. In greater gratitude for a purer faith, a larger hope, we should be more generous. Devoting ourselves first as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, we should count it an honour to give in proportion to our ability. One after another, every prince, every father of a family, every servant of the Lord, to the poorest widow, should bring a becoming gift.

The chapter closes with a verse apparently quite detached from the narrative as well as from what follows, which, however, has a singular importance as embodying the law of the oracle. “And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the Voice speaking unto him from above the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, “Seven Lamps of Architecture.”

mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim: and he spake unto Him." At first this may seem exceedingly anthropomorphic. It is a human voice that is heard by Moses speaking in response to his inquiries. One is there, in the darkness behind the veil, who converses with the prophet as friend communicates with friend. Yet, on reflection, it will be felt that the statement is marked by a grave idealism and has an air of mystery befitting the circumstances. There is no form or visible manifestation, no angel or being in human likeness, representing God. It is only a Voice that is heard. And that Voice, as proceeding from above the mercy-seat which covered the law, is a revelation of what is in harmony with the righteousness and truth, as well as the compassion, of the Unseen God. The separateness of Jehovah is very strikingly suggested. Here only, in this tent of meeting, apart from the common life of humanity, can the one prophet-mediator receive the sacred oracles. And the veil still separates even Moses from the mystic Voice. Yet God is so akin to men that He can use their words, make His message intelligible through Moses to those who are not holy enough to hear for themselves, but are capable of responding in obedient faith.

Whatever is elsewhere said in regard to the Divine communications that were given through Moses must be interpreted by this general statement. The revelations to Israel came in the silence and mystery of this place of audience, when the leader of the people had withdrawn from the bustle and strain of his common tasks. He must be in the exalted mood this highest of all offices requires. With patient, earnest soul he must wait for the Word of God. There is nothing sudden,

no violent flash of light on the ecstatic mind. All is calm and grave.

## 2. THE CANDELABRUM

NUMBERS viii. 1-4

The seven-branched candlestick with its lamps stood in the outer chamber of the tabernacle into which the priests had frequently to go. When the curtain at the entrance of the tent was drawn aside during the day there was abundance of light in the Holy Place, and then the lamps were not required. It may indeed appear from Exod. xxvii. 20, that one lamp of the seven fixed on the candelabrum was to be kept burning by day as well as by night. Doubt, however, is thrown on this by the command, repeated in Lev. xxiv. 1-4, that Aaron shall order it "from evening to morning;" and Rabbi Kimchi's statement that the "western lamp" was always found burning cannot be accepted as conclusive. In the wilderness, at all events, no lamp could be kept always alight; and from 1 Sam. iii. 3 we learn that the Divine voice was heard by the child-prophet when Eli was laid down in his place, "and the lamp of God was not yet gone out" in the temple where the ark of God was. The candelabrum therefore seems to have been designed not specially as a symbol, but for use. And here direction is given, "When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick." All were to be so placed upon the supports that they might shine across the Holy Place, and illuminate the altar of incense and the table of shewbread.

The text goes on to state that the candlestick was all of beaten work of gold; "unto the base thereof and

unto the flowers thereof, it was beaten work," and the pattern was that which Jehovah had showed Moses. The material, the workmanship, and the form, not particularly important in themselves, are anew referred to because of the special sacredness belonging to all the furniture of the tabernacle.

The attempt to fasten typical meanings to the seven lights of the candelabrum, to the ornaments and position, and especially to project those meanings into the Christian Church, has little warrant even from the Book of Revelation, where Christ speaks as "He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." There can be no doubt, however, that symbolic references may be found, illustrating in various ways the subjects of revelation and the Christian life.

The "tent of meeting" may represent to us that chamber or temple of reverent inquiry where the voice of the Eternal is heard, and His glory and holiness are realised by the seeker after God. It is a chamber silent, solemn, and dark, curtained in such gloom, indeed, that some have maintained there is no revelation to be had, no glimpse of Divine life or love. But as the morning sunshine flowed into the Holy Place when the hangings were drawn aside, so from the natural world light may enter the chamber in which fellowship with God is sought. "The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." The world is not God, its forces are not in the true sense elemental—do not belong to the being of the Supreme. But it bears witness to the infinite mind, the omnipotent will it cannot fitly represent. In the silence of the tent of meeting, when the light of nature shines through the

door that opens to the sunrise, we realise that the inner mystery must be in profound accord with the outer revelation—that He who makes the light of the natural world must be in Himself the light of the spiritual world; that He who maintains order in the great movements and cycles of the material universe, maintains a like order in the changes and evolutions of the immaterial creation.

Yet the light of the natural world shining thus into the sacred chamber, while it aids the seeker after God in no small degree, fails at a certain point. It is too hard and glaring for the hour of most intimate communion. By night, as it were, when the world is veiled and silent, when the soul is shut alone in earnest desire and thought, then it is that the highest possibilities of intercourse with the unseen life are realised. And then, as the seven-branched candlestick with its lamps illuminated the Holy Place, a radiance which belongs to the sanctuary of life must supply the soul's need. On the curtained walls, on the altar, on the veil whose heavy folds guard the most holy mysteries, this light must shine. Nature does not reveal the life of the Ever-Living, the love of the All-Loving, the will of the All-Holy. In the conscious life and love of the soul, created anew after the plan and likeness of God in Christ,—here is the light. The unseen God is the Father of our spirits. The lamps of purified reason, Christ-born faith and love, holy aspiration, are those which dispel the darkness on our side the veil. The Word and the Spirit give the oil by which those lamps are fed.

Must we say that with the Father, Christ also, who once lived on earth, is in the inner chamber which our gaze cannot penetrate? Even so. A thick curtain is

interposed between the earthly and the heavenly. Yet while by the light which shines in his own soul the seeker after God regards the outer chamber—its altar, its shewbread, its walls, and canopy—his thought passes beyond the veil. The altar is fashioned according to a pattern and used according to a law which God has given. It points to prayer, thanksgiving, devotion, that have their place in human life because facts exist out of which they arise—the beneficence, the care, the claims of God. The table of shewbread represents the spiritual provision made for the soul which cannot live but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God. The continuity of the outer chamber with the inner suggests the close union there is between the living soul and the living God—and the veil itself, though it separates, is no jealous and impenetrable wall of division. Every sound on this side can be heard within; and the Voice from the mercy seat, declaring the will of the Father through the enthroned Word, easily reaches the waiting worshipper to guide, comfort, and instruct. By the light of the lamps kindled in our spiritual nature the things of God are seen; and the lamps themselves are witnesses to God. They burn and shine by laws He has ordained, in virtue of powers that are not fortuitous nor of the earth. The illumination they give on this side the veil proves clearly that within it the Parent Light, glorious, never-fading, shines—transcendent reason, pure and almighty will, unchanging love—the life which animates the universe.

Again, the symbolism of the candlestick has an application suggested by Rev. i. 20. Now, the outer chamber of the tabernacle in which the lamps shine represents the whole world of human life. The temple

is vast ; it is the temple of the universe. Still the veil exists ; it separates the life of men on earth from the life in heaven, with God. Isaiah in his oracles of redemption spoke of a coming revolution which should open the world to Divine light. "He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations." And the light itself, still as proceeding from a Hebrew centre, is described in the second book of the Isaian prophecies : "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burneth. And the nations shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory." But the prediction was not fulfilled until the Hebrew merged in the human and He came who, as the Son of Man, is the true light which lighteth every man coming into the world.

Dark was the outer chamber of the great temple when the Light of life first shone, and the darkness comprehended it not. When the Church was organised, and the apostles of our Lord, bearing the gospel of Divine grace, went through the lands, they addressed a world still under the veil of which Isaiah spoke. But the spiritual enlightenment of mankind proceeded ; the lamps of the candlestick, set in their places, showed the new altar, the new table of heavenly bread, a feast spread for all nations, and made the ignorant and earthly aware that they stood within a temple consecrated by the offering of Christ. St. John saw in Asia, amid the gross darkness of its seven great cities, seven lamp-stands with their lights, some increasing, some waning in brightness. The sacred flame was carried from country to country, and in every centre of popula-

tion a lamp was kindled. There was no seven-branched candelabrum merely, but one of a hundred, of a thousand arms. And all drew their oil from the one sacred source, cast more or less bravely the same Divine illumination on the dark eye of earth.

True, the world had its philosophy and poetry, using, often with no little power, the themes of natural religion. In the outer chamber of the temple the light of nature gleamed on the altar, on the shewbread, on the veil. But interpretation failed, faith in the unseen was mixed with dreams, no real knowledge was gained of what the folds of the curtain hid—the mercy-seat, the holy law that called for pure worship and love of one Living and True God. And then the darkness that fell when the Saviour hung on the cross, the darkness of universal sin and condemnation, was made so deeply felt that in the shadow of it the true light might be seen, and the lamp of every church might glow, a beacon of Divine mercy shining across the troubled life of man. And the world has responded, will respond, with greater comprehension and joy, as the Gospel is proclaimed with finer spirit, embodied with greater zeal in lives of faith and love. Christ in the truth, Christ in the sacraments, Christ in the words and deeds of those who compose His Church—this is the light. The candlestick of every life, of every body of believers, should be as of beaten gold, no base metal mixed with that which is precious. He who fashions his character as a Christian is to have the Divine idea before him and re-think it; those who build the Church are to seek its purity, strength, and grace. But still the light must come from God, not from man, the light that burned on the altar of the Divine sacrifice and shines from the glorious personality of the risen Lord

## 3. THE PASSOVER

NUMBERS ix. 1-14<sup>1</sup>

The day fixed by statute for the feast which commemorated the deliverance from Egypt was the fourteenth of the first month—the year beginning with the month of the exodus. Chap. ix. opens by reiterating this statute, already recorded in Exod. xii. and Lev. xxiii., and proceeds to narrate the observance of the Passover in the second year. A supplementary provision follows which met the case of those excluded from the feast through ceremonial uncleanness. In one passage it is assumed that the statutes and ordinances of the celebration are already known. The feast proper, ordered to be kept between the two evenings of the fourteenth day, is, however, alone spoken of; there is no mention of the week of unleavened bread (Exod. xii. 15; Lev. xxiii. 6), nor of the holy convocations with which that week was to open and close. It is almost impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Passover in the wilderness was a simple family festival at which every head of a household officiated in a priestly capacity. The supplementary Passover of this chapter was, according to the rabbis, distinguished from the great feast by the rites lasting only one day instead of seven, and by other variations. There is, however, no trace of such a difference between the one observance and the other. What was done by the congregation on the fourteenth of Abib was apparently to be done at the "Little Passover" of the following month.

On every male Israelite old enough to understand

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<sup>1</sup> For chap. viii. 5-26 see p. 39.

the meaning of the Passover, the observance of it was imperative. Lest the supplementary feast should be made an excuse for failure to keep the fourteenth day of the first month, it is enacted (ix. 13) that he who wilfully neglects shall be "cut off from his people." For strangers who sojourn among the Israelites provision is made that if they wish to keep the feast they may do so under the regulations applied to the Hebrews; these, of course, including the indispensable rite of circumcision, which had to precede any observance of a feast in honour of God. Noticeable are the terms with which this statute concludes: "Ye shall have one statute, both for the stranger and for him that is born in the land." The settlement in Canaan is assumed.

Regarding the Passover in the wilderness, difficulties have been raised on the ground that a sufficient number of lambs, males of the first year, could scarcely have been provided, and that the sacrificing of the lambs by Aaron and his two sons within the prescribed time would have been impossible. The second point of difficulty disappears if this Passover was, as we have seen reason to believe, a family festival like that observed on the occasion of the exodus. Again, the number of yearling male lambs required would depend on the number who partook of the feast. Calculations made on the basis that one lamb sufficed for about fifteen, and that men alone ate the Passover, leave the matter in apparent doubt. Some fifty thousand lambs would still be needed. Keeping by the enumeration of the Israelites given in the muster-roll of Numbers, some writers explain that the desert tribes might supply large numbers of lambs, and that kids also were available. The difficulty, however, remains, and it is one of those

which point to the conclusion that the numbers given have somehow been increased in the transcription of the ancient records century after century.

The case of certain men who could not partake of the Passover in the first month, because they were unclean through the dead, was brought before Moses and Aaron. The men felt it to be a great loss of privilege, especially as the march was about to begin, and they might not have another opportunity of observing the feast. Who indeed could tell whether in the first conflict it might not be his lot to fall by the sword? "We are unclean by the *nephesh* of a man," they said: "wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer the oblation of the Lord in its appointed season among the children of Israel?" The result of the appeal was the new law providing that two disabilities, and two only, should be acknowledged. The supplementary Passover of the second month was appointed for those unclean by the dead, and those on a journey who found themselves too far off to reach in time the precincts of the sanctuary. Those unclean would be in a month presumably free from defilement; those on a journey would probably have returned. The concession is a note of the gracious reasonableness that in many ways distinguished the Hebrew religion; and the Passover observances of Jews at the present day are based on the conviction that what is practicable is accepted by God, though statute and form cannot be kept.

The question presents itself, why keeping of the Passover should be necessary to covenant union with Jehovah. And the reply bears on Christian duty with regard to the analogous sacrament of the Lord's Supper, for it rests on the historical sanction and continuity

of faith. If God was to be trusted as a Saviour by the Hebrew, certain facts in the nation's history had to be known, believed, and kept in clear remembrance; otherwise no reality could be found in the covenant. And under the new covenant the same holds good. The historical fact of Christ's crucifixion must be kept in view, and constantly revived by the Lord's Supper. In either case redemption is the main idea presented by the commemorative ordinance. The Hebrew festival is not to be held on the anniversary of the giving of the law; it recalls the great deliverance connected with the death of the first-born in Egypt. So the Christian festival points to the deliverance of humanity through the death of Christ.

Remarkable is the congruity between the view of the law presented by Paul and the fact that the great commemorative feast of Hebraism is attached, not to the legislation of Sinai, but to the rescue from Egyptian bondage. The law kept the Hebrew nation in ward (Gal. iii. 23); "it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. iii. 19); it "came in beside, that the trespass might abound" (Rom. v. 20). The Hebrews were not required to commemorate that ordinance which laid on them a heavy burden and was found, as time went on, to be "unto death" (Rom. vii. 10). And, in like manner, the feast of Christianity does not recall the nativity of our Lord, nor that agony in the garden which showed Him in the depths of human sorrow, but that triumphant act of His soul which carried Him, and humanity with Him, through the shadow of death into the free life of spiritual energy and peace. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the commemoration of a victory by which we are

enfranchised. Partaking of it in faith, we realise our rescue from the Egypt of slavery and fear, our unity with Christ and with one another as "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." The wilderness journey lies before us still; but in liberty we press on as the ransomed of the Lord.

Mr. Morley has said, not without reason, that "the modern argument in favour of the supernatural origin of the Christian religion, drawn from its suitability to our needs and its Divine response to our aspirations," is insufficient to prove it the absolute religion. "The argument," he says, "can never carry us beyond the relativity of religious truth."<sup>1</sup> Christians may not assume that "their aspirations are the absolute measure of those of humanity in every stage." To dispense with faith in the historical facts of the life of Christ, His claims, and the significance of His cross, to leave these in the haze of the past as doubtful, incapable of satisfactory proof, and to rest all on the subjective experience which any one may reckon sufficient, is to obliterate the covenant and destroy the unity of the Church. Hence, as the Hebrews had their Passover, and the observance of it gave them coherence as a people and as a religious body, so we have the Supper. No local centre, indeed, is appointed at which alone our symbolic feast can be observed. Wherever a few renew their covenant with God in proclaiming the Lord's death till He come, there the souls of the faithful are nourished and inspired through fellowship with Him who brought spiritual life and liberty to our world.

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<sup>1</sup> "Voltaire," by John Morley, ed. 1891, pp. 254, 255.

## VII

### THE CLOUD AND THE MARCH

#### I. THE GUIDING CLOUD

NUMBERS ix. 15-23

THE pillar of cloud, the ensign of Jehovah's royalty among the Hebrews, and for us one of the most ancient symbols of His grace, is first mentioned in the account of the departure from Egypt. "Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light." At the passage of the Red Sea this murky cloud removed and came between the host of Israel and their pursuers. In the morning watch "Jehovah looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians." On that occasion it followed or represented "the angel of God." There is nowhere any attempt to give a complete account of the symbol. We read of its glory filling the inner shrine and even the holy place. At other times it only hovers above the western end of the tabernacle, marking the situation of the ark. Now and again it moves from that position, and covers the door of the tent of meeting into which Moses has entered. The targums use the term *Shechinah* to indicate what it was conceived to be—a luminous cloud, the visible manifestation of the Divine

presence ; and Philo speaks of the fiery appearance of the Deity shining forth from a cloud. But these are glosses on the original descriptions and cannot be altogether harmonised. In one passage only (Isa. iv. 5) do we find a reference which appears to throw any light on the real nature of the symbol. Evidently recalling it, the prophet says, "Jehovah will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." To him the cloud is one of smoke rising from a fire which at night sends up tongues of flame ; and the reflection of the bright fire on the overhanging cloud resembles a canopy of glory.

Ewald's view is that the smoke of the altar which went up in a thick column, visible at a great distance by day, ruddy with flame by night, was the origin of the conception. There are various objections to this theory, which the author of it himself finds difficult to reconcile with many of the statements. At the same time the pillar of cloud does not need to be thought of as in any respect a more Divine symbol than others which were associated with the tabernacle. Certainly the ark of the covenant which Bezaleel made according to the instructions of Moses was, far beyond anything else, the sacred centre around which the whole of the worship gathered, the mysterious emblem of Jehovah's character, the guarantee of His presence with Israel. It was from the space above the mercy-seat, as we have seen, that the Voice proceeded, not from the pillar of cloud. The sanctity of the ark was so great that it was never exposed to the view of the people, nor even of the Levites who were set apart to carry it. The cloud, on the other hand, was seen by all, and had its

principal function in showing where the ark was in the camp or on the march.

Now assuming, in harmony with the reference in Isaiah, that the cloud was one of smoke, some may be disposed to think that, like the ark of the covenant, the holiest symbol of all, this was produced by human intervention, yet in a way not incompatible with its sacredness, its mystery, and value as a sign of Jehovah's presence. Where Moses was as leader, law-giver, prophet, mediator, there God was for this people: what Moses did in the spirit of Divine zeal and wisdom was done for Israel by God. Through his inspiration the ritual and its elaborate symbolism had their origin. And is it not possible that after the manner of the emblem of Jehovah which appeared in the desert of Horeb the fire and cloud were now realised? While some may adopt this explanation, others again will steadily believe that the appearance and movements of the cloud were quite apart from human device or agency.

Scarcely any difficulty greater than that connected with the pillar of cloud presents itself to thoughtful modern readers of the Pentateuch. The traditional view, apparently involved in the narrative, is that in this cloud and in this alone Jehovah revealed Himself in the interval between His appearance to Jacob and, long afterwards, to Joshua in angelic form. Many will maintain that unless the cloud was of supernatural origin the whole relation of the Israelites to their Divine King must fall into shadow. Was not this one of the miracles which made Hebrew history different in kind from that of every other nation? Is it not one of the revelations of the Unseen God on which we must build if we are to have sure faith in the Old

Testament economy, and indeed in Christianity itself, as of superhuman revelation? If we are not to interpret literally what is said in Exodus—"The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light"—shall we not practically abandon the whole Divine element in the history of Israel's deliverance and education? Thus the difficulty stands.

Yet, it may be argued, since we have now the revelation of God in the human life of Christ and the gospel of salvation through the ministry of men, what need is there to doubt that, for the guidance of a people from place to place in the wilderness, the wisdom, foresight, and faithfulness of an inspired man were the appointed means? It is admitted that in many things Moses acted for Jehovah, that his mind received in idea, and his intellectual skill expressed in verbal form, the laws and statutes which were to maintain Israel's relation to God as a covenant people. We follow our Lord Himself in saying that Moses gave Israel the law. But the legislation of the Decalogue was far more of the nature of a disclosure of God, and had far higher aims and issues than could be involved in the guidance through the desert. The law was for the spiritual nature of the Hebrews. It brought them into relation with God as just, pure, true, the sole source of moral life and progress. As the nucleus of the covenant it was symbolic in a sense that fire could never be. It may be asked, then, What need is there to doubt that Moses had his part in this symbol which has so long appeared, more than the other, important as a nexus between heaven and earth? To interpret the words "whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tent," as meaning that it was self-moved, would imply

that Moses, though he is called the leader, did not lead but was led like the rest. And this would reduce his office to a point to which no prophet's work is reduced throughout the entire Old Testament. Was he unable to direct the march from Moseroth to Bene-jaakan? An inspired man, on whom, according to the will of God, lay the whole responsibility for Israel's national development, was he unable to determine when the pastures in one region were exhausted and others had to be sought? Then indeed the mediation of his genius would be so minimised that our whole idea of him must be changed. Especially would we have to set aside that prediction applied to Christ: "A prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you, from your brethren, like unto me."

And further, it may be said, the pillar of cloud and fire retains the whole of its value as a symbol when the intervention of Moses is admitted; and this may be proved by the analogy of other emblems. Almost parallel to the cloud, for instance, is the serpent of brass, which became a sign of Jehovah's healing power, and conveyed new life to those who looked towards it in faith. The fact that this rude image of a serpent was made by human hands did not in the least impair its value as an instrument of deliverance, and the efficacy of that particular symbol was selected by Christ as an illustration of His own redeeming energy which was to be gained through the cross: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." For certain occasions and needs of a people one symbol avails; in other circumstances there must be other signs. The smoke-cloud was not enough when the serpents terrified the host. Elijah in this same desert saw a flashing fire;

but Jehovah was not in the fire. Natural symbols, however impressive, do not avail by themselves; and when God by His prophet says, "This cloud, this fire, symbolise My presence," and the people believe, is it not sufficient? The Divine Friend is assuredly there. The symbol is not God; it represents a fact, impresses a fact which altogether apart from the symbol would still hold good.

In the course of the passage (ix. 17-23) the manner of the guidance given by means of the cloud is carefully detailed. Sometimes the tribes remained encamped for many days, sometimes only from evening to morning. "Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried on the tabernacle, abiding thereon, the children of Israel remained encamped, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed." Here is emphasised the authority which lay in "the commandment of the Lord *by the hand of Moses*" (ver. 23). For Israel, as for every nation that is not lost in the desert of the centuries, and every society that is not on the way to confusion, there must be wise guidance and cordial submission thereto. We are not, however, saved now, as the Israelites were, by a great movement of society, or even of the Church. Individually we must see the signal of the Divine will, and march where it points the way. And in a sense there are no rests of many days. Each morning the cloud moves forward; each morning we must strike our tents. Our march is in the way of thought, of moral and spiritual progress; and if we live in any real sense, we shall press on along that way. The indication of duty, the guidance in thought which we are to follow, impose a Divine obligation none the less that they are communicated through the

instrumentality of men. For every group of travellers, associated in worship, duty, and aim, there is some spiritual authority pointing the direction to be followed. As individuals we have our separate calling, our responsibility to Christ, with which nothing is to interfere. But the unity of Christians in the faith and work of the kingdom of God must be kept; and for this one like Moses is needed, or at least a consensus of judgment, a clear expression of the corporate wisdom. The standard must be carried forward, and where it moves on to quiet pasturage or grim conflict the faithful are to advance.

“Ye armies of the living God,  
His sacramental host,  
Where hallowed footsteps never trod  
Take your appointed post.

“Follow the cross; the ark of peace  
Accompany your path.”

Thus, we may say, the general direction runs; and in the changing circumstances of the Church submission is given by its members to those who hold command at once from the Lord Himself and from His people. But in the details of duty each must follow the guidance of a cloud that marks his own path to his own eye.

## 2. THE SILVER TRUMPETS

### NUMBERS X, 1-10

An air of antique simplicity is felt in the legislation regarding the two trumpets of silver, yet we are not in any way hindered from connecting the statute with the idea of claiming human art for Divine service. Instrumental music was of course rudimentary in the wilderness; but, such as it was, Jehovah was to con-

trol the use of it through the priests ; and the developed idea is found in the account of the dedication of the temple of Solomon, as recorded in 2 Chron. v., where we are told that besides the Levites, who had cymbals, psalteries, and harps, a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets took part in the music.

There is no need to question the early use of these instruments ; nevertheless, the legislation in our passage assumes the settlement in Canaan, and times when defensive war became necessary and the observance of the sacred feasts fell into a fixed order. The statute is instructive as to the meaning of the formula "The Lord spake unto Moses," and not less as to the gradual accretion of particulars around an ancient nucleus. We cannot set aside the sincere record, though it may seem to make Jehovah speak on matters of small importance. But interpretation must spring from a right understanding of the purpose suggested to the mind of Moses. Uses found for the trumpets in the course of years are simply extensions of the germinal idea of reserving for sacred use those instruments and the art they represented. It was well that whatever fear or exhilaration the sounding of them caused should be controlled by those who were responsible to God for the moral inspiration of the people.

According to the statute, the two trumpets, which were of very simple make, and capable of only a few notes, had their use first in calling assemblies. A long peal blown on one trumpet summoned the princes who were the heads of the thousands of Israel : a long peal on both trumpets called the whole congregation to the "tent of meeting." There were occasions when these assemblies were required not for deliberation, but to hear in detail the instructions and orders of

the leader. At other times the convocations were for prayer or thanksgiving; or, again, the people had to hear solemn reproofs and sentences of punishment. We may imagine that with varying sound, joyful or mournful, the trumpets were made to convey some indication of the purpose for which the assembly was called.

A sacred obligation lay on the Israelites to obey the summons, whether for joy or sorrow. They heard in the trumpet-blast the very voice of God. And upon us, bound to His service by a more solemn and gracious covenant, rests an obligation even more commanding. The unity of the tribes of Israel, and their fellowship in the obedience and worship of Jehovah, could never be of half so much importance as the unity of Christians in declaring their faith and fulfilling their vocation. To come together at the call of recurring opportunity, that we may confess Christ and hear His word anew, is essential to our spiritual life. Those who hear the call should know its urgency and promptly respond, lest in the midst of the holiest light there come to be a shadow of deep darkness, the midnight gloom of paganism and death.

Again, in the wilderness, the trumpets gave the signal for striking the camp and setting out on a new stage of the journey. Blown sharply by way of alarm, the peals conveyed now to one, now to another part of the host the order to advance. The movement of the pillar of cloud, we may assume, could not be seen everywhere, and this was another means of direction, not only of a general kind, but with some detail.

Taking vv. 5, 6, along with the passage beginning at ver. 14, we have an ideal picture of the order of movement. One peal, sharply rung out from the

trumpets, would signify that the eastern camp, embracing the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, should advance. Then the tabernacle was to be taken down, and the Levites of the families of Gershon and Merari were to set forward with the various parts of the tent and its enclosure. Next two alarms gave the signal to the southern camp, that of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. The Levites of the family of Kohath followed, bearing the ark, the altar of incense, the great altar, the table of shewbread, and other furniture of the sanctuary. The third and fourth camps, of which Ephraim and Benjamin were the heads, brought up the rear. In these movements the trumpets would be of much use. But it is quite clear that the real difficulty was not to set the divisions in motion each at a fit time. The camps were not composed only of men under military discipline. The women and children, the old and feeble, had to be cared for. The flocks and herds also had to be kept in hand. We cannot suppose that there was any orderly procession; rather was each camp a straggling multitude, with its own delays and interruptions.

And so it is in the case of every social and religious movement. Clear enough may be the command to advance, the trumpet of Providence, the clarion of the Gospel. But men and women are undisciplined in obedience and faith. They have many burdens of a personal kind to bear, many private differences and quarrels. How very seldom can the great Leader find prompt response to His will, though the terms of it are distinctly conveyed and the demand is urgent! God makes a plan for us, opens our way, shows us our need, proclaims the fit hours; but our unbelief and fear and incapacity impede the march. Nevertheless,

through the grace of His providence, as Israel slowly made its way across the desert and reached Canaan at last, the Church moves, and will continue to move, towards the holy future, the millennial age.

Turning now to the uses of the silver trumpets after the settlement in Canaan, there is first that connected with war. The people are presumed to be living peaceably in their country; but some neighbouring power has attacked them. The sounding of the trumpets then is to be of the nature of a prayer to the Divine Protector of the nation. The cry of the dependent tribes will be gathered up, as it were, into the shrill blast which carries the alarm to the throne of the Lord of Hosts. To the army and to the nation assurance is given that the old promise of Jehovah's favour remains in force, and that the promise, claimed by the priests according to the covenant, will be fulfilled. And this will make the trumpet-blast exhilarating, a presage of victory. The claim and hope of the nation rise heavenward. The men of war stand together in faith, and put to flight the armies of the aliens.

For the battles we have to fight, the conflicts of faith with unbelief, and righteousness with aggressive iniquity, an inspiration is needed like that conveyed to Israel in the peal of the silver trumpets. Have we any means of assurance resembling that which was to animate the Hebrews when the enemy came upon them? Even the need is often unrecognised. Many take for granted that religion is safe, that the truth requires no valour of theirs in maintaining it, and the Gospel of Christ no spirited defence. The trumpet is not heard because the duty to which all Christians are called as helpers of the Gospel is never considered. Messages are accepted as oracles of God only when they tell the

trustful of safety and confirm them in easy enjoyment of spiritual privilege and hope. One kind of trumpet peal alone is liked—that which sounds an alarm to the unconverted, and bids them prepare for the coming of the Judge.

But there are for all Christians frequent calls to a service in which they need the courage of faith and every hope the covenant can give. At the present time no greater mistake is possible than to sit in comfort under the shadow of ancient forms and creeds. We cannot realise the value of the promise given to genuine faith unless we abandon the crumbling walls and meet our assailants in the open ground, where we can see them face to face, and know the spirit with which they fight, the ensigns of their war. There is no brave thinking now in those old shelters, no room to use the armour of light. Christianity is one of the free forces of human life. Its true inspiration is found only when those who stand by it are bent on securing and extending the liberties of men. The trumpets that lift to heaven the prayers of the faithful and fill the soldiers of the Cross with the hope of victory can never be in the hands of those who claim exclusive spiritual authority, nor will they ever again sound the old Hebrew note. They inspire those who are generous, who feel that the more they give the more they are blessed, who would impart to others their own life that God's love to the world may be known. They call us not to defend our own privileges, but to keep the way of salvation open to all, to prevent the Pharisee and the unbeliever from closing against men the door of heavenly grace.

Once more ; in the days of gladness and solemn feasting the trumpets were to be blown over the burnt

offerings and peace offerings. The joy of the Passover, the hope of the new-moon festival, especially in the beginning of the seventh month, were to be sent up to heaven with the sound of these instruments, not as if Jehovah had forgotten His people and His covenant, but for the assurance and comfort of the worshippers. He was a Friend before whom they could rejoice, a King whose forgiveness was abundant, who showed mercy unto the thousands who loved Him and kept His commandments. The music, loud, and clear, and bold, was to carry to all who heard it the conviction that God had been sought in the way of His holy law, and would cause blessing to descend upon Israel.

We claim with gentler sounds, those of lowly prayer and pleading, the help of the Most High. Even in the secret chamber when the door is shut we can address our Father, knowing that our claim will be answered for the sake of Christ. Yet there are times when the loud and clear hallelujahs, borne heavenward by human voices and pealing organ, seem alone to express our exultation. Then the instruments and methods of modern art may be said to bind the old Hebrew times, the ancient faith of the wilderness and of Zion, to our own. We carry out ideas that lie at the heart of the race; we realise that human skill, human discovery, find their highest use and delight when they make beautiful and inspiring the service of God.

### 3. THE ORDER OF MARCH

NUMBERS X. 11-28

The difficulties connected with the order of march prescribed in this passage have been often and fully rehearsed. According to the enumeration given in

chap. ii., the van of the host formed by the division of Judah, men, women, and children, must have reached some six hundred thousand at least. The second division, headed by Reuben, would number five hundred thousand. The Levites, with their wives and children, according to the same computation would be altogether about seventy thousand. Then came the two remaining camps, about nine hundred thousand souls. At the first signal six hundred thousand would have to get into marching order and move off across the desert. There could be no absolute separation of the fighting men from their families and flocks, and even if there were no narrow passes to confine the vast multitude, it would occupy miles of road. We must not put a day's journey at more than ten miles. The foremost groups would therefore have reached the camping ground, let us say, when the last ranks of the second division were only beginning to move; and the rear would still be on its way when night had long fallen upon the desert. Whatever obstacles were removed for the Israelites, the actual distance to be traversed could not be made less; and the journey is always represented as a stern and serious discipline. When we take into account the innumerable hindrances which so vast a company would certainly have to contend with, it seems impossible that the order of march as detailed in this passage could have been followed for two days together.

Suppose we receive the explanation that the numbers have been accidentally increased in the transcription of records. This would relieve the narrative, not only here but at many points, of a burden it can hardly carry. And we remember that according to the Book of Nehemiah less than fifty thousand Jews, returning from Babylon at the close of the captivity, reconstructed

the nation, so that it soon showed considerable spirit and energy. If the numbers as they stand in the Pentateuch were reduced, divided by ten, as some propose, the desert journey would appear less of a mere marvel. It would remain one of the most striking and important migrations known to history; it would lose none of its religious significance. No religious idea is affected by the numbers who receive it; nor do the great purposes of God depend on multitudes for their fulfilment. We can view with composure the criticism which touches the record on its numerical side, because we know the prophetic work of Moses and the providential education of Israel to be incontrovertible facts.

It has been suggested that the order of march as described did not continue to be kept throughout the whole of the wilderness journey; that in point of fact it may have been followed only so far as Kadesh. Whether this was so or not it must be taken into account that for the greater part of the forty years there was absolutely no travelling; the tribes were settled in the wilderness of Paran. The proofs are incidental but conclusive. From a central point, where the cloud rested (Numb. x. 12), the people spread themselves, we may suppose, in various directions, seeking grass for their cattle, and living for the most part like the other inhabitants of the district. Even if there were but three years of travelling in all, before and after the sojourn in the neighbourhood of Kadesh, there would be ample time for the movement from one place to another mentioned in the records.

## VIII

### *HOBAB THE KENITE*

NUMBERS X. 29-36

THE Kenites, an Arab tribe belonging to the region of Midian, and sometimes called Midianites, sometimes Amalekites, were already in close and friendly relation with Israel. Moses, when he went first to Midian, had married a daughter of their chief Jethro, and, as we learn from Exod. xviii., this patriarch, with his daughter Zipporah and the two sons she had borne to Moses, came to the camp of Israel at the mount of God. The meeting was an occasion of great rejoicing; and Jethro, as priest of his tribe, having congratulated the Hebrews on the deliverance Jehovah had wrought for them, "took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God," and was joined by Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel in the sacrificial feast. A union was thus established between Kenites and Israelites of the most solemn and binding kind. The peoples were sworn to continual friendship.

While Jethro remained in the camp his counsel was given in regard to the manner of administering justice. In accordance with it rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens were chosen, "able men, such as feared God, men of truth, hating covetousness"; and to them matters of minor importance were referred for judg-

ment, the hard causes only being brought before Moses. The sagacity of one long experienced in the details of government came in to supplement the intellectual power and the inspiration of the Hebrew leader.

It does not appear that any attempt was made to attach Jethro and the whole of his tribe to the fortunes of Israel. The small company of the Kenites could travel far more swiftly than a great host, and, if they desired, could easily overtake the march. Moses, we are told, let his father-in-law depart, and he went to his own place. But now that the long stay of the Israelites at Sinai is over and they are about to advance to Canaan, the visit of a portion of the Kenite tribe is made the occasion of an appeal to their leader to cast in his lot with the people of God. There is some confusion in regard to the relationship of Hobab with Jethro or Raguel. Whether Hobab was a son or grandson of the chief cannot be made out. The word translated father-in-law (Numb. x. 29), means a relation by marriage. Whatever was the tie between Hobab and Moses, it was at all events so close, and the Kenite had so much sympathy with Israel, that it was natural to make the appeal to him: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Himself assured of the result of the enterprise, anticipating with enthusiasm the high destiny of the tribes of Israel, Moses endeavours to persuade these children of the desert to take the way to Canaan.

There was a fascination in the movement of that people who, rescued from bondage by their Heavenly Friend, were on their journey to the land of His promise. This fascination Hobab and his followers appear to have felt; and Moses counted upon it. The Kenites, used to the wandering life, accustomed to

strike their tents any day as occasion required, no doubt recoiled from the thought of settling even in a fertile country, still more from dwelling in any walled town. But the south of Canaan was practically a wilderness, and there, keeping to a great extent their ancestral habits, they might have had the liberty they loved, yet kept in touch with their friends of Israel. Some aversion from the Hebrews, who still bore certain marks of slavery, would have to be overcome. Yet, with the bond already established, there needed only some understanding of the law of Jehovah, and some hope in His promise to bring the company of Hobab to decision.

And Moses had right in saying, "Come with us, and we will do thee good; for Jehovah hath spoken good concerning Israel." The outlook to a future was something which the Kenites as a people had not, never could have in their desultory life. Unprogressive, out of the way of the great movements of humanity, gaining nothing as generations went by, but simply reproducing the habits and treasuring the beliefs of their fathers, the Arab tribe might maintain itself, might occasionally strike for righteousness in some conflict, but otherwise had no prospect, could have no enthusiasm. They would live their hard life, they would enjoy freedom, they would die—such would be their history. Compared with that poor outlook, how good it would be to share the noble task of establishing on the soil of Canaan a nation devoted to truth and righteousness, in league with the living God, destined to extend His kingdom and make His faith the means of blessing to all. It was the great opportunity of these nomads. As yet, indeed, there was no courage of religion, no brightness of enthusiasm among the

Israelites. But there was the ark of the covenant, there were the sacrifices, the law; and Jehovah Himself, always present with His people, was revealing His will and His glory by oracle, by discipline and deliverance.

Now these Kenites may be taken as representing a class, in the present day to a certain extent attracted, even fascinated, by the Church, who standing irresolute are appealed to in terms like those addressed by Moses to Hobab. They feel a certain charm, for in the wide organisation and vast activity of the Christian Church, quite apart from the creed on which it is based, there are signs of vigour and purpose which contrast favourably with endeavours directed to mere material gain. In idea and in much of its effort the Church is splendidly humane, and it provides interests, enjoyments, both of an intellectual and artistic kind, in which all can share. Not so much its universality nor its mission of converting the world, nor its spiritual worship, but rather the social advantages and the culture it offers draw towards it those minds and lives. And to them it extends, too often without avail, the invitation to join its march.

Is it asked why many, partly fascinated, remain proof against its appeals? why an increasing number prefer, like Hobab, the liberty of the desert, their own unattached, desultory, hopeless way of life? The answer must partly be that, as it is, the Church does not fully commend itself by its temper, its enthusiasm, its sincerity and Christianity. It attracts but is unable to command, because with all its culture of art it does not appear beautiful, with all its claims of spirituality it is not unworldly; because, professing to exist for the redemption of society, its methods and standards are

too often human rather than Divine. It is not that the outsider shrinks from the religiousness of the Church as overdone; rather does he detect a lack of that very quality. He could believe in the Divine calling and join the enterprise of the Church if he saw it journeying steadily towards a better country, that is a heavenly. Its earnestness would then command him; faith would compel faith. But social status and temporal aims are not subordinated by the members of the Church, nor even by its leaders. And whatever is done in the way of providing attractions for the pleasure-loving, and schemes of a social kind, these, so far from gaining the undecided, rather make them less disposed to believe. More exciting enjoyments can be found elsewhere. The Church offering pleasures and social reconstruction is attempting to catch those outside by what, from their point of view, must appear to be chaff.

It is a question which every body of Christians has need to ask itself—Can we honestly say to those without, Come with us, and we will do you good? In order that there may be certainty on this point, should not every member of the Church be able to testify that the faith he has gives joy and peace, that his fellowship with God is making life pure and strong and free? Should there not be a clear movement of the whole body, year by year, towards finer spirituality, broader and more generous love? The gates of membership are in some cases opened to such only as make very clear and ample profession. It does not, however, appear that those already within have always the Christian spirit corresponding to that high profession. And yet as Moses could invite Hobab and his company without misgiving because Jehovah was

the Friend and Guide of Israel and had spoken good concerning her, so because Christ is the Head of the Church, and Captain of her salvation, those outside may well be urged to join her fellowship. If all depended on the earnestness of our faith and the steadfastness of our virtue we should not dare to invite others to join the march. But it is with Christ we ask them to unite. Imperfect in many ways, the Church is His, exists to show His death, to proclaim His Gospel and extend His power. In the whole range of human knowledge and experience there is but one life that is free, pure, hopeful, energetic in every noble sense, and at the same time calm. In the whole range of human existence there is but one region in which the mind and the soul find satisfaction and enlargement, in which men of all sorts and conditions find true harmony. That life and that region of existence are revealed by Christ; into them He only is the Way. The Church, maintaining this, demonstrating this, is to invite all who stand aloof. They who join Christ and follow Him will come to a good land, a heavenly heritage.

The first invitation given to Hobab was set aside. "Nay," he said, "I will not go; but I will depart to my own land and to my kindred." The old ties of country and people were strong for him. The true Arab loves his country passionately. The desert is his home, the mountains are his friends. His hard life is a life of liberty. He is strongly attached to his tribe, which has its own traditions, its own glories. There have been feuds, the memory of which must be cherished. There are heirlooms that give dignity to those who possess them. The people of the clan are brothers and sisters. Very little of the commercial

mingles with the life of the desert ; so perhaps family feeling has the more power. These influences Hobab felt, and this besides deterred him, that if he joined the Israelites he would be under the command of Moses. Hobab was prospective head of his tribe, already in partial authority at least. To obey the word of command instead of giving it was a thing he could not brook. No doubt the leader of Israel had proved himself brave, resolute, wise. He was a man of ardent soul and fitted for royal power. But Hobab preferred the chieftainship of his own small clan to service under Moses ; and, brought to the point of deciding, he would not agree.

Freedom, habit, the hopes that have become part of life—these in like manner interpose between many and a call which is known to be from God. There is restraint within the circle of faith ; old ideas, traditional conceptions of life, and many personal ambitions have to be relinquished by those who enter it. Accustomed to that Midian where every man does according to the bent of his own will, where life is hard but uncontrolled, where all they have learned to care for and desire may be found, many are unwilling to choose the way of religion, subjection to the law of Christ, the life of spiritual conflict and trial, however much may be gained at once and in the eternal future. Yet the liberty of their Midian is illusory. It is simply freedom to spend strength in vain, to roam from place to place where all alike are barren, to climb mountains lightning-riven, swept by interminable storms. And the true liberty is with Christ, who opens the prospect of the soul, and redeems the life from evil, vanity, and fear. The heavenward march appears to involve privation and conflict, which men do not care to face. But is the

worldly life free from enemies, hardships, disappointments? The choice is, for many, between a bare life over which death triumphs, and a life moving on over obstacles, through tribulations, to victory and glory. The attractions of land and people, set against those of Christian hope, have no claim. "Every one," says the Lord, "that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life."

Passing on, the narrative informs us that Moses used another plea: "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou shalt be to us instead of eyes." Hobab did not respond to the promise of advantage to himself; he might be moved by the hope of being useful. Knowing that he had to deal with a man who was proud, and in his way magnanimous, Moses wisely used this appeal. And he used it frankly, without pretence. Hobab might do real and valuable service to the tribes on their march to Canaan. Accustomed to the desert, over which he had often travelled, acquainted with the best methods of disposing a camp in any given position, with the quick eye and habit of observation which the Arab life gives, Hobab would be the very adjutant to whom Moses might commit many details. If he joins the tribes on this footing it will be without pretence. He professes no greater faith either in Israel's destiny or in Jehovah's sole Godhead than he really feels. Wishing Israel well, interested in the great experiment, yet not bound up in it, he may give his counsel and service heartily so far as they avail.

We are here introduced to another phase of the relation between the Church and those who do not

altogether accept its creed, or acknowledge its mission to be supernatural, Divine. Confessing unwillingness to receive the Christian system as a whole, perhaps openly expressing doubts of the miraculous, for example, many in our day have still so much sympathy with the ethics and culture of Christianity that they would willingly associate themselves with the Church, and render it all the service in their power. Their tastes have led them to subjects of study and modes of self-development not in the proper sense religious. Some are scientific, some have literary talent, some artistic, some financial. The question may be, whether the Church should invite these to join her ranks in any capacity, whether room may be made for them, tasks assigned to them. On the one hand, would it be dangerous to Christian faith? on the other hand, would it involve them in self-deception? Let it be assumed that they are men of honour and integrity, men who aim at a high moral standard and have some belief in the spiritual dignity man may attain. On this footing may their help be sought and cordially accepted by the Church?

We cannot say that the example of Moses should be taken as a rule for Christians. It was one thing to invite the co-operation with Israel for a certain specified purpose of an Arab chief who differed somewhat in respect of faith; it would be quite another thing to invite one whose faith, if he has any, is only a vague theism, to give his support to Christianity. Yet the cases are so far parallel that the one illustrates the other. And one point appears to be this, that the Church may show itself at least as sympathetic as Israel. Is there but a single note of unison between a soul and Christianity? Let that be recognised, struck again and again till it

is clearly heard. Our Lord rewarded the faith of a Syrophœnician woman, of a Roman centurion. His religion cannot be injured by generosity. Attachment to Himself personally, disposition to hear His words and accept His morality, should be hailed as the possible dawn of faith, not frowned upon as a splendid sin. Every one who helps sound knowledge helps the Church. The enthusiast for true liberty has a point of contact with Him whose truth gives freedom. The Church is a spiritual city with gates that stand wide open day and night towards every region and condition of human life, towards the north and south, the east and west. If the wealthy are disposed to help, let them bring their treasures; if the learned devote themselves reverently and patiently to her literature, let their toil be acknowledged. Science has a tribute that should be highly valued, for it is gathered from the works of God; and art of every kind—of the poet, the musician, the sculptor, the painter—may assist the cause of Divine religion. The powers men have are given by Him who claims all as His own. The vision of Isaiah in which he saw Tarshish and the isles, Sheba and Seba offering gifts to the temple of God, did not assume that the tribute was in all cases that of covenant love. And the Church of Christ has broader human sympathy and better right to the service of the world than Isaiah knew. For the Church's good, and for the good of those who may be willing in any way to aid her work and development, all gifts should be gladly received, and those who stand hesitating should be invited to serve.

But the analogy of the invitation to Hobab involves another point which must always be kept in view. It is this, that the Church is not to slacken her march not

divert her march in any degree because men not fully in sympathy with her join the company and contribute their service. The Kenite may cast in his lot with the Israelites and aid them with his experience. But Moses will not cease to lead the tribes towards Canaan, will not delay their progress a single day for Hobab's sake. Nor will he less earnestly claim sole Godhead for Jehovah, and insist that every sacrifice shall be made to Him and every life kept holy in His way, for His service. Perhaps the Kenite faith differed little in its elements from that which the Israelites inherited. It may have been monotheistic; and we know that part of the worship was by way of sacrifice not unlike that appointed by the Mosaic law. But it had neither the wide ethical basis nor the spiritual aim and intensity which Moses had been the means of imparting to Israel's religion. And from the ideas revealed to him and embodied in the moral and ceremonial law he could not for the sake of Hobab resile in the least. There should be no adjustment of creed or ritual to meet the views of the new ally. Onward to Canaan, onward also along the lines of religious duty and development, the tribes would hold their way as before.

In modern alliances with the Church a danger is involved, sufficiently apparent to all who regard the state of religion. History is full of instances in which, to one company of helpers and another, too much has been conceded; and the march of spiritual Christianity is still greatly impeded by the same thing. Money contributed, by whomsoever, is held to give the donors a right to take their place in councils of the Church, or at least to sway decision now in one direction, now in another. Prestige is offered with the

tacit understanding that it shall be repaid with deference. The artist uses his skill, but not in subordination to the ideas of spiritual religion. He assumes the right to give them his own colour, and may even, while professing to serve Christianity, sensualise its teaching. Scholarship offers help, but is not content to submit to Christ. Having been allowed to join itself with the Church, it proceeds, not infrequently, to play the traitor's part, assailing the faith it was invoked to serve. Those who care more for pleasure than for religion may within a certain range find gratification in Christian worship; they are apt to claim more and still more of the element that meets their taste. And those who are bent on social reconstruction would often, without any thought of doing wrong, divert the Church entirely from its spiritual mission. When all these influences are taken into account, it will be seen that Christianity has to go its way amid perils. It must not be unsympathetic. But those to whom its camp is opened, instead of helping the advance, may neutralise the whole enterprise.

Every Church has great need at present to consider whether that clear spiritual aim which ought to be the constant guide is not forgotten, at least occasionally, for the sake of this or that alliance supposed to be advantageous. It is difficult to find the mean, difficult to say who serve the Church, who hinder its success. More difficult still is it to distinguish those who are heartily with Christianity from those who are only so in appearance, having some nostrum of their own to promote. Hobab may decide to go with Israel; but the invitation he accepts, perhaps with an air of superiority, of one conferring a favour, is really extended to him for his good, for the saving of his life.

Let there be no blowing of the silver trumpets to announce that a prince of the Kenites henceforth journeys with Israel; they were not made for that! Let there be no flaunting of a gay ensign over his tent. We shall find that a day comes when the men who stand by true religion have—perhaps through Kenite influence—the whole congregation to face. So it is in Churches. On the other hand, Pharisaism is a great danger, equally tending to destroy the value of religion; and Providence ever mingles the elements that enter into the counsels of Christianity, challenging the highest wisdom, courage, and charity of the faithful.

The closing verses of chap. x. (33-6), belonging, like the passage just considered, to the prophetic narrative, affirm that the ark was borne from Sinai three days' journey before the host to find a halting-place. The reconciliation between this statement and the order which places the ark in the centre of the march, may be that the ideal plan was at the outset not observed, for some sufficient reason. The absolute sincerity of the compilers of the Book of Numbers is shown in their placing almost side by side the two statements without any attempt to harmonise. Both were found in the ancient documents, and both were set down in good faith. The scribes into whose hands the old records came did not assume the *rôle* of critics.

At the beginning of every march Moses is reported to have used the chant: "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee." When the ark rested he said: "Return, O Jehovah, unto the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel." The former is the open-

ing strain of Psalm lxviii., and its magnificent strophes move towards the idea of that rest which Israel finds in the protection of her God. Part of the ode returns upon the desert journey, adding some features and incidents omitted in the narrations of the Pentateuch—such as the plentiful rain which refreshed the weary tribes, the publishing by women of some Divine oracle. But on the whole the psalm agrees with the history, making Sinai the scene of the great revelation of God, and indicating the guidance He gave through the wilderness by means of the cloudy pillar. The chants of Moses would be echoed by the people, and would help to maintain the sense of constant relation between the tribes and their unseen Defender.

Through the wilderness Israel went, not knowing from what quarter the sudden raid of a desert people might be made. Swiftly, silently, as if springing out of the very sand, the Arab raiders might bear down upon the travellers. They were assured of the guardianship of Him whose eye never slumbered, when they kept His way and held themselves at His command. Here the resemblance to our case in the journey of life is clear; and we are reminded of our need of defence and the only terms on which we may expect it. We may look for protection against those who are the enemies of God. But we have no warrant for assuming that on whatever errand we are bound we have but to invoke the Divine arm in order to be secure. The dreams of those who think their personal claim on God may always be urged have no countenance in the prayer, "Rise up, O Jehovah, and let Thine enemies be scattered." And as Israel settling to rest after some weary march could enjoy the sense of Jehovah's presence only if the duties of the day had

been patiently done, and the thought of God's will had made peace in every tribe, and His promise had given courage and hope—so for us, each day will close with the Divine benediction when we have “fought a good fight and kept the faith.” Fidelity there must be; or, if it has failed, the deep repentance that subdues wandering desire and rebellious will, bringing the whole of life anew into the way of lowly service.

## IX

### *THE STRAIN OF THE DESERT JOURNEY*

#### NUMBERS xi

THE narrative has accompanied the march of Israel but a short way from the mount of God to some spot marked for an encampment by the ark of the covenant, and already complaining has to be told of, and the swift judgment of those who complained. The Israelites have made a reservation in their covenant with God, that though obedience and trust are solemnly promised, yet leave shall be taken to murmur against His providence. They will have God for their Protector, they will worship Him; but let Him make their life smooth. Much has had to be borne which they did not anticipate; and they grumble and speak evil.

Generally men do not realise that their murmuring is against God. They have no intention to accuse His providence. It is of other men they complain, who come in their way; of accidents, so called, for which no one seems to be responsible; of regulations, well enough meant, which at some point prove vexatious; the obtuseness and carelessness of those who undertake but do not perform. And there does seem to be a great difference between displeasure with human agents whose follies and failures provoke us, and discontent with our own lot and its trials. At the same time, this

has to be kept in view, that while we carefully refrain from criticising Providence, there may be, underlying our complaints, a tacit opinion that the world is not well made nor well ordered. To a certain extent the persons who irritate us are responsible for their mistakes; but just among those who are prone to err our discipline has been appointed. To gird at them is as much a revolt against the Creator as to complain of the heat of summer or the winter cold. With our knowledge of what the world is, of what our fellow-creatures are, should go the perception that God rules everywhere and stands against us when we resent what, in His world, we have to do or to suffer. He is against those who fail in duty also. Yet it is not for us to be angry. Our due will not be withheld. Even when we suffer most it is still offered, still given. While we endeavour to remedy the evils we feel, it must be without a thought that the order appointed by the Great King fails us at any point.

The punishment of those who complained is spoken of as swift and terrible. "The fire of the Lord burnt among them, and devoured in the uttermost part of the camp." This judgment falls under a principle assumed throughout the whole book, that disaster must overtake transgressors, and conversely that death by pestilence, earthquake, or lightning is invariably a result of sin. For the Israelites this was one of the convictions that maintained a sense of moral duty and of the danger of offending God. Again and again in the wilderness, where thunderstorms were common and plagues spread rapidly, the impression was strongly confirmed that the Most High observed everything that was done against His will. The journey to Canaan brought in this way a new experience of God to those who had

been accustomed to the equable conditions of climate and the comparative health enjoyed in Egypt. The moral education of the people advanced by the quickening of conscience in regard to all that befell Israel.

From the disaster at Taberah the narrative passes to another phase of complaint in which the whole camp was involved. The dissatisfaction began amongst the "mixed multitude"—that somewhat lawless crowd of low-caste Egyptians and people of the Delta and the wilderness who attached themselves to the host. Among them first, because they had absolutely no interest in Israel's hope, a disposition to quarrel with their circumstances would naturally arise. But the spirit of dissatisfaction grew apace, and the burden of the new complaint was: "We have nought but this manna to look to." The part of the desert into which the travellers had now penetrated was even more sterile than Midian. Hitherto the food had been varied somewhat by occasional fruits and the abundant milk of kine and goats. But pasturage for the cattle was scanty in the wilderness of Paran, and there were no trees of any kind. Appetite found nothing that was refreshing. Their soul was dried away.

It was a common belief in our Lord's time that the manna, falling from heaven, very food of the angels, had been so satisfying, so delicious, that no people could have been more favoured than those who ate of it. When Christ spoke of the meat which endureth unto eternal life, the thought of His hearers immediately turned to the manna as the special gift of God to their fathers, and they conceived an expectation that Jesus would give them that bread of heaven, and so prove Himself worthy of their faith. But He replied, "Moses gave you not that bread out of heaven, but My Father

giveth you the true bread out of heaven. I am the Bread of Life."

In the course of time the manna had been, so to speak, glorified. It appeared to the later generations one of the most wonderful and impressive things recorded in the whole history of their nation, this provision made for the wandering host. There was the water from the rock, and there was the manna. What a benignant Providence had watched over the tribes! How bountiful God had been to the people in the old days! They longed for a sign of the same kind. To enjoy it would restore their faith and put them again in the high position which had been denied for ages.

But these notions are not borne out by the history as we have it in the passage under notice. Nothing is said about angels' food—that is a poetical expression which a psalmist used in his fervour. Here we read, as to the coming of the manna, that when the dew fell upon the camp at night the manna fell upon it, or with it. And so far from the people being satisfied, they complained that instead of the fish and onions, cucumbers and melons of Egypt, they had nothing but manna to eat. The taste of it is described as like that of fresh oil. In Exodus it is said to have resembled wafers mixed with honey. It was not the privilege of the Israelites in the wilderness but their necessity to live on this somewhat cloying food. In no sense can it be called ideal. Nevertheless, complaining about it, they were in serious fault, betraying the foolish expectation that on the way to liberty they should have no privations. And their discontent with the manna soon became alarming to Moses. A sort of hysteria spread through the camp. Not the women

only, but the men at the doors of their tents bewailed their hard lot. There was a tempest of tears and cries.

God, through His providence, determining for men, carrying out His own designs for their good, does not allow them to keep in the region of the usual and of mere comfort. Something is brought into their life which stirs the soul. In new hope they begin an enterprise the course and end of which they cannot foresee. The conventional, the pleasant, the peace and abundance of Egypt, can be no longer enjoyed if the soul is to have its own. By Moses Jehovah summoned the Israelites from the land of plenty to fulfil a high mission; and when they responded, it was so far a proof that there was in them spirit enough for an uncommon destiny. But for the accomplishment of it they had to be nerved and braced by trial. Their ordeal was that mortifying of the flesh and of sensuous desire which must be undergone if the hopes through which the mind becomes conscious of the will of God are to be fulfilled.

In our personal history God, reaching us by His word, enlightening us with regard to the true ends of our being, calls us to begin a journey which has no earthly terminus and promises no earthly reward. We may be quite sure that we have not yet responded to His call if there is nothing of the wilderness in our life, no hardship, no adventure, no giving up of what is good in a temporal sense for what is good in a spiritual sense. The very essence of the design of God concerning a man is that he leave the lower and seek the higher, that he deny himself that which according to the popular view is his life, in order to seek a remote and lofty goal. There will be duty that calls for faith, that needs hope and courage. In doing it

he will have recurring trials of his spirit, necessities of self-discipline, stern difficulties of choice and action. Every one of these he must face.

What is wrong with many lives is that they have no strain in them as of a desert journey towards a heavenly Canaan, the realisation of spiritual life. Adventure, when it is undertaken, is often for the sake of getting fish and melons and cucumbers by-and-by in greater abundance and of better kinds. Many live hardly just now, not because they are on the way to spiritual freedom and the high destiny of life in God, but because they believe themselves to be on the way to better social position, to wealth or honour. But take the life that has begun its high enterprise at the urgency of a Divine vocation, and that life will find hardness, deprivations, perils, of its own. It is not given to us to be absolutely certain in decision and endeavour. Out in the wilderness, even when manna is provided, and the pillar of cloud seems to show the way, the people of God are in danger of doubting whether they have done wisely, whether they have not taken too much upon themselves or laid too much upon the Lord. The Israelites might have said, We have obeyed God: why, then, should the sun smite us with burning heat, and the dust-storms sweep down upon our march, and the night fall with so bitter a chill? Interminable toil, in travelling, in attending to cattle and domestic duties, in pitching tents and striking them, gathering fuel, searching far and wide through the camp for food, helping the children, carrying the sick and aged, toil that did not cease till far into the night and had to be resumed with early morning—such, no doubt, were the things that made life in the wilderness irksome. And although many now have a

lighter burden, yet our social life, adding new difficulties with every improvement, our domestic affairs, the continual struggle necessary in labour and business, furnish not a few causes of irritation and of bitterness. God does not remove annoyances out of the way even of His devoted servants. We remember how Paul was vexed and burdened while carrying the world's thought on into a new day. We remember what a weight the infirmities and treacheries of men laid upon the heart of Christ.

Let us thank God if we feel sometimes across the wilderness a breeze from the hills of the heavenly Canaan, and now and then catch glimpses of them far away. But the manna may seem flat and tasteless, nevertheless; the road may seem long; the sun may scorch. Tempted to despond, we need afresh to assure ourselves that God is faithful who has given us His promise. And although we seem to be led not towards the heavenly frontier, but often aside through close defiles into some region more barren and dismal than we have yet crossed, doubt is not for us. He knoweth the way that we take; when He has tried us, we shall come forth where He appoints.

From the people we turn to Moses and the strain he had to bear as leader. Partly it was due to his sense of the wrath of God against Israel. To a certain extent he was responsible for those he led, for nothing he had done was apart from his own will. The enterprise was laid on him as a duty certainly; yet he undertook it freely. Such as the Israelites were, with that mixed multitude among them, a dangerous element enough, Moses had personally accepted the leadership of them. And now the murmuring, the lusting, the childish weeping, fall upon him. He feels that he must

stand between the people and Jehovah. The behaviour of the multitude vexes him to the soul; yet he must take their part, and avert, if possible, their condemnation.

The position is one in which a leader of men often finds himself. Things are done which affront him personally, yet he cannot turn against the wayward and unbelieving, for, if he did, the cause would be lost. The Divine judgment of the transgressors falls on him all the more because they themselves are unaware of it. The burden such an one has to sustain points directly to the sin-bearing of Christ. Wounded to the soul by the wrong-doing of men, He had to interpose between them and the stroke of the law, the judgment of God. And may not Moses be said to be a type of Christ? The parallel may well be drawn; yet the imperfect mediation of Moses fell far short of the perfect mediation of our Lord. The narrative here reflects that partial knowledge of the Divine character which made the mediation of Moses human and erring for all its greatness.

For one thing Moses exaggerated his own responsibility. He asked of God: "Why hast Thou evil entreated Thy servant? Why dost Thou lay the burden of all this people upon me? Am I their father? Am I to carry the whole multitude as a father carries his young child in his bosom?" These are ignorant words, foolish words. Moses is responsible, but not to that extent. It is fit that he should be grieved when the Israelites do wrong, but not proper that he should charge God with laying on him the duty of keeping and carrying them like children. He speaks unadvisedly with his lips.

Responsibility of those who endeavour to lead others has its limits; and the range of duty is bounded in

two ways—on the one hand by the responsibility of men for themselves, on the other hand by God's responsibility for them, God's care of them. Moses should see that no law or ordinance makes him chargeable with the childish lamentations of those who know they should not complain, who ought to be manly and endure with stout hearts. If persons who can go on their own feet want to be carried, no one is responsible for carrying them. It is their own fault when they are left behind. If those who can think and discover duty for themselves, desire constantly to have it pointed out to them, crave daily encouragement in doing their duty, and complain because they are not sufficiently considered, the leader, like Moses, is not responsible. Every man must bear his own burden—that is, must bear the burden of duty, of thought, of effort, so far as his ability goes.

Then, on the other side, the power of God is beneath all, His care extends over all. Moses ought not for a moment to doubt Jehovah's mindfulness of His people. Men who hold office in society or the Church are never to think that their effort is commensurate with God's. Proud indeed he would be who said: "The care of all these souls lies on me: if they are to be saved, I must save them; if they perish, I shall be chargeable with their blood." Speaking ignorantly and in haste, Moses went almost that length; but his error is not to be repeated. The charge of the Church and of the world is God's; and He never fails to do for all and for each what is right. The teacher of men, the leader of affairs, with full sympathy and indefatigable love, is to do all he can, yet never trench on the responsibility of men for their own life, or assume to himself the part of Providence.

Moses made one mistake and went on to another. He was on the whole a man of rare patience and meekness; yet on this occasion he spoke to Jehovah in terms of daring resentment. His cry was to get rid of the whole enterprise: "If Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, and let me not see my wretchedness." He seemed to himself to have this work to do and no other, apparently imagining that if he was not competent for this, he could be of no use in the world. But even if he had failed as a leader, highest in office, he might have been fit enough for a secondary place, under Joshua or some other whom God might inspire: this he failed to see. And although he was bound up in Israel's well-being, so that if the expedition did not prosper he had no wish to live, and was so far sincerely patriotic, yet what good end could his death serve? The desire to die shows wounded pride. Better live on and turn shepherd again. No man is to despise his life, whatever it is, however it may seem to come short of the high ambition he has cherished as a servant of God and men. Discovering that in one line of endeavour he cannot do all he would, let him make trial of others, not pray for death.

The narrative represents God as dealing graciously with his erring servant. Help was provided for him by the appointment of seventy elders, who were to share the task of guiding and controlling the tribes. These seventy were to have a portion of the leader's spirit—zeal and enthusiasm like his own. Their influence in the camp would prevent the faithlessness and dejection which threatened to wreck the Hebrew enterprise. Further, the murmuring of the people was to be effectually silenced. Flesh was to be given them

till they loathed it. They should learn that the satisfaction of ignorant desire meant punishment rather than pleasure.

The promise of flesh was speedily fulfilled by an extraordinary flight of quails, brought up, according to the seventy-eighth Psalm, by a wind which blew from the south and east—that is, from the Elyptic Gulf. These quails cannot sustain themselves long on the wing, and after crossing the desert some thirty or forty miles they would scarcely be able to fly. The enormous numbers of them which fluttered around the camp are not beyond ordinary possibility. Fowls of this kind migrate at certain seasons in such enormous multitudes that in the small island of Capri, near Naples, one hundred and sixty thousand have been netted in one season. When exhausted, they would easily be taken as they flew at a height of about two cubits above the ground. The whole camp was engaged in capturing quails from one morning to the evening of the following day; and the quantity was so great that he who gathered least had ten homers, probably a heap estimated to be of that measure. To keep them for further use the birds were prepared and spread on the ground to dry in the sun.

When the epidemic of weeping broke out through the camp, the doubt occurred to Moses whether there was any spiritual quality in the people, any fitness for duty or destiny of a religious kind. They seemed to be all unbelievers on whom the goodness of God and the sacred instruction had been wasted. They were earthly and sensual. How could they ever trust God enough to reach Canaan?—or if they reached it, how would their occupation of it be justified? They would but form another heathen nation, all the worse that

they had once known the true God and had abandoned Him. But a different view of things was presented to Moses when the chosen elders, men of worth, were gathered at the tent of meeting, and on a sudden impulse of the Spirit began to prophesy. As these men in loud and ecstatic language proclaimed their faith, Moses found his confidence in Jehovah's power and in the destiny of Israel re-established. His mind was relieved at once of the burden of responsibility and the dread of an extinction of the heavenly light he had been the means of kindling among the tribes. If there were seventy men capable of receiving the Spirit of God, there might be hundreds, even thousands. A spring of new enthusiasm is opened, and Israel's future is again possible.

Now there were two men, Eldad and Medad, who were of the seventy, but had not come to the tent of meeting, where the prophetic spirit fell upon the rest. They had not heard the summons, we may suppose. Unaware of what was taking place at the tabernacle, yet realising the honour conferred upon them, they were perhaps engaged in ordinary duties, or, having found some need for their interference, they may have been rebuking murmurers and endeavouring to restore order among the unruly. And suddenly they also, under the same influence as the other sixty-eight, began to prophesy. The spirit of earnestness caught them. With the same ecstasy they declared their faith and praised the God of Israel.

There was in one sense a limitation of the spirit of prophecy, whatever it was. Of all the host only the seventy received it. Other good men and true in Israel that day might have seemed as capable of the heavenly endowment as those who prophesied. It

was, however, in harmony with a known principle that the men designated to special office alone received the gift. The sense of a choice felt to be that of God does unquestionably exalt the mind and spirit of those chosen. They realise that they stand higher and must do more for God and men than others, that they are inspired to say what otherwise they could not dare to say. The limitation of the Spirit in this sense is not invariable, is not strict. At no time in the world's history has the call to office been indispensable to prophetic fervour and courage. Yet the sequence is sufficiently common to be called a law.

But while in a sense there is restriction of the spiritual influence, in another sense there is no restraint. The Divine afflatus is not confined to those who have gathered at the tabernacle. It is not place or occasion that makes the prophets; it is the Spirit, the power from on high entering into life; and out in the camp the two have their portion of the new energy and zeal. Spiritual influence, then, is not confined to any particular place. Neither was the neighbourhood of the tabernacle so holy that there alone the elders could receive their gift; nor is any place of meeting, any church, capable of such consecration and singular identification with the service of God that there alone the power of the Divine Spirit can be manifested or received. Let there be a man chosen of God, ready for the duties of a holy calling, and on that man the Spirit will come, wherever he is, in whatever he is engaged. He may be employed in common work, but in doing it he will be moved to earnest service and testimony. He may be labouring, under great difficulties, to restore the justice that has been impaired by social errors and political chicanery—and his words will be prophetic; he will be a witness

for God to those who are without faith, without holy fear.

While Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, a young man who heard them ran officiously to inform Moses. To this young man as to others—for no doubt there were many who loved and revered the Usual—the two elders were presumptuous fools. The camp was, as we say, secular: was it not? People in the camp looked after ordinary affairs, tended their cattle, chattered and bargained, quarrelled about trifles, murmured against Moses and against God. Was it right to prophesy there, carrying religious words and ideas into the midst of common life? If Eldad and Medad could prophesy, let them go to the tabernacle. And besides, what right had they to speak for Jehovah, in Jehovah's name? Was not Moses the prophet, the only prophet? Israel was accustomed to think him so, would keep to that opinion. It would be confusing if at any one's tent door a prophet might begin to speak without warning. So the young man thought it his duty to run and tell Moses what was taking place. And Joshua, when he heard, was alarmed, and desired Moses to put an end to the irregular ministry. "My lord Moses, forbid them," he said. He was jealous not for himself and the other elders, but for Moses' sake. So far the leader alone held communication with Jehovah and spoke in His name; and there was perhaps some reason for the alarm of Joshua, more than was apparent at the time. To have one central authority was better and safer than to have many persons using the right to speak in any sense for God. Who could be sure that these new voices would agree with Moses in every respect? Even if they did, might there not be divisions in the camp, new priesthoods as well as new oracles?

Prophets might not be always wise, always truly inspired. And there might be false prophets by-and-by, even if Eldad and Medad were not false.

In like manner it might be argued now that there is danger when one here and another there assume authority as revealers of the truth of things. Some, full of their own wisdom, take high ground as critics and teachers of religion. Others imagine that with the right to wear a certain dress there has come to them the full equipment of the prophet. And others still, remembering how Elijah and John the Baptist arrayed themselves in coarse cloth and leathern girdle, assume that garb, or what corresponds to it, and claim to have the prophetic gift because they express the voice of the people. So in our days there is a question whether Eldad or Medad, prophesying in the camp, ought to be trusted or even allowed to speak. But who is to decide? Who is to take upon him to silence the voices? The old way was rough and ready. All who were in office in a certain Church were commissioned to interpret Divine mysteries; the rest were ordered to be silent on pain of imprisonment. Those who did not teach as the Church taught, under her direction, were made offenders against the public well-being. That way, however, has been found wanting, and "liberty of prophesying" is fully allowed. With the freedom there have come difficulties and dangers enough. Yet to "try the spirits whether they are of God" is our discipline on the way to life.

The reply of Moses to Joshua's request anticipates, in no small degree, the doctrine of liberty. "Art thou jealous for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them." His answer is that of a broad

and magnanimous toleration. Mosès cannot indeed have believed that great religious truths were in the reach of every man, and that any earnest soul might receive and communicate those truths. But his conception of a people of God is like that in the prophecy of Joel, where he speaks of all flesh being endued with the Spirit, the old men and young men, the sons and daughters, alike made able to testify of what they have seen and heard. The truly great man entertains no jealousy of others. He delights to see in other eyes the flash of heavenly intelligence, to find other souls made channels of Divine revelation. He would have no monopoly in knowledge and sacred prophecy. Moses had instituted an exclusive priesthood; but here he sets the gate of the prophetic office wide open. All whom God endows are declared free in Israel to use that office.

We can only wonder that still any order of men should try in the name of the Church to shut the mouths of those who approve themselves reverent students of the Divine Word. At the same time let it not be forgotten that the power of prophesying is no chance gift, no easy faculty. He who is to speak on God's behalf must indeed know the mind of God. How can one claim the right to instruct others who has never opened his mind to the Divine voice, who has not reverently compared Scripture with Providence and all the phases of revelation that are unfolded in conscience and human life? Men who draw a narrow circle and keep their thoughts within it can never become prophets.

The closing verses of the chapter tell of the plague that fell on the lustful, and the burial of those who died of it, in a place thence called Kibroth-hattaavah.

The people had their desire, and it brought judgment upon them. Here in Israel's history a needful warning is written ; but how many read without understanding ! And so, every day the same plague is claiming its victims, and " graves of lust " are dug. The preacher still finds in this portion of Scripture a subject that never ceases to claim treatment, let social conditions be what they may.

## X

### *THE JEALOUSY OF MIRIAM AND AARON*

#### NUMBERS xii

IT may be confidently said that no representative writer of the post-exilic age would have invented or even cared to revive the episode of this chapter. From the point of view of Ezra and his fellow-reformers, it would certainly appear a blot on the character of Moses that he passed by the women of his own people and took a Cushite or Ethiopian wife. The idea of the "holy seed," on which the zealous leaders of new Judaism insisted after the return from Babylon, was exclusive. It appeared an abomination for Israelites to intermarry either with the original inhabitants of Canaan, or even with Moabites, Ammonites, and Egyptians. At an earlier date any disposition to seek alliance with Egypt or hold intercourse with it was denounced as profane. Isaiah and Jeremiah alike declare that Israel, whom Jehovah led forth from Egypt, should never think of returning to drink of its waters or trust in its shadow. As the necessity of separateness from other peoples became strongly felt, revulsion from Ethiopia would be greater than from Egypt itself. Jeremiah's inquiry, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" made the dark colour of that race a symbol of moral taint.

To be sure, the prophets did not all adopt this view. Amos, especially, in one of his striking passages, claims for the Ethiopians the same relation to God as Israel had: "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O children of Israel, saith the Lord?" No reproach to the Israelites is intended; they are only reminded that all nations have the same origin and are under the same Divine providence. And the Psalms in their evangelical anticipations look once and again to that dark land in the remote south: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God"; "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know Me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there." The zeal of the period immediately after the captivity carried separateness far beyond that of any earlier time, surpassing the letter of the statute in Exod. xxxiv. 11 and Deut. vii. 2. And we may safely assert that if the Pentateuch did not come into existence till after the new ideas of exclusion were established, and if it was written then for the purpose of exalting Moses and his law, the reference to his Cushite wife would certainly have been suppressed.

All the more may this be maintained when we take into account the likelihood that it was not entirely without reason Aaron and Miriam felt some jealousy of the woman. The story is usually taken to mean that there was no cause whatever for the feeling entertained; and if Miriam alone had been involved, we might have regarded the matter as without significance. But Aaron had hitherto acted cordially with the brother to whom he owed his high position. Not a single disloyal word or deed had as yet separated him in the least, personally, from Moses. They wrought

together in the promulgation of law, they were together in transgression and judgment. Aaron had every reason for remaining faithful; and if he was now moved to a feeling that the character and reputation of the lawgiver were imperilled, it must have been because he saw reason. He could approach Moses quietly on this subject without any thought of challenging his authority as leader. We see that while he accompanied Miriam he kept in the background, unwilling, himself, to appear as an accuser, though persuaded that the unpleasant duty must be done.

So far as Moses is concerned these thoughts, which naturally arise, go to support the genuineness of the history. And in like manner the condemnation of Aaron bears out the view that the episode is not of legendary growth. If priestly influence had determined to any extent the form of the narrative, the fault of Aaron would have been suppressed. He agrees with Miriam in making a claim the rejection of which involves him and the priesthood in shame. And yet, again, the theory that here we have prophetic narrative, critical of the priesthood, will not stand; for Miriam is a prophetess, and language is used which seems to deny to all but Moses a clear and intimate knowledge of the Divine will.

Miriam was the spokeswoman. She it was, as the Hebrew implies, who "spake against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married." It would seem that hitherto in right of her prophetic gift she was to some extent an adviser of her brother, or had otherwise a measure of influence. It appeared to her not only a bad thing for Moses himself but absolutely wrong that a woman of alien race, who probably came out of Egypt with the tribes, one among the mixed

multitude, should have anything to say to him in private, or should be in his confidence. Miriam maintained, apparently, that her brother had committed a serious mistake in marrying this wife, and still more in denying to Aaron and to herself that right of advising which they had hitherto used. Was not Moses forgetting that Miriam had her share in the zeal and inspiration which had made the guidance of the tribes so far successful? If Moses stands aloof, consults only with his alien wife, will he not forfeit position and authority and be deprived of help with which he has no right to dispense?

Miriam's is an instance, the first instance we may say, of the woman's claim to take her place side by side with the man in the direction of affairs. It would be absurd to say that the modern desire has its origin in a spirit of jealousy like that which Miriam showed; yet, parallel to her demand, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not also spoken by us?" is the recent cry, "Has man a monopoly either of wisdom or of the moral qualities? Are not women at least equally endowed with ethical insight and sagacity in counsel?" Long excluded from affairs by custom and law, women have become weary of using their influence in an unrecognised, indirect way, and many would now claim an absolute parity with men, convinced that if in any respect they are weak as yet they will soon become capable. The claim is to a certain extent based on the Christian doctrine of equality between male and female, but also on the acknowledged success of women who, engaging in public duties side by side with men, have proved their aptitude and won high distinction.

At the same time, those who have had experience

of the world and the many phases of human life must always have a position which the inexperienced may not claim ; and women, as compared with men, must continue to be at a certain disadvantage for this reason. It may be supposed that intuition can be placed against experience, that the woman's quick insight may serve her better than the man's slowly acquired knowledge. And most will allow this, but only to a certain point. The woman's intuition is a fact of her nature—to be trusted often and along many ways. It is, indeed, her experience, gained half unconsciously. But the modern claim is assuming far more than this. We are told that the moral sense of the race comes down through women. They conserve the moral sense. This is no Christian claim, or Christian only in outdoing Romanism and setting Mary far above her Son. Seriously put forward by women, this will throw back their whole claim into the middle ages again. That a finer moral sense often forms part of their intuition is admitted : that as a sex they lead the race must be proved where, as yet, they do not prove it. Nevertheless, the world is advancing by the advance of women. There is no need any longer for that jealous intriguing which has often wrecked governments and homes. Christianity, ruling the questions of sex, means a very stable form of society, a continuous and calm development, the principle of charity and mutual service.

Miriam claimed the position of a prophet or *nabi* for herself, and endeavoured to make her gift and Aaron's as revealers of truth appear equal to that of Moses. At the Red Sea she led the chorus "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." That, so far as we know, was her title to count herself a

prophetess. As for Aaron, we often find his name associated with his brother's in the formula, "The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron." He had also been the *nabi* of Moses when the two went to Pharaoh with their demand on behalf of Israel. But the claim of equality with Moses was vain. Poor Miriam had her one flash of high enthusiasm, and may have now and again risen to some courage and zeal in professing her faith. But she does not seem to have had the ability to distinguish between her fitful glimpses of truth and Moses' Divine intelligence. Aaron, again, must have been half ashamed when he was placed beside his brother. He had no genius, none of the elevation of soul that betokens an inspired man. He obeyed well, served the sanctuary well; he was a good priest, but no prophet.

The little knowledge, the small gifts, appear great to those who have them, so great as often to eclipse those of nobler men. We magnify what we have,—our power of vision, though we cannot see far; our spiritual intelligence, though we have learned the first principles only of Divine faith. In the religious controversies of to-day, as in those of the past, men whose claims are of the slightest have pushed to the front with the demand, Hath not the Lord spoken by us? But there is no Moses to be challenged. The age of the revealers is gone. He who seems to be a great prophet may be taken for one because he stands on the past and invokes voluminous authority for all he says and does. In truth, our disputations are between the modern Eliphaz, Bildad, and Job—all of them to-day men of limited view and meagre inspiration, who repeat old hearsays with wearisome pertinacity, or inveigh against the old interpretations with infinite

assurance. Jehovah speaks from the storm ; but there is no heed paid to His voice. By some the Word is declared unintelligible ; others deny it to be His.

While Moses kept silence, ruling his spirit in the meekness of a man of God, suddenly the command was given, "Come out, ye three, unto the tent of meeting." Possibly the interview had been at Moses' own tent in the near portion of the camp. Now judgment was to be solemnly given ; and the circumstances were made the more impressive by the removal of the cloud-pillar from above the tabernacle to the door of the tent, where it seems to have intervened between Moses on the one side and Miriam and Aaron on the other ; then the Voice spoke, requiring these two to approach, and the oracle was heard. The subject of it was the position of Moses as the interpreter of Jehovah's will. He was distinguished from any other prophet of the time.

We are here at a point where more knowledge is needful to a full understanding of the revelation : we can only conjecture. Not long is it since the seventy elders belonging to different tribes were endowed with the spirit of prophecy. Already there may have been some abuse of their new power ; for though God bestows His gifts on men, they have practical liberty, and may not always be wise or humble in exercising the gifts. So the need of a distinction between Moses and the others would be clear. As to Miriam and Aaron, their jealousy may have been not only of Moses, but also of the seventy. Miriam and Aaron were prophets of older standing, and would be disposed to claim that the Lord spoke by them rather in the way He spoke by Moses than after the manner of His communications through the seventy. Were members

of the sacred family to be on a level henceforth with any persons who spoke ecstatically in praise of Jehovah? Thus claim asserted itself over claim. The seventy had to be informed as to the limits of their office, prevented from taking a place higher than they had been assigned: Miriam and Aaron also had to be instructed that their position differed entirely from their brother's, that they must be content so far as prophecy was concerned to stand with the rest whose inspiration they may have despised. With this view the general terms of the deliverance appear to correspond.

The Voice from the tent of meeting was heard through the cloud; and on the one hand the function of the prophet or *nabi* was defined, on the other the high honour and prerogative of Moses were announced. The prophet, said the Voice, shall have Jehovah made known to him "in vision, or in dream,"—in his waking hours, when the mind is on the alert, receiving impressions from nature and the events of life; when memory is occupied with the past and hope with the future, the vision shall be given. Or again, in sleep, when the mind is withdrawn from external objects and appears entirely passive, a dream shall open glimpses of the great work of Providence, the purposes of judgment or of grace. In these ways the prophet shall receive his knowledge; and of necessity the revelation will be to some extent shadowed, difficult to interpret. Now the name prophet, *nabi*, is continually applied throughout the Old Testament, not only to the seventy and others who like them spoke in ecstatic language, and those who afterwards used musical instruments to help the rapture with which the Divine utterance came, but also to men like Amos and Isaiah. And it has been made a question whether the inspiration of these pro-

phets is to come under the general law of the oracle we are considering. The answer in one sense is clear. So far as the word *nabi* designates all, they are all of one order. But it is equally certain, as Kuenen has pointed out, that the later prophets were not always in a state of ecstasy when they gave their oracles, nor simply reproducing thoughts of which they first became conscious in that state. They had an exalting consciousness of the presence and enlightening Spirit of Jehovah bestowed on them, or the burden of Jehovah laid on them. The visions were often flashes of thought; at other times the prophet seemed to look on a new earth and heaven filled with moving symbols and powers. But the whole development of national faith and knowledge affected their flashes of thought and visions, lifting prophetic energy into a higher range.

Now, returning to the oracle, we find that Moses is not a prophet or *nabi* in this sense. The words that relate to him carefully distinguish between his illumination and that of the *nabi*. "My servant Moses is not so; he is faithful in all Mine house: with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the form of Jehovah shall he behold." Every word here is chosen to exclude the idea of ecstasy, the idea of vision or dream, which leaves some shadow of uncertainty upon the mind, and the idea of any intermediate influence between the human intelligence and the disclosure of God's will. And when we try to interpret this in terms of our own mental operations, and our consciousness of the way in which truth reaches our minds, we recognise for one thing an impression made distinctly word by word of the message to be conveyed. There is given to Moses not only a general idea of the truth or principle

to be embodied in his words, but he receives the very terms. They come to him in concrete form. He has but to repeat or write what Jehovah communicates. Along with this there is given to Moses a power of apprehending the form or similitude of God. His mind is made capable of singular precision in receiving and transmitting the oracle or statute. There is complete calmness and what we may call self-possession when he is in the tent of meeting face to face with the Eternal. And yet he has this spiritual, transcendent symbol of the Divine Majesty before him. He is no poet, but he enjoys some revelation higher and more exalting to mind and soul than poet ever had.

The paradox is not inconceivable. There is a way to this converse with God "mouth to mouth" along which the patient, earnest soul can partly travel. Without rhapsody, with full effort of the mind that has gathered from every source and is ready for the Divine synthesis of ideas, the Divine illumination, the Divine dictation, if we may so speak, the humble intelligence may arrive where, for the guidance of the personal life at least, the very words of God are to be heard. Beyond, along the same way, lies the chamber of audience which Moses knew. We think it an amazing thing to be sure of God and of His will to the very words. Our state is so often that of doubt, or of self-absorption, or of entanglement with the affairs of others, that we are generally incapable of receiving the direct message. Yet of whom should we be sure if not of God? Of what words should we be more certain than those pure, clear words that come from His mouth? Moses heard on great themes, national and moral—he heard for the ages, for the world: there lay his unique

dignity. We may hear only for our own guidance in the next duty that is to be done. But the Spirit of God directs those who trust Him. It is ours to seek and to receive the very truth.

With regard to the *similitude* of Jehovah which Moses saw, we notice that there is no suggestion of human form; rather would this seem to be carefully avoided. The statement does not take us back to the appearance of the angel Jehovah to Abraham, nor does it point to any manifestation like that of which we read in the history of Joshua or of Gideon. Nothing is here said of an angel. We are led to think of an exaltation of the spiritual perception of Moses, so that he knew the reality of the Divine life, and was made sure of an originative wisdom, a transcendent source of ideas and moral energy. He with whom Moses holds communion is One whose might and holiness and glory are seen with the spiritual eye, whose will is made known by a voice entering into the soul. And the distinction intended between Moses and all other prophets corresponds to a fact which the history of Israel's religion brings to light. The account of the way in which Jehovah communicated with Moses remains subject to the condition that the expressions used, such as "mouth to mouth," are still only symbols of the truth. They mean that in the very highest sense possible to man Moses entered into the purposes of God regarding His people. Now Isaiah certainly approached this intimate knowledge of the Divine counsel when long afterwards he said in Jehovah's name: "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment unto the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street."

Yet between Moses and Isaiah there is a difference. For Moses is the means of giving to Israel pure morality and true religion. By the inspiration of God he brings into existence that which is not. Isaiah foresees; Moses, in a sense, creates. And the one parallel with Moses, according to Scripture, is to be found in Christ, who is the creator of the new humanity.

When the oracle had spoken, there was a movement of the cloud from the door of the tent of meeting, and apparently from the tabernacle—a sign of the displeasure of God. Following the idea that the cloud was connected with the altar, this withdrawal has been interpreted by Lange as a rebuke to Aaron. “He was inwardly crushed; the fire on his altar went out; the pillar of smoke no longer mounted up as a token of grace; the cultus was for a moment at a standstill, and it was as if an interdict of Jehovah lay on the cultus of the sanctuary.” But the cloud-pillar is not, as this interpretation would imply, associated with Aaron personally; it is always the symbol of the Divine will “by the hand of Moses.” We must suppose therefore that the movement of the cloud conveyed in some new and unexpected way a sense of the Divine support which Moses enjoyed. He was justified in all he had done: condemnation was brought home to his accusers.

And Miriam, who had offended most, was punished with more than a rebuke. Suddenly she was found to be covered with leprosy. Aaron, looking upon her, saw that morbid pallor which was regarded as the invariable sign of the disease. It was seen as a proof of her sin and of the anger of Jehovah. Himself trembling as one who had barely escaped, Aaron could not but confess his share in the transgression. Addressing Moses with the deepest reverence, he said,

“Oh my lord, lay not, I pray thee, sin upon us, for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned.” The leprosy is the mark of sin. Let it not be stamped on her indelibly, nor on me. Let not the disease run its course to the horrible end. With no small presumption the two had ventured to challenge their brother’s conduct and position. They knew indeed, yet from their intimacy with him did not rightly apprehend, the “divinity that hedged” him. Now for the first time its terror is disclosed to themselves; and they shrink before the man of God, pleading with him as if he were omnipotent.

Moses needs no second appeal to his compassion. He is a truly inspired man, and can forgive. He has seen the great God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, slow to anger, and he has caught something of the Divine magnanimity. This temper was not always shown throughout Israel’s history by those who had the position of prophets. And we find that men who claim to be religious, even to be interpreters of the Divine will, are not invariably above retaliation. They are seen to hate those who criticise them, who throw doubt upon their arguments. A man’s claim to fellowship with God, his professed knowledge of the Divine truth and religion, may be tested by his conduct when he is under challenge. If he cannot plead with God on behalf of those who have assailed him, he has not the Spirit; he is as “sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.”

Even in response to the prayer of Moses, Miriam could not be cured at once. She must go aside bearing her reproach. Shame for her offence, apart from the taint of leprosy, would make it fitting that she should withdraw seven days from camp and sanctuary.

A personal indignity, not affecting her character in the least, would have been felt to that extent. Her transgression is to be realised and brooded over for her spiritual good. The law is one that needs to be kept in mind. To escape detection and leave adverse judgment behind is all that some offenders against moral law seem to desire. They dread the shame and nothing besides. Let that be avoided, or, after continuing for a time, let the sense of it pass, and they feel themselves free. But true shame is towards God ; and from the mind sincerely penitent that does not quickly pass away. Those only who are ignorant of the nature of sin can soon overcome the consciousness of God's displeasure. As for men, no doubt they should forgive ; but their forgiveness is often too lightly granted, too complacently assumed, and we see the easy self-recovery of one who should be sitting in sackcloth and ashes. God forgives with infinite depth of tenderness and grace of pardon. But His very generosity will affect the truly contrite with poignant sorrow when His name has by their act been brought into dishonour.

The offence of Miriam was only jealousy and presumption. She may scarcely seem so great a sinner that an attack of leprosy should have been her punishment, though it lasted for no more than seven days. We make so much of bodily maladies, so little of diseases of the soul, that we would think it strange if any one for his pride should be struck with paralysis, or for envy should be laid down with fever. Yet beside the spiritual disorder that of the body is of small moment. Why do we think so little of the moral taint, the falsehood, malice, impurity, and so much of the ills our flesh is heir to ? The bad heart is the great disease.

Miriam's exclusion from the camp becomes a lesson to all the people. They do not journey while she is separated as unclean. There may have been other lepers in the outlying tents ; but her sin has been of such a kind that the public conscience is especially directed to it. And the lesson had particular point with reference to those who had the prophetic gift.

Modern society, making much of sanitation and all kinds of improvements and precautions intended to prevent the spread of epidemics and mitigate their effects, has also some thought of moral disease. Persons guilty of certain crimes are confined in prisons or "cut off from the people." But of the greater number of moral maladies no account is taken. And there is no widespread gloom over the nation, no arrest of affairs, when some hideous case of social immorality or business depravity has come to light. It is but a few who pray for those who have the evil heart, and wait sympathetically for their cleansing. Ought not the reorganisation of society to be on a moral rather than an economic basis? We should be nearer the general well-being if it were reckoned a disaster when any employer oppressed those under him, or workmen were found indifferent to their brothers, or a grave crime disclosed a low state of morality in some class or circle. It is the defeat of armies and navies, the overthrow of measures and governments, that occupy our attention as a people, and seem often to obscure every moral and religious thought. Or if injustice is the topic, we find the point of it in this : that one class is rich while another is poor ; that money, not character, is lost in shameful contention.

## XI

### *THE SPIES AND THEIR REPORT*

NUMBERS xiii. ; xiv. 1-10

TWO narratives at least appear to be united in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters. From xiii. 17, 22, 23, we learn that the spies were despatched by way of the south, and that they went to Hebron and a little beyond, as far as the valley of Eshcol. But ver. 21 states that they spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin, south of the Dead Sea, to the entering in of Hamath. The latter statement implies that they traversed what were afterwards called Judæa, Samaria, and Galilee, and penetrated as far as the valley of the Leontes, between the southern ranges of Libanus and Antilibanus. The one account taken by itself would make the journey of the spies northward about a hundred miles ; the other, three times as long.

A further difference is this : According to one of the narratives Caleb alone encourages the people (xiii. 30 ; xiv. 24). But according to the other (xiii. 8, 16 ; xiv. 6, 7), Joshua, as well as Caleb, is among the twelve, and reports favourably as to the possibility of conquering and possessing Canaan.

Without deciding on the critical points involved, we may find a way of harmonising the apparent differences. It is quite possible, for instance, that while some of the

twelve were instructed to keep in the south of Canaan, others were sent to the middle district and a third company to the north. Caleb might be among those who explored the south; while Joshua, having gone to the far north, might return somewhat later and join his testimony to that which Caleb had given. There is no inconsistency between the portions ascribed to the one narrative and those referred to the other; and the account, as we have it, may give what was the gist of several co-ordinate documents. As to any variance in the reports of the spies, we can easily understand how those who looked for smiling valleys and fruitful fields would find them, while others saw only the difficulties and dangers that would have to be faced.

The questions occur, why and at whose instance the survey was undertaken. From Deuteronomy we learn that a demand for it arose among the people. Moses says (i. 22): "Ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, Let us send men before us, that they may search the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come." In Numbers the expedition is undertaken at the order of Jehovah conveyed through Moses. The opposition here is only on the surface. The people might desire, but decision did not lie with them. It was quite natural when the tribes had at length approached the frontier of Canaan that they should seek information as to the state of the country. And the wish was one which could be sanctioned, which had even been anticipated. The land of Canaan was already known to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the praise of it as a land flowing with milk and honey mingled with their traditions. In one sense there was no need to send spies, either to report on the

fertility of the land or on the peoples dwelling in it. Yet Divine Providence, on which men are to rely, does not supersede their prudence and the duty that rests with them of considering the way they go. The destiny of a life or of a nation is to be wrought out in faith ; still we are to use all available means in order to ensure success. So personality grows through providence, and God raises men for Himself.

To the band of pioneers each tribe contributes a man, and all the twelve are headmen, whose intelligence and good faith may presumably be trusted. They know the strength of Israel ; they should also be able to count upon the great source of courage and power—the unseen Friend of the nation. Remembering what Egypt is, they know also the ways of the desert ; and they have seen war. If they possess enthusiasm and hope, they will not be dismayed by the sight of a few walled towns or even of some Anakim. They will say, “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Yet there is danger that old doubts and new fears may colour their report. God appoints men to duty ; but their personal character and tendencies remain. And the very best men Israel can choose for a task like this will need all their faithfulness and more than all their faith to do it well.

The spies were to climb the heights visible in the north, and look forth towards the Great Sea and away to Moriah and Carmel. They were also to make their way cautiously into the land itself and examine it. Moses anticipates that all he has said in praise of Canaan will be made good by the report, and the people will be encouraged to enter at once on the final struggle. When the desert was around them, unfruitful, seemingly interminable, the Israelites might have been

disposed to fear that journeying from Egypt they were leaving the fertility of the world farther and farther behind. Some may have thought that the Divine promise had misled and deceived them, and that Canaan was a dream. Even although they had now overpassed that dreary region covered with coarse gravel, black flints, and drifting sand, "the great and terrible wilderness," what hope was there that northward they should reach a land of olives, vineyards, and flowing streams? The report of the spies would answer this question.

Now in like manner the future state of existence may seem dim and unreal, scarcely credible, to many. Our life is like a series of marches hither and thither through the desert. Neither as individuals nor as communities do we seem to approach any state of blessedness and rest. Rather, as years go by, does the region become more inhospitable. Hopes once cherished are one after another disappointed. The stern mountains that overhung the track by which our forefathers went still frown upon us. It seems impossible to get beyond their shadow. And in a kind of despair some may be ready to say: There is no promised land. This waste, with its sere grass, its burning sand, its rugged hills, makes the whole of life. We shall die here in the wilderness like those who have been before us; and when our graves are dug and our bodies laid in them, our existence will have an end. But it is a thoughtless habit to doubt that of which we have no full experience. Here we have but begun to learn the possibilities of life and find a clue to its Divine mysteries. And even as to the Israelites in the wilderness there were not wanting signs that pointed to the fruitful and pleasant country beyond, so for us,

even now, there are provisions of the higher world. Some shrubs and straggling vines grew in sheltered hollows among the hills. Here and there a scanty crop of maize was reared, and in the rainy season streams flowed down the wastes. From what was known the Israelites might reason hopefully to that which as yet was beyond their sight. And are there not fore-signs for the soul, springs opened to the seekers after God in the desert, some verdure of righteousness, some strength and peace in believing?

Science and business and the cares of life absorb many and bewilder them. Immersed in the work of their world, men are apt to forget that deeper draughts of life may be drunk than they obtain in the laboratory or the counting-house. But he who knows what love and worship are, who finds in all things the food of religious thought and devotion, makes no such mistake. To him a future in the spiritual world is far more within the range of hopeful anticipation than Canaan was to one who remembered Egypt and had bathed in the waters of the Nile. Is the heavenly future real? It is: as thought and faith and love are real, as the fellowship of souls and the joy of communion with God are realities. Those who are in doubt as to immortality may find the cause of that doubt in their own earthliness. Let them be less occupied with the material, care more for the spiritual possessions, truth, righteousness, religion, and they will begin to feel an end of doubt. Heaven is no fable. Even now we have our foretaste of its refreshing waters and the fruits that are for the healing of the nations.

The spies were to climb the hills which commanded a view of the promised land. And there are heights which must be scaled if we are to have provisions of

the heavenly life. Men undertake to forecast the future of the human race who have never sought those heights. They may have gone out from camp a few miles or even some days' journey, but they have kept in the plain. One is devoted to science, and he sees as the land of promise a region in which science shall achieve triumphs hitherto only dreamt of, when the ultimate atoms shall disclose their secrets and the subtle principle of life shall be no longer a mystery. The social reformer sees his own schemes in operation, some new adjustment of human relations, some new economy or system of government, the establishment of an order that shall make the affairs of the world run smoothly, and banish want and care and possibly disease from the earth. But these and similar previsions are not from the heights. We have to climb quite above the earthly and temporal, above economics and scientific theories. Where the way of faith rises, where the love of men becomes perfect in the love of God, not in theory but in the practical endeavour of earnest life, there we ascend, we advance. We shall see the coming kingdom of God only if we are heartily with God in the ardour of the redeemed soul, if we follow in the footsteps of Christ to the summits of Sacrifice.

The spies went forth from among tribes which had so far made a good journey under the Divine guidance. So well had the expedition sped that a few days' march would have brought the travellers into Canaan. But Israel was not a hopeful people nor a united people. The thoughts of many turned back ; all were not faithful to God nor loyal to Moses. And as the people were, so were the spies. Some may have professed to be enthusiastic who had their doubts regarding Canaan and the possibility of conquering it. Others may have

even wished to find difficulties that would furnish an excuse for returning even to Egypt. Most were ready to be disenchanted at least and to find cause for alarm. In the south of Canaan a pastoral district, rocky and uninviting towards the shore of the Dead Sea, was found to be sparsely occupied by wandering companies of Amalekites, Bedawin of the time, probably with a look of poverty and hardship that gave little promise for any who should attempt to settle where they roamed. Towards Hebron the aspect of the country improved ; but the ancient city, or at all events its stronghold, was in the hands of a class of bandits whose names inspired terror throughout the district—Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, sons of Anak. The great stature of these men, exaggerated by common report, together with stories of their ferocity, seem to have impressed the timid Hebrews beyond measure. And round Hebron the Amorites, a hardy highland race, were found in occupation. The report agreed on was that the people were men of great stature ; that the land was one which ate up its inhabitants—that is to say, yielded but a precarious existence. Just beyond Hebron vineyards and olive-groves were found ; and from the valley of Eshcol one fine cluster of grapes was brought, hung upon a rod to preserve the fruit from injury, an evidence of capabilities that might be developed. Still the report was an evil one on the whole.

Those who went farther north had to tell of strong peoples—the Jebusites and Amorites of the central region, the Hittites of the north, the Canaanites of the seaboard, where afterwards Sisera had his headquarters. The cities, too, were great and walled. These spies had nothing to say of the fruitful plains of Esdraelon and Jezreel, nothing to tell of the flowery meadows,

the "murmuring of innumerable bees," the terraced vineyards, the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. They had seen the strong, resolute holders of the soil, the fortresses, the difficulties; and of these they brought back an account which caused abundant alarm. Joshua and Caleb alone had the confidence of faith, and were assured that Jehovah, if He delighted in His people, would give them Canaan as an inheritance.

The report of the majority of the spies was one of exaggeration and a certain untruthfulness. They must have spoken altogether without knowledge, or else allowed themselves to magnify what they saw, when they said of the children of Anak, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." Possibly the Hebrews were at this time somewhat ill-developed as a race, bearing the mark of their slavery. But we can hardly suppose that the Amorites, much less the Hittites, were of overpassing stature. Nor could many cities have been so large and strongly fortified as was represented, though Lachish, Hebron, Shalim, and a few others were formidable. On the other hand, the picture had none of the attractiveness it should have borne. These exaggerations and defects, however, are the common faults of misbelieving and therefore ignorant representation. Are any disposed to leave the wilderness of the world and possess the better country? A hundred voices of the baser kind will be heard giving warning and presage. Nothing is said about its spiritual fruit, its joy, hope, and peace. But its hardships are detailed, the renunciations, the obligations, the conflicts necessary before it can be possessed. Who would enter on the hopeless task of trying to cast out the strong man armed, who sits entrenched—of holding at bay the thousand forces that

oppose the Christian life? Each position must be taken after a sore struggle and kept by constant watchfulness. Little know they who think of becoming religious how hard it is to be Christians. It is a life of gloom, of constant penitence for failures that cannot be helped, a life of continual trembling and terror. So the reports go that profess to be those of experience and knowledge, of men and women who understand life.

Observe also that the account given by those who reconnoitred the land of promise sprang from an error which has its parallel now. The spies went supposing that the Israelites were to conquer Canaan and dwell there purely for their own sake, for their own happiness and comfort. Had not the wilderness journey been undertaken for that end? It did not enter into the consideration either of the people as a whole or of their representatives that they were bound for Canaan in order to fulfil the Divine purpose of making Israel a means of blessing to the world. Here, indeed, a spirituality of view was needful which the spies could not be expected to have. Breadth of foresight, too, would have been required which in the circumstances scarcely lay within human power. If any of them had taken account of Israel's spiritual destiny as a witness for Jehovah in the midst of the heathen, could they have told whether this land of Syria or some other would be a fit theatre for the fulfilment of that high destiny?

And in ignorance like theirs lies the source of mistakes often made in judging the circumstances of life, in deciding what will be wisest and best to undertake. We, too, look at things from the point of view of our own happiness and comfort, and, in a higher range, of our religious enjoyment. If we see that these

are to be had in a certain sphere, by a certain movement or change, we decide on that change, we choose that sphere. But if neither temporal well-being nor enjoyment of religious privilege appears to be certain, our common practice is to turn in another direction. Yet the truth is that we are not here, and we shall never be anywhere, either in this world or another, simply to enjoy, to have the milk and honey of a smiling land, to fulfil our own desires and live to ourselves. The question regarding the fit place or state for us depends for its answer on what God means to do through us for our fellow-men, for the truth, for His kingdom and glory. The future which we with greater or less success attempt to conquer and secure will, as the Divine hand leads us on, prove different from our dream in proportion as our lives are capable of high endeavour and spiritual service. We shall have our hope, but not as we painted it.

Who are the Calebs and Joshuas of our time? Not those who, forecasting the movements of society, see what they think shall be for their people a region of comfort and earthly prosperity, to be maintained by shutting out as far as possible the agitation of other lands; but those who realise that a nation, especially a Christian nation, has a duty under God to the whole human race. Those are our true guides and come with inspiration who bid us not be afraid in undertaking the world-wide task of commending truth, establishing righteousness, seeking the enfranchisement and Christianisation of all lands.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Caleb and afterwards of Joshua to controvert the disheartening reports spread by their companions, the people were filled with dismay; and night fell upon a weeping camp. The

pictures of those Anakim and of the tall Amorites, rendered more terrible by imagination, appear to have had most to do with the panic. But it was the general impression also that Canaan offered no attractions as a home. There was murmuring against Moses and Aaron. Disaffection spread rapidly, and issued in the proposal to take another leader and return to Egypt. Why had Jehovah brought them across the desert to put them under the sword at last? The tumult increased, and the danger of a revolt became so great that Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the assembly.

Always and everywhere *faithless* means foolish, *faithless* means cowardly. By this is explained the dejection and panic into which the Israelites fell, into which men often fall. Our life and history are not confided to the Divine care; our hope is not in God. Nothing can save a man or a nation from vacillation, despondency, and defeat but the conviction that Providence opens the way and never fails those who press on. No doubt there are considerations which might have made Israel doubtful whether the conquest of Canaan lay in the way of duty. Some modern moralists would call it a great crime—would say that the tribes could look for no success in endeavouring to dispossess the inhabitants of Canaan, or even to find a place among them. But this thought did not enter into the question. Panic fell on the host, because doubt of Jehovah and His purpose overcame the partial faith which had as yet been maintained with no small difficulty.

Now it was by the mouth of Moses Israel had been assured of the promise of God. Broadly speaking, faith in Jehovah was faith in Moses, who was their

moralist, their prophet, their guide. Men here and there, the seventy who prophesied for instance, had their personal consciousness of the Divine power; but the great mass of the people had the covenant, and trusted it through the mediation of Moses. Had Moses then, as the Israelites could judge, a right to command, unquestionable authority as a revealer of the will of the unseen God? Take away from the history every incident, every feature, that may appear doubtful, and there remains a personality, a man of distinguished unselfishness, of admirable patience, of great sagacity, who certainly was a patriot, and as certainly had greater conceptions, higher enthusiasms, than any other man of Israel. It was perhaps difficult for those who were gross in nature and very ignorant to realise that Moses was indeed in communication with an unseen, omnipotent Friend of the people. Some might even have been disposed to say: What if he is? What can God do for us? If we are to get anything, we must seek and obtain it for ourselves. Yet the Israelites as a whole held the almost universal belief of those times, the conviction that a Power above the visible world does rule the affairs of earth. And there was evidence enough that Moses was guided and sustained by the Divine hand. The sagacious mind, the brave, noble personality of Moses, made for Israel, at least for every one in Israel capable of appreciating character and wisdom, a bridge between the seen and the unseen, between man and God.

We must not indeed deny that this conviction was liable to challenge and revision. It must always be so when a man speaks for God, represents God. Doubt of the wisdom of any command meant doubt whether God had really given it by Moses. And when it seemed

that the tribes had been unwisely brought to Canaan, the reflection might be that Moses had failed as an interpreter. Yet this was not the common conclusion. Rather, from all we learn, was it the conclusion that Jehovah Himself had failed the people or deceived them. And there lay the error of unbelief which is constantly being committed still.

For us, whatever may be said as to the composition of the Bible, it is supremely, and as no other sacred book can be, the Word of God. As Moses was the one man in Israel who had a right to speak in Jehovah's name, so the Bible is the one book which can claim to instruct us in faith, duty, and hope. Speaking to us in human language, it may of course be challenged. At one point and another, some even of those who believe in Divine communication to men may question whether the Bible writers have always caught aright the sound of the heavenly Word. And some go so far as to say : There is no Divine Voice ; men have given as the Word of God, in good faith, what arose in their own mind, their own exalted imagination. Nevertheless, our faith, if faith we are to have at all, must rest on this Book. We cannot get away from human words. We must rely on spoken or written language if we are to know anything higher than our own thought. And what is written in the Bible has the highest marks of inspiration—wisdom, purity, truth, power to convince and convert and to build up a life in holiness and in hope.

It remains true accordingly that doubt of the Bible means for us, must mean, not simply doubt of the men who have been instrumental in giving us the Book, but doubt of God Himself. If the Bible did not speak in harmony with nature and reason and the widest

human experience when it lays down moral law, prescribes the true rules and unfolds the great principles of life, the affirmation just made would be absurd. But it is a book of breadth, full of wisdom which every age is verifying. It stands an absolute, the manifest embodiment of knowledge drawn from the highest sources available to men—from sources not earthly nor temporary, but sublime and eternal. Faith, therefore, must have its foundation on the teaching of this Book as to “what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.” And on the other hand infidelity is and must be the result of rejecting the revelation of the Bible, denying that here God speaks with supreme wisdom and authority to our souls.

The Israelites doubting Jehovah who had spoken through Moses, that is to say, doubting the highest, most inspiring word it was possible for them to hear, turning away from the Divine reason that spoke, the heavenly purpose revealed to them, had nothing to rely upon. Confused inadequate counsels, chaotic fears, waited immediately upon their revolt. They sank at once to despondency and the most fatuous and impossible projects. The men who stood against their despair were made offenders, almost sacrificed to their fear. Joshua and Caleb, facing the tumult, called for confidence. “Fear not ye the people of the land,” they said, “for they are bread for us: their defence is removed from over them, and Jehovah is with us: fear them not.” But all the congregation bade stone them with stones; and it was only the bright glow of the pillar of fire shining out at the moment that prevented a dreadful catastrophe.

So the faithless generations fall back still into panic,

fatuity, and crime. Trusting in their resources, men say, "No change need trouble us; we have courage, wisdom, power, sufficient for our needs." But have they unity, have they any scheme of life for which it is worth while to be courageous? The hope of bare continuance, of ignoble safety and comfort will not animate, will not inspire. Only some great vision of Duty seen along the track of the eternally right will kindle the heart of a people; the faith that goes with that vision will alone sustain courage. Without it, armies and battle-ships are but a temporary and flimsy defence, the pretext of a self-confidence, while the heart is clouded with despair. Whether men say, We will return to Egypt, refusing the call of Providence which bids us fulfil a high destiny, or, still refusing to fulfil it, We will maintain ourselves in the wilderness—they have in secret the conviction that they are failures, that their national organisation is a hollow pretence. And the end, though it may linger for a time, will be dismemberment and disaster.

Modern nations, nominally Christian, are finding it difficult to suppress disorder, and occasionally we are almost thrown into a state of panic by the activity of revolutionists. Does the cause not lie in this, that the *en avant* of Providence and Christianity is not obeyed either in the politics or social economy of the people? Like Israel, a nation has been led so far through the wilderness, but advance can only be into a new order which faith perceives, to which the voice of God calls. If it is becoming a general conclusion that there is no such country, or that the conquest of it is impossible, if many are saying, Let us settle in the wilderness, and others, Let us return to Egypt, what can the issue be but confusion? This is to encourage

the anarchist, the dynamiter. The enterprise of humanity, according to such counsels, is so far a failure, and for the future there is no inspiring hope. And to make economic self-seeking the governing idea of a nation's movement is simply to abandon the true leader and to choose another of some ignominious order. Would it have been possible to persuade Moses to hold the command of the tribes, and yet remain in the desert or return to Egypt? Neither is it possible to retain Christ as our captain and also to make this world our home, or return to a practical heathenism, relieved by abundance of food, the Hellenic worship of beauty, the organisation of pleasure. For the great enterprise of spiritual redemption alone will Christ be our leader. We lose Him if we turn to the hopes of this world and cease to press the journey towards the city of God.

## XII

### *THE DOOM OF THE UNBELIEVING*

#### NUMBERS xiv

THE spirit of revolt which came to a head in the proposal to put Joshua and Caleb to death was quelled by the fiery splendour that flashed out at the tent of meeting; but disaffection continued, and Moses realised with horror that immediate destruction threatened the tribes. Jehovah would smite them with pestilence, disinherit them, and raise up a new nation greater and mightier than they. Moses himself should be the father of the destined race.

The thought was one at which an ambitious man would have grasped; and to entertain it might well seem a good man's duty. In what better way could one of earnest and courageous spirit serve the world and the Divine purpose of grace? Moses stood as a representative of Abraham, to whom the promise had been first given, and of Jacob, to whom it had been renewed. If the will of Heaven was that a fresh beginning in the old succession should be made, the honour was not lightly to be put aside. Moses now saw, as Abraham saw, a great possibility. The Divine purpose did not fail, though Israel proved unfit to serve it; in the field of a more instructed age that magnificent hope which made Abraham great would blossom more generously and yield its fruit of blessing.

With the sense of this possible honour to himself, there came, however, to Moses other and arresting thoughts. For Abraham had become great by sacrifice, and only one spiritually greater even than he could found a worthier race. Did Moses not think of that scene on Moriah, when the son of the promise lay stretched on the altar, and feel himself inspired for a sacrifice of his own? Yet what could it be? Nothing but the silent inward refusal of that great honour which was being put in his power, the honour of becoming even higher than Abraham in the line of originators. True, it seemed that necessity was laid on him. Yet might not Jehovah intervene on Israel's behalf as once before on Isaac's, when the moment of his death had almost come? Not to sacrifice Israel was the call Moses heard when he listened in the silence, but to sacrifice his own hope, though it seemed to be pressed on him by Providence. And this began to prove itself the necessity. On the one hand he could not hide the fear that even if the Israelites were settled in Canaan a long period of education would be required to fit them for national life and power; after many generations they would be still incapable of any high spiritual task. But if Israel perished, what would happen? The faith of Jehovah, already established as an influence in the world, would fall into abeyance. When doom fell on Israel, the Egyptians would hear of it, Canaan would hear of it. The desert, the valley of the Nile, the hills of the Promised Land, would ring with the exultant cry that Jehovah had failed. And then—how long would the world have to wait till this seeming defeat could be retrieved? Century after century had passed since Abraham left his own land to fulfil the vocation of God. Century after century would have to pass before the

sons of Moses could attain to any greatness, any power to move the world. The instrument Jehovah had meanwhile to use was imperfect; the tribes were not like a strong two-edged sword in the hand of the King. Yet they existed; they could be used, and Divine might, Divine grace, could overcome their imperfection. Ere the world grew older in ignorance and idolatry, Moses would have the heavenly purpose wrought. For this he will renounce, for this he must renounce, the honour possible to himself. Let Jehovah do all.

His choice made, Moses intercedes with God. The prayer has an air of simple anthropomorphism. He appears to plead that Jehovah should not imperil His own fame. The underlying thought is partly concealed by the form of expression; but the meaning is clear. It is the dawning power of the religion of God for which Moses is concerned. He would not have that lost to men which by the events of the exodus and the wilderness journey has been so far secured. Egypt is half persuaded; Canaan is beginning to see that Jehovah is greater than Anubis and Thoth, than Moloch and Baal. Was that impression to fade and to be succeeded by doubt, possibly contempt of Jehovah as Israel's God. He had brought His people into the wilderness, but He could not establish them in Canaan; therefore He slew them: if that were said, would not the loss to mankind be incalculable? "Thou, Jehovah, art seen face to face, and Thy cloud standeth over them, and Thou goest before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night." The astonished lands have seen this; let them not return with greater trust than ever to their own poor idols.

In the report of Moses' intercession words are quoted which were part of the revelation of the Divine character

at Sinai: "Jehovah slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation." The prayer quoting these latter clauses is abundantly sincere; and it proceeds on the belief that mercy rather than judgment is the delight of God. The greatness of the Divine compassion already shown time after time since the people left Egypt is still relied upon. And the desire of Moses is granted so far as it is in harmony with the character and purpose of God. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their doings" (Psalm xcix. 8).

Jehovah says, "I have pardoned according to My word." The national sin is not to be visited with destruction of the nation. No pestilence shall exterminate the murmurers, nor shall they be left without the guidance of Moses and of the cloud to melt away in the plagues of the wilderness. But yet the power of Jehovah shall be shown in their punishment; the manner of it shall be such that the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. The men who came out of Egypt and have tempted Jehovah ten times shall never see Canaan. Their carcasses shall fall in the desert. For forty years shall the Israelites wander as shepherds till the evil generation shall have disappeared.

Divine Providence judges the pusillanimity of men. Their fear deprives them of that which is offered and actually put within their grasp. They prove themselves incapable when the time of decisive endeavour comes, and a new generation must arise before the ripeness of circumstance again opens the way. The

case of the Israelites shows that rebuke and disappointment are necessary in the Divine discipline of human life. Defects of character, of faith, are not overborne by a *tour de force* in order that the development of a heavenly purpose may be hastened. It would indeed cease to be a heavenly purpose, if with easy forgiveness God gave miraculous success. The result would be no gain in the long-run to any good cause. If men fail, God can wait for others who shall not fail. We are apt to forget this; we think that we show proper trust in the fulness of Divine pardon when we insist that men who have erred and been forgiven, who have faithlessly missed their opportunity and passed through penitence into new zeal, shall be hurried on to the duties they refused to face. But now, as in the times of Israel, the law of adequate discipline forbids, the law of punishment forbids. Humanity is not to be cheated of its Divine instruction, nor shall any pretext of generosity or necessity be urged in order that certain men may enter a Canaan they once refused to possess. We see a term set to a probation.

Does it appear an inordinate punishment, this denial of Canaan to the unbelieving? There is no need to think so. For the men and women who held back in doubt of God, the wilderness, quite as well as Canaan, would serve the main end, to teach them trust. Life went on still under the protection of the Almighty. The desert was His, as well as the land flowing with milk and honey. Yea, in the desert they had, being such as they were, fewer temptations to question the power of God and their own need of Him than they would have found in the land of promise. May we not say that men who had been so ready to receive an evil report of the land would have been confirmed in their

doubt of Jehovah if they had been allowed to cross the frontier? Better for them to remain in the desert that made no pretence to be anything else, than to enter Canaan and find excuses for calling it a desert. No individual was prevented from learning to know God and trust Him; of that we may be sure. The way of instruction was that of penitence and sorrow and continued hardships. But there would have been no other way for those unbelievers even if they had entered on the promised inheritance. In Canaan, as well as in the desert, they would have had to learn contrition, to advance in moral life by means of temporal hardships and defeat.

And there was a limitation of the judgment. Only those from twenty years old and upward were included. The young men and young women, presumably because they had not bewailed their lot and cried against Moses and God, having too much of the hopeful spirit of youth, were not condemned to die in the wilderness. A difference was there, and by the terms of the deliverance was made clear, which often comes to light in human history. The old, who should know most of the goodness of God and His unfailing power, draw back; the young and inexperienced are ready to advance. Men who are occupied with affairs tend to think that their wise management brings success, and they place Divine Providence secondary to their own wisdom. Shall we be able for this? they ask. Does this approve itself to us as men of the world, responsible men? If not, they think it would be folly to go forward even at the call of God. But the young are not so wise in their own experience; they are in the mood to dare: the young and the trustful—men like Joshua and Caleb, who have learned that power and success are of God,

and that His way is always safe. To calculate and act on the basis of expediency is not the failing of the young. Let us pray for men who have faith in the future of humanity and of the Church to stand forth and rally about them the youths, not spoiled by over-wise theories of life, who have still in their souls the heavenly instinct of hope.

Caleb has here and elsewhere in the history peculiar honour, all the more remarkable that he was, properly speaking, no Israelite. The narrative at this point associates his family with the tribe of Judah. But Caleb was a Kenizzite (Numb. xxxii. 12); and Kenaz appears in Gen. xxxvi. 11, 15, as an Edomite or descendant of Esau. At what time this particular Kenizzite family joined the expedition of Israel we have no hint. As yet, however, there was no inter-marriage; and it should be noticed that the district which in consideration of his fidelity Caleb has for his inheritance in Canaan is the same as was occupied by Kenizzites before the conquest. There is, of course, no improbability in this; it may rather appear to give proof of the genuineness of the narrative. Caleb joins the Israelites, attaches himself to Judah in the camp and on the march, proves himself a faithful servant of God and of the host, and has the promise of his forefathers' inheritance when the distribution of Canaan shall be made. He reported favourably of the region about Hebron; and Hebron became his city, as we learn from Josh. xiv.

In contrast to the special promise made to Joshua and Caleb is the fate of the other ten whose report brought "a slander upon the land." These "died by the plague before Jehovah." It would seem that before Moses appealed to God on behalf of the people, the pestilence was spreading which might have swept the

Israelites down like Sennacherib's army in after-times. And the ten false spies had been among the first to die. Little indeed know men how soon Providence will convict them of their faithlessness and rebellion. Let us save our lives, they say, by holding back from duties that involve difficulty and danger. Why advance where we are sure to fall by the sword? But the sword finds them nevertheless, or the plague lays hold of them; and where then is the life they were so careful to preserve? The men of Israel who said, "Let us not go to Canaan, but return to Egypt," neither see Canaan nor Egypt. They gain nothing they desire; they lose all they were so careful to keep.

Suddenly at ver. 40 we are brought to a new development. The people no sooner hear their doom than they resolve to take the future into their own hands. They acknowledge that they have sinned, meaning, however, only that they have fallen into a mistake the consequence of which they had not foreseen; and with this inadequate confession of fault they decide to make the advance into Canaan forthwith. They do not see that instead of recovering their hope in God by any such attempt they will really deepen the alienation between themselves and Him. Submission is indeed hard, but it is their one grace, their one duty. If they press on into Canaan, they must go without the Lord, as Moses warns them, and they shall not prosper.

It is not enough when men have discovered an evil heart of unbelief, and turned again in repentance, that they take up the thread of life which has become unravelled. Perverse faithlessness cannot be cured by a sudden decision to resume the duty which was abandoned in fear. The refusal was no superficial

thing, but had its source in the springs of will, the character and habits of life. We are apt to judge otherwise, and to suppose that we can alter the whole current of our nature by a single act of choice. To-day the trend is strongly in one direction, along a channel which has been forming for many years; to-morrow we think it possible to become other men, strong where we were weak, determined upon that which we abhorred. But something must intervene; some change must take place deeper than our impulse. We must have the new heart and the right spirit; and in proportion to the gravity of the situation and the importance of the duty to be done must the time of discipline be long. The wilderness wandering had to be for many years because the temper of a whole people was to be altered. For a single person a far shorter ordeal may suffice. He may pass through the stages of conviction, repentance, and new creation in a few weeks or even days. Nay, sometimes the regenerating Spirit brings about the change apparently in a moment. Yet the rule is that stability in faith must come slowly, that the way of trial cannot be hastened. A great task, therefore, the right doing of which is necessary to the open vindication of religion, may not be gone about in a sudden change of mind. We are not to take lightly, into untried hands, the massive plough of the kingdom of God.

In Canaan, the Amalekites and Canaanites, Moses said, would dispute the advance of Israel,—Amalekites skilled in desultory war; Canaanites long trained in military art. These would fight without any sense of the support of the true God. But how would the Hebrews speed, meeting them on the same footing? The contest would be then between human skill and

daring on either side ; and there could be no doubt as to the issue. Bands of men acquainted with the country, disciplined in war as the tribes of Israel were not, fighting for their fields and homes with a defence of walled cities to fall back upon, would certainly win. If the Hebrews went up, it would be without the sign of Jehovah's presence ; the ark of the covenant could not be borne with the army on such an expedition. Their attempt, being presumptuous, must end in disaster.

Too often the conflicts in which the Church is involved are of this very kind. There is profession of high moral design and Christian principle. Ostensibly it is for the sake of true religion that something is undertaken. But in reality the affair is not one that belongs to the essence of faith. It is perhaps a question of prestige, of exclusive claim to certain rights or moneys, the very last thing a Christian church should insist upon. Then the contest is between human diplomacy and resolution, whether on the one side or the other. It is idle to call a campaign like this a holy war. The ark of the covenant does not accompany the army that calls itself Jehovah's. As Israel found that even Amalekites and Canaanites were too strong for her, so has the Church often found that men whom she termed unbelievers were superior to her in the arms she chose to use. Again and again have her forces had to retire smitten even unto Hormah. For those who are called unbelievers and atheists have their rights ; and they will always be able to maintain their rights against a presumptuous church which "goes up into the mountain" without the sanction of its living Head.

It was no general advance of the tribes that on this

occasion ended in defeat. The solid, resolute march of the whole people was a very different thing from the half-hearted sally of some hundreds of fighting men. When the host of the Israelites, men, women, and children, moved together, the men of war had support in the sympathy of those they defended, in the prayers of the priest and of the people. They were nerved to play the part of heroes by the thought that all depended upon them, that if they failed their wives and children would be put to the sword. And again there is a parallel in the advance of the Church against her adversaries. If the officials only go out to fight, if it is their affair, their expedition, if there is no strong onward movement of the whole host, what is there to give support to the enterprise? The fighting men may seem to have heart enough for their battle; but the underlying feeling that they are not engaged in the defence of the Gospel itself, or in guarding any position on which the power and success of the Gospel depend, must always, and properly, weaken their arms. There is all the difference in the world between an ecclesiastical battle and the contest for vital faith. And it is a matter of regret that so much of the strength and ardour of good men should be wasted in downright earthly fighting, when the feeling of the Church as a whole is not with those who claim to be her army. Let all the tribes, that is to say all the churches of Christ that are of one mind as to vital truth, advance together, without jealousy, without mutual contempt, and the opposition to Christianity will practically melt away.

From the twenty-first chapter, which appears to open with a reminiscence of the first attack on Canaan, we gather that one of those who opposed the expedition

was the Canaanite King of Arad. The advance appears therefore to have been made by way of Hezron and Beersheba. The mountains visible from the camp were likely the chalk hills beyond the "Ascent of Akrabbim." These passed, probably near Hezron, a valley opened, stretching away towards Hebron. The Amalekites gathering from every wady, and the Canaanites from the ridge to the right, where Arad lay, seem to have fallen upon the Hebrews with a sudden onset. While many escaped others were slain or taken captive. A keen memory of the defeat survived; but it was not till long afterwards, in the days of the judges, that the strongholds of the region were reduced.

## XIII

### *OFFERINGS: SABBATH-KEEPING: DRESS*

#### NUMBERS xv

THE enactments of this chapter regarding meal offerings and drink offerings, the heave offerings of the first dough, and the atonement for unwitting errors belong to the cultus of Canaan. Nothing generic distinguishes the first and third of these statutes from some that were presumably to be observed in the desert; but the note is explicit, "When ye be come into the land of your habitations which I give unto you," "When ye be come into the land whither I bring you." The whole chapter, with its instance of presumptuous sin introduced by the clause, "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness," marking a return to that time, and its commandment regarding the fringes or tassels of blue to be attached to the dress as remembrancers of obligations, may appear at first sight without any reference either to what has preceded or what follows. The compilers, however, have a definite purpose in view. The presumption of Korah and his company, and of Dathan and Abiram, is in contrast to the unwitting faults for which atonement is provided, and it comes under the category of what is "done with a high hand"—a form of blasphemy which is to be punished with death. The case of the Sabbath-

breaker is an instance of this unpardonable sin, and sends its light on to the incidents that follow. Even the memorial fringes or tassels, and the prophetic sentences that accompany the command to wear them, seem to be forewarnings of the doom of sacrilegious men.

I. MEAL AND DRINK OFFERINGS.—The statute regarding offerings “to make a sweet savour unto Jehovah” is specially occupied with prescribing the proportion of flour and oil and wine to be presented along with the animal brought for a burnt offering or sacrifice. Any one separating himself in terms of a vow, or desiring to express gratitude for some Divine favour, or again on the occasion of a sacred festival when he had special cause of rejoicing before God, might bring a lamb, a ram, or an ox as his oblation; and the meal and drink offerings were to vary with the value of the animal brought for sacrifice. The law does not demand the same offering of every person under similar circumstances. According to his means or his gratitude he may give. But deciding first as to his burnt or slain offering, he must add to it, for a lamb, the tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil, and also a quarter of a hin of wine. For a bullock, the quantities were to be three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, with half a hin of oil, and, as a drink offering, half a hin of wine.

The provision is a singular one, based on some sense of what was becoming which we cannot pretend to revive. But it points to a rule which the Apostle Paul may have recognised in this and other Jewish statutes as belonging to universal morality: “Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men.” To

make a show of generosity by giving a bullock, while the flour and oil and wine were withheld, was not seemly. Neither is it seemly for a Christian to be lavish in his gifts to the Church, but withhold the meal offering and drink offering he owes to the poor. Throughout the whole range of use and expenditure, personal and of the family, a proportion is to be found which it is one of the Christian arts to determine, one of the Christian duties to observe. And nothing is right unless all is right. The penny saved here takes away the sweet savour of the pound given there. No man is in this to be a law to himself. Public justice and Divine are to be satisfied.

The presence or absence of oil in an oblation marked its character. The sin offering and the jealousy offering were without oil. The "oil of joy" (Isa. lxi. 3) accompanied festal and peace offerings. All ordinances prescribing the oblation of wine and oil necessarily belonged to the cultus of Canaan, for in the wilderness neither of these elements of the sacrifice could be always had. The idea underlying the peace offerings, with their accompanying meal and drink offerings, was unquestionably that of feasting with Jehovah, enjoying His bounty at His table. Acknowledgment was made that the cattle on the hills were His, that it was He who gave the harvest, the vintage, and the fruit of the olive-grove. Confession of man's indebtedness to Jehovah as Lord of nature was interwoven with the whole sacrificial system.

In connection with this ordinance of meal and drink offerings, and that of atonement for unintentional failures in duty (ver. 22 ff.), it is very carefully enacted that the law shall be the same for the "homeborn" and the "stranger." "For the assembly there shall be

one statute for you and for the stranger that sojourneth with you, a statute for ever throughout your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord." The design is to secure religious unity, and by means of it gradually to incorporate with Israel all dwellers in the land. While certain ordinances were intended to make Israel a holy nation separated and consecrated to Jehovah, this admission of strangers to the privileges of the covenant has another design. In the Book of Deuteronomy (vii. 2) a statute occurs that entirely excludes from citizenship and incorporation all Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Hivites, Girgashites, and Perizzites. There was to be no intermarriage with them, no toleration of them, lest they led Israel away into idolatry. The statute is enforced by the words, "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth." With this emphatic assertion of the severance of the Hebrews from other races the strain of Numbers, as well as Exodus and Leviticus, generally agrees. When we endeavour to harmonise with it the admission of strangers to the right and joy of sacrificial festivals, we at once meet the difficulty that no other races were fitter to be received into religious confraternity than those of Canaan. Neither Babylonians, Syrians, Phœnicians, nor Philistines were free from the taint of idolatry; and however degrading the rites of the Canaanites were, some of the other nations followed practices quite as revolting.

We know that for a long period of Israel's history strangers were, according to the statute presently under consideration, admitted to the fellowship of

religion, as well as to high office in the state. "We have only to study the Book of Joshua to discover that the Israelites, like the Saxons in Britain, destroyed the cities and not the population of the country, and that the number of cities actually overthrown was not very large. We have only to turn to the list of the 'mighty men' of David to learn how many of them were foreigners, Hittites, Ammonites, Zobahtes, and even Philistines of Gath (2 Sam. xv. 18, 19; vi. 10). Nor must it be forgotten that David himself was partly a Moabite by descent."<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this large tolerance we might be disposed to include among the "strangers" admitted to privilege men belonging to races that inhabited Canaan before the conquest. Even Deuteronomy seems in one passage to exclude none but Ammonites and Moabites; and the covenant law of Exod. xxiii. commands generous treatment of the stranger. In contrast to the "homeborn," strangers may appear to mean those only who had come from other countries and chosen to identify themselves with the faith and fortunes of Israel; still this passage attempts no such definition, and on the whole we must allow that the Mosaic law in regulating the political and social position of resident non-Israelites showed "a spirit of great liberality." They had, of course, to conform to many laws—those, for instance, of marriage, and those which forbade the eating of blood and the flesh of animals not properly slaughtered. If uncircumcised, they could not keep the Passover; but being circumcised, they had equal rights with the Hebrews. The purpose evidently was to

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<sup>1</sup> Sayce, "The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments," p. 359.

make an open way to the benefits of Israel's government and religion.

The heave offering of the first dough is placed (ver. 20) side by side with the heave offering of the threshing-floor of the first sheaves. In Leviticus (xxiii. 17) a harvest oblation is ordered—two wave-loaves of fine flour baked with leaven. Here the heave offering of a cake made from the first dough is not accompanied with sacrifices of animals, but is of a simple kind, mainly a tribute to the priests. The Deuteronomic statute regarding firstfruits, which were to be put in a basket and set down before the altar, prescribed a formula of dedication beginning, "An Aramean ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt": and the offering of these firstfruits was to be an occasion of joy—"Thou shalt rejoice in all the good which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee and unto thine house, thou and the Levite, and the stranger that is in the midst of thee." There can be no question that the most developed statute regarding these harvest offerings is that given in Leviticus, where the exact time for the presentation of the loaves is fixed, the fiftieth day after the Sabbath, from the day when the sheaf was brought. The feast accompanying the offering of the loaves came to be known as that of Pentecost.

Passing now to the law of atonement for unintentional omissions of duty, we notice that the introductory sentences (vv. 22, 23) have a peculiar retrospective cast. They seem to point back to the time when the Lord gave commandment by the hand of Moses. It would appear that in course of years discovery was made that portions of the law were neglected, and the provisions of this statute were to relieve the nation

and individuals of accumulating defilement. "When ye shall err, and not observe all these commandments, which the Lord hath spoken unto Moses, even all that the Lord hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the Lord gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations; then it shall be, if it be done unwittingly, without the knowledge of the congregation"—so runs the preamble. A series of statutes in Lev. iv. contemplates offences of a like kind, when something has been done which the Lord commanded not to be done. The enactment of Numbers appears to point to a "complete falling away of the congregation from the whole of the law," an unconscious apostasy. Maimonides understands the provision as relating to guilt incurred by the people in adopting customs and usages of the heathen that seemed to be reconcilable with the law of Jehovah, though they really led to contempt and neglect of His commandments.<sup>1</sup>

For the nation as a whole, under these circumstances, atonement was to be made by the burnt offering of a young bullock with its meal offering and drink offering, and the sin offering of a he-goat. In this purgation all strangers resident with Israel are specially included. When any person discovered that he had neglected a precept, he was to offer a she-goat of the first year for a sin offering. The Israelite and the stranger alike had in this way access to the sanctuary. But in contrast to unintentional omission of duty was set deliberate neglect of it. For this there was no atonement. Whether the high-handed transgressor was homeborn or a stranger, he was to be utterly cut off as a blasphemer; his iniquity rested upon him. The

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<sup>1</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch *in loco*.

distinction is morally sound; and the punishment of the rebel against authority—apparently nothing less than death, or perhaps, if he has fled the land, outlawry—is such as the theocratic idea obviously required. It was Jehovah Himself who was defied. A man who, as it were, shook his fist in rebellion against God had no right to live in His world, under the protection of His beneficent laws.

The distinction between unwitting neglect and open rejection runs through the whole range of duty, natural, Hebrew, Christian. What a man knows to be right he has before him as a Divine law of moral conduct. By the highest obligations, under which he lies to the Lord of conscience, to his fellow-men, and to himself, he is bound to obey. Judaism added the authority of revelation—the Mosaic law, the prophetic word. Christianity still further adds the authority of the word spoken by the Son of God, and the obligation imposed by His death as the manifestation of eternal love. In proportion as the Divine will is made clear, and the law enforced by revelation and grace, the sin of rejection becomes greater and more blasphemous. But, on the other hand, the unwitting transgressor, be he heathen or imperfectly instructed Christian, has under the new covenant, in which mercy and justice go hand in hand, no less consideration than the Hebrew who unintentionally erred. There is no law that cuts him off from his people. Wide as this principle may reach, it must be that according to which men are judged. Many, knowing the invisible things of God “through the things that are made,” are without excuse. They “hold down the truth in unrighteousness”; they are high-handed transgressors. But others who have no knowledge of the Divine law, and break it unwittingly,

have their atonement: God provides it. Nor are we to impeach Divine Providence by judging before the time.

It may be asked, Why, since defiant rejection of Christian law is more blasphemous than high-handed breach of the old Hebrew law, the providence of God does not punish it? If any one with Christ and His cross in view is guilty of injustice, or of hatred which is murder, does he not prove himself unworthy to live in God's world? And why, then, does he not suffer at once the doom of his rebellion? The theory of some stern moralists has been that human government should administer the justice of Heaven and cut off the unbeliever. In many a notable case this has been done, and has caused a righteous horror which continues to be felt. But although men cannot safely undertake the punishment of such offenders, why does not God? Christ boldly stated that here and now this is not the method of the Divine government, but that men enjoy the Father's mercy even when they are unjust, unthankful, and evil. Yet He spoke of judgment universal—judgment and retribution that shall not miss a single sinner, a single secret sin. And His view of the theocracy clearly is that meanwhile God by mercy to the defiant desires to train men in mercy, by forbearance towards the unthankful and evil commends to us like patience and endurance. Transgressors are to have their full opportunity of repentance, to which the very goodness of God calls them. But justice which delays is not unobservant. Though He who reigns moves slowly to His end, He will not fail to reach it. "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness." As for human law, its sphere is fixed. Society must protect itself against crime, and

is to do so in the name of God, in conformity with the eternal principles of righteousness. The Hebrew temper may seem to have carried this principle into a range that was perilous to enter, as in the instance immediately to be considered; yet the protection of society was even then the immediate motive, not vain jealousy for the honour of God. For ourselves, we have a duty which must be done without assumption or hypocrisy.

The various subjects of thought suggested here should be followed out. For us, they are complicated on the social as well as the religious side by certain theories that are in vogue. The duty of civil government, for example, is on one side extended beyond its proper range by the attempt to give it authority in the domain of religious truth; on the other hand it is unduly restricted by toleration of what is against the well-being of society. The Christian moralist has much to ponder in relation to popular opinions and the trend of modern legislation.

2. THE SABBATH-BREAKER.—If the actual sequence of events is followed in the narrative of Numbers, it must have been after the condemnation of the adult Israelites that judgment of the man who was found infringing the Sabbath law had to be executed; and some who were themselves under reprobation took part in convicting and punishing this offender. There is a difficulty here which on high moral grounds it is impossible to explain away. Disaffection and revolt had brought on the mass of the people the sentence of destruction; and this had only been exchanged on Moses' intercession for the forty years of wandering. Should not sins that were visited with this penalty have

excluded all who were guilty of them from any judicial act? But the same objection would, if admitted, prevent all of us from taking part in the execution of law. Neither the judge nor the jury, neither those who legislate nor those who administer law, are free from moral fault. The whole system dealing with crime has this defect; and Israel in the wilderness was as much entitled as modern society to take in hand the correction of offenders, the maintenance of public well-being.

The law which had been broken was one specially connected with duty to God. Sabbath-keeping might indeed seem to belong to worship rather than to social morality. The seventh day was the Sabbath of Jehovah. It was to be kept holy to Him, made a delight for His sake. The statute regarding it belonged to the first table of the Decalogue. Still, the commandment had a social as well as a religious side. In goodwill to men Jehovah required the day to be kept holy to Him. Had one and another like this offender been allowed to set aside the fourth commandment, the interests of the whole congregation would soon have suffered. It was for the good of the race, physically as well as intellectually and spiritually, the Sabbath was to be kept. Those who guarded the sanctity of the Sabbath were guarding not the honour of God alone, though they may have thought that the chief merit of their watchfulness, but the interests of the people, a precious heritage of the nation.

It is not necessary to maintain that judgment was given by Moses solely on the ground that the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath was an offender against the public well-being. The thought of Jehovah's "jealousy" was constantly kept before the mind of

Israel, for by that idea, better than any other, beneficent legislation was supported in a rude age; and judgment no doubt rested mainly on this. Yet the interference of the people and their share in the execution of punishment are to be justified by the undoubted fact that Israel could not afford to let the Sabbath be lost. Even those who were to a great extent earthly could perceive this. And if the punishment seems disproportionate, we must remember that it was the presumptuous temper of the man rather than his actual fault that was judged criminal. St. James said, no doubt from this point of view, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is become guilty of all." The criminal act was that of breaking down, with daring hand, the safeguard of social and religious prosperity.

And there is a sense in which without Pharisaism those who are concerned for the public well-being may still insist on the strict enforcement of the laws that guard the day of rest. Though all days are alike sacred to spiritually minded persons, yet bodily health and mental soundness are bound up more than men in general know with the Sabbatic interval between labour and labour. The Puritanism often scoffed at is far more philanthropic than the humanitarianism, so-called, which derides it. And when any one enforces the duty of Sabbath-keeping by insisting on God's claim to the seventh day, his belief is no superstition. Convict him first of advocating what is against the good of men, irrational, absurd, before venturing to call him superstitious. If what is advanced as a claim of God can be proved to be really for the good of men, it is a virtue to insist that for God's sake as well as the sake of men it should be rendered. There were persons in our

Lord's time who made Sabbath-keeping a superstition. Against them He testified. But it is in His name who was the great Friend of men the Sabbath law is now insisted on; and the day of rest has all the higher sanction that it commemorates His resurrection from the dead, His promise of that new life which relief from labour enables us to pursue.

The institution of the Sabbath and the scrupulous observance of it were, for Israel, and are still for all believers in Divine religion, most important means of maintaining unity in the faith. Now that many causes interfere with the simultaneous exhibition of regard for other symbols of Christian belief, the day of rest and worship gives a universal opportunity which it would be fatal to neglect. It has the advantage of beginning to claim men on the ground where religion first appeals to them, that of God's care for their temporal well-being. Those with whom religious feeling is quite elementary must see that a boon of incalculable value is offered in this recurring refreshment to the wearied body and strained mind. And with progress in religious culture the benefit of the day of rest is found to advance. The opportunities of worship, of religious meditation and service, which it brings will be esteemed as the value of Christian fellowship, the importance of Christian knowledge, and the duty of Christian endeavour are successively understood. On all these grounds the Sabbath, or Lord's Day, is for modern religion, as for that of the old covenant, a great declaration, a means of unity and development which the spiritual will earnestly uphold. Let it fail, and distinction between religious and non-religious will be without a sign. No doubt the reality is more by far than the symbol. Yet fellowship, for which in many cases the Sabbath

alone gives opportunity, is far more than a symbol; and unity requires an outward manifestation. Nothing could be more perilous to the religious life of our people than the tendency, shown by many who profess Christianity and sanctioned by some of its teachers, to make the Sabbath a day of self-pleasing, of mere individualism, and incoherent secularity.

3. THE MEMORIAL TASSELS.—The unique sumptuary law with which the chapter closes may be regarded as a sequence of the Sabbath-breaker's conviction. That Israelites might never be without a reminder of their duty, and of the Divine laws they were scrupulously to observe, these tassels with a band of blue were to be constantly worn. It appears to us singular that men should be expected to pay heed to such mementoes as these. We are apt to say, If the laws of God were not in their hearts, the *zizith* would scarcely make them more attentive; and if they had the laws in their hearts, they would need no memorials of obligation. But the ornament was something more than a reminder of duty. It was a badge of honour, and became more so as the Israelites understood their high position among the peoples. The *zizith* would be like an order, a mark of rank; or like the uniform of his regiment which to the good soldier recalls its history. The Hebrew would have to live up to his duty as signified by these attachments of his dress.

And Israelites were to be distinguished by the *zizith* from those who were of other races, not under law to Jehovah. Every man who wore this badge would be able to count on the sympathy of every other Israelite. The symbol became a means of rousing the *esprit* of the nation, and binding it together in a zealous fraternity.

The nature of the badge appears to us peculiar; but the value of it cannot be denied. The modern peoples, far as they have travelled from the old ways of the Hebrews, retain the use of symbolic dress, the liking for ornaments, by which a man's life may be known.

The name *zizith* is derived from a word meaning blossom. The tassel was formed of twisted threads bound by a cord or ribbon of blue to the garment. It was the blossom of the robe, so to speak, hanging by a blue stem. The ornament is again mentioned in Deut. xxii. 12, where it has another name, *gedilim*, enlargements. With extraordinary pride the Jews of our own time still wear the *talith*, which is a fantastical development of the *zizith* of Numbers. "The rabbins observe that each string consisted of eight threads, which, with the number of knots and the numerical value of the letters in the word, make 613, which, according to them, is the exact number of the precepts in the law." The Pharisees in Christ's time enlarged their phylacteries, displaying superfluously the proofs of their Hebrew orthodoxy and zeal. It is the danger of all symbols. In the youth of a people they have meaning; they express fact, they give honour. The Israelite wearing his felt himself reminded, put on his honour, not to go about "according to his own heart and his own eyes by which he used to go a-whoring." But afterwards the zeal became that of pride, the symbol a mere amulet or a token of self-sufficiency. The Jew of to-day is partly kept separate by his *talith*, and because he wears it, feels himself in touch with the fathers and heroes and prophets of his people. But he also feels, what is not always good, his remoteness from heathen and Christian "dogs."

And Christian symbols, the few sanctioned by

Scripture, the others that have crept into use in the course of history, bring with their use a similar danger. In many cases they are signs of privilege rather than memorials of duty. They minister to pride, rather than stimulate zeal in the service of God and men. The crucifix itself, with consummate superstition, is worn and kissed as a talisman.

## XIV

### *KORAH, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM*

NUMBERS xvi., xvii

BEHIND what appears in the history, there must have been many movements of thought and causes of discontent which gradually led to the events we now consider. Of the revolts against Moses which occurred in the wilderness, this was the most widely organised and involved the most serious danger. But we can only conjecture in what way it arose, how it was related to previous incidents and tendencies of popular feeling. It is difficult to understand the report, in which Korah appears at one time closely associated with Dathan and Abiram, at other times quite apart from them as a leader of disaffection. According to Wellhausen and others, three narratives are combined in the text. But without going so far in the way of analysis we clearly trace two lines of revolt: one against Moses as leader; the other against the Aaronic priesthood. The two risings may have been distinct; we shall however deal with them as simultaneous and more or less combined. A great deal is left unexplained, and we must be guided by the belief that the narrative of the whole book has a certain coherency, and that facts previously recorded must have had their bearing on those now to be examined.

The principal leader of revolt was Korah, son of Izhar, a Levite of the family of Kohath; and with him were associated two hundred and fifty "princes of the congregation, called to the assembly, men of renown," some of them presumably belonging to each of the tribes as is shown incidentally in xxvii. 3. The complaint of this company—evidently representing an opinion widely held, was that Moses and Aaron took too much upon them in reserving to themselves the whole arrangement and control of the ritual. The two hundred and fifty, who according to the law had no right to use censers, were so far in opposition to the Aaronic priesthood that they were provided with the means of offering incense. They claimed for themselves on behalf of the whole congregation, whom they declared to be holy, the highest function of priests. With Korah were specially identified a number of Levites who, not content with being separated to do the service of the tabernacle, demanded the higher sacerdotal office. It might seem from vv. 10, 11, that all the two hundred and fifty were Levites; but this is precluded by the earlier statement that they were princes of the congregation, called to the assembly. So far as we can gather, the tribe of Levi did not supply princes, "men of renown," in this sense. While Moses deals with Korah and his company, Dathan, Abiram, and On, who belong to the tribe of Reuben, stand in the background with their grievance. Invited to state it, they complain that Moses has not only brought the congregation out of a land "flowing with milk and honey," to kill them in the wilderness, failing to give them the inheritance he promised; but he has made himself a prince over the host, determining everything without consulting the heads of the

tribes. They ask if he means "to put out the eyes of these men,"—that is, to blind them to the real purpose he has in view, whatever it is, or to make them his slaves after the Babylonian fashion, by actually boring out the eyes of each tenth man, perhaps. The two hundred and fifty are called by Moses to bring their censers and the incense and fire they have been using, that Jehovah may signify whether He chooses to be served by them as priests, or by Aaron. The offering of incense over, the decree against the whole host as concerned in this revolt is made known, and Moses intercedes for the people. Then the Voice commands that all the people shall separate themselves from the "tabernacle" of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, apparently as if some tent of worship had been erected in rivalry of the true tabernacle. Dathan and Abiram are not at the "tabernacle," but at some little distance, in tents of their own. The people remove from the "tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," and on the terrible invocation of judgment pronounced by Moses, the ground cleaves asunder and all the men that appertain unto Korah go down alive into the pit. Afterwards, it is said, "fire came forth from the Lord and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that offered the incense." "The men that appertained unto Korah" may be the presumptuous Levites, most closely identified with his revolt. But the two hundred and fifty consumed by the fire are not said to have been swallowed by the cleaving earth; their censers are taken up "out of the burning," as devoted or sacred, and beaten into plates for a covering of the altar.

On the morrow the whole congregation, even more disaffected than before, is in a state of tumult. The cry is raised that Moses and Aaron "have killed the people

of Jehovah." Forthwith a plague, the sign of Divine anger, breaks out. Atonement is made by Aaron, who runs quickly with his burning censer "into the midst of the assembly," and "stands between the dead and the living." But fourteen thousand seven hundred die before the plague is stayed. And the position of Aaron as the acknowledged priest of Jehovah is still further confirmed. Rods or twigs are taken, one for each tribe, all the tribes having been implicated in the revolt; and these rods are laid up in the tent of meeting. When a day has passed, the rod of Aaron for the tribe of Levi is found to have put forth buds and borne almonds. The close of the whole series of events is an exclamation of amazed anxiety by all the people: "Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Every one that cometh near unto the tabernacle of Jehovah dieth: shall we perish all of us?"

Now throughout the narrative, although other issues are involved, there can be no question that the main design is the confirmation of the Aaronic priesthood. What happened conveyed a warning of most extraordinary severity against any attempt to interfere with the sacerdotal order as established. And this we can understand. But it becomes a question why a revolt of Reubenites against Moses was connected with that of Korah against the sole priesthood of the Aaronic house. We have also to consider how it came about that princes out of all the tribes were to be found provided with censers, which they were apparently in the habit of using to burn incense to Jehovah. There is a Levitical revolt; there is an assumption by men in each tribe of priestly dignity; and there is a protest by men representing the tribe of Reuben against the dictatorship of Moses. In what way might these

different movements arise and combine in a crisis that almost wrecked the fortunes of Israel?

The explanation supplied by Wellhausen on the basis of his main theory is exceedingly laboured, at some points improbable, at others defective. According to the Jehovistic tradition, he says,<sup>1</sup> the rebellion proceeds from the Reubenites, and is directed against Moses as leader and judge of the people. The historical basis of this is dimly discerned to be the fall of Reuben from its old place at the head of the brother tribes. Out of this story, says Wellhausen, at some time or other not specified, "when the people of the congregation, *i.e.*, of the Church, have once come on the scene," there arises a second version. The author of the agitation is now Korah, a prince of the tribe of Judah, and he rebels not only against Moses but against Moses and Aaron as representing the priesthood. "The jealousy of the secular grandees is now directed against the class of hereditary priests instead of against the extraordinary influence on the community of a heaven-sent hero." Then there is a third addition which "belongs likewise to the Priestly Code, but not to its original contents." In this, Korah the prince of the tribe of Judah is replaced by another Korah, head of a "post-exilic Levitical family"; and "the contest between clergy and aristocracy is transformed into a domestic strife between the higher and inferior clergy which was no doubt raging in the time of the narrator." All this is supposed to be a natural and easy explanation of what would otherwise be an "insoluble enigma." We ask, however, at what period any family of Judah would be likely to claim the priesthood, and at what

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<sup>1</sup> Prolegomena to the "History of Israel," p. 354.

post-exilic period there was "no doubt" a strife between the higher and inferior clergy. Nor is there any account here of the two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, with their partially developed ritual antagonistic to that of the tabernacle.

We have seen that according to the narrative of Numbers seventy elders of the tribes were appointed to aid Moses in bearing the heavy burden of administration, and were endowed with the gift of prophecy that they might the more impressively wield authority in the host. In the first instance, these men might be zealous helpers of Moses, but they proved, like the rest, angry critics of his leadership when the spies returned with their evil report. They were included with the other men of the tribes in the doom of the forty years' wandering, and might easily become movers of sedition. When the ark was stationed permanently at Kadesh, and the tribes spread themselves after the manner of shepherds over a wide range of the surrounding district, we can easily see that the authority of the seventy would increase in proportion to the need for direction felt in the different groups to which they belonged. Many of the scattered companies too were so far from the tabernacle that they might desire a worship of their own, and the original priestly function of the heads of tribes, if it had lapsed, might in this way be revived. Although there were no altars, yet with censers and incense one of the highest rites of worship might be observed.

Again, the period of inaction must have been galling to many who conceived themselves quite capable of making a successful assault on the inhabitants of Canaan, or otherwise securing a settled place of abode for Israel. And the tribe of Reuben, first by birth-

right, and apparently one of the strongest, would take the lead in a movement to set aside the authority of Moses. We have also to keep in mind that though Moses had pressed the Kenizzites to join the march and relied on their fidelity, the presence in the camp of one like Hobab, who was an equal not a vassal of Moses, must have been a continual incentive to disaffection. He and his troops had their own notions, we may believe, as to the delay of forty years, and would very likely deny its necessity. They would also have their own cultus, and religiously, as well as in other ways, show an independence which encouraged revolt.

Once more, as to the Levites, it might seem unfair to them that Aaron and his two sons should have a position so much higher than theirs. They had to do many offices in connection with sacrifice, and other parts of the holy service. On them, indeed, fell the burden of the duties, and the ambitious might expect to force their way into the higher office of the priesthood, at a time when rebellion against authority was coming to a head. We may suppose that Korah and his company of Levites, acting partly for themselves, partly in concert with the two hundred and fifty who had already assumed the right to burn incense, agreed to make their demand in the first instance, that as Levites they should be admitted priests. This would prepare the way for the princes of the tribes to claim sacerdotal rights according to the old clan idea. And at the same time, the priority of Reuben would be another point, insistence upon which would strike at the power of Moses. If the princes of Reuben had gone so far as to erect a "tabernacle" or *mishcan* for their worship, that may have been, for the occasion,

made the headquarters of revolt, perhaps because Reuben happened at the time to be nearest the encampment of the Levites.

A widespread rebellion, an organised rebellion, not homogeneous, but with many elements in it tending to utter confusion, is what we see. Suppose it to have succeeded, the unity of worship would have been destroyed completely. Each tribe with its own cultus would have gone its own way so far as religion was concerned. In a very short time there would have been as many debased cults as there were wandering companies. Then the claim of autonomy, if not of right to lead the tribes, made on behalf of Reuben, involved a further danger. Moses had not only the sagacity but the inspiration which ought to have commanded obedience. The princes of Reuben had neither. Whether all under the lead of Reuben or each tribe led by its own princes, the Israelites would have travelled to disaster. Futile attempts at conquest, strife or alliance with neighbouring peoples, internal dissension, would have worn the tribes piecemeal away. The dictatorship of Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, and the unity of worship stood or fell together. One of the three removed, the others would have given way. But the revolutionary spirit, springing out of ambition and a disaffection for which there was no excuse, was blind to consequences. And the stern suppression of this revolt, at whatever cost, was absolutely needful if there was to be any future for Israel.

It has been supposed that we have in this rebellion of Korah the first example of ecclesiastical dissension, and that the punishment is a warning to all who presumptuously intrude into the priestly office. Laymen take the censer; and the fire of the Lord burns them

up. So, let not laymen, at any time in the Church's history, venture to touch the sacred mysteries. If ritual and sacramentarian miracle were the heart of religion ; if there could be no worship of God and no salvation for men now unless through a consecrated priesthood, this might be said. But the old covenant, with its symbols and shadows, has been superseded. We have another centre now, another tabernacle, another way which has been consecrated for ever by the sacrifice of Christ, a way into the holiest of all open to every believer. Our unity does not depend on the priesthood of men, but on the universal and eternal priesthood of Christ. The co-operation of Aaron as priest was needful to Moses, not that his power might be maintained for his own sake, but that he might have authority over the host for Israel's sake. It was not the dignity of an order or of a man that was at stake, but the very existence of religion and of the nation. This bond snapped at any point, the tribes would have been scattered and lost.

A leader of men standing above them for their temporal interests can rarely take upon him to be the instrument of administering the penalty of their sins. What king, for instance, ever invoked an interdict on his own people, or in his own right of judging for God condemned them to pay a tax to the Church, because they had done what was morally wrong? Rulers generally have regarded disobedience to themselves as the only crime it was worth their while to punish. When Moses stood against the faithless spirit of the Israelites and issued orders by way of punishing that bad spirit, he certainly put his authority to a tremendous test. Without a sure ground of confidence in Divine support, he would have been foolhardy in the extreme.

And we are not surprised that the coalition against him represented many causes of discontent. Under his administration the long sojourn in the desert had been decreed, and a whole generation deprived of what they held their right—a settlement in Canaan. He appeared to be tyrannising over the tribes; and proud Reubenites sought to put an end to his rule. The priesthood was his creation, and seemed to be made exclusive simply that through Aaron he might have a firmer hold of the people's liberties. Why was the old prerogative of the headmen in religious matters taken from them? They would reclaim their rights. Neither Levi nor Reuben should be denied its priestly autonomy any longer. In the whole rebellion there was one spirit, but there were also divided counsels; and Moses showed his wisdom by taking the revolt not as a single movement, but part by part.

First he met the Levites, with Korah at their head, professing great zeal for the principle that all the congregation were holy, every one of them. A claim made on that ground could not be disproved by argument, perhaps, although the holiness of the congregation was evidently an ideal, not a fact. Jehovah Himself would have to decide. Yet Moses remonstrated in a way that was fitted to move the Levites, and perhaps did touch some of them. They had been honoured by God in having a certain holy office assigned to them. Were they to renounce it in joining a revolt which would make the very priesthood they desired common to all the tribes? From Jehovah Himself the Levites had their commission. It was against Jehovah they were fighting; and how could they speed? They spoke of Aaron and his dignity. But what was Aaron? Only a servant of God and of

the people, a man who personally assumed no great airs. By this appeal some would seem to have been detached from the rebellion, for in xxvi. 9-11, when the judgment of Korah and his company is referred to, it is added, "Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not." From 1 Chron. vi. we learn that in the line of Korah's descendants appeared certain makers and leaders of sacred song, Heman among them, one of David's singers, to whom Psalm lxxxviii. is ascribed.

With the Reubenites Moses deals in the next place, taking their cause of discontent by itself. Already one of the three Reubenite chiefs had withdrawn, and Dathan and Abiram stood by themselves. Refusing to obey the call of Moses to a conference, they stated their grievance roughly by the mouth of a messenger; and Moses could only with indignation express before God his blamelessness in regard to them: "I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them." Neither for his own enrichment, nor in personal ambition had he acted. Could they maintain, did the people think, that the present revolt was equally disinterested? Under cover of opposition to tyranny, are they not desiring to play the part of tyrants and aggrandise themselves at the expense of the people?

It is singular that not a word is said in special condemnation of the two hundred and fifty because they were in possession of censers and incense. May it be the case that the complete reservation of the high-priestly duties to the house of Aaron had not as yet taken effect, that it was a purpose rather than a fact? May it not further be the case that the rebellion partly took form and ripened because an order had

been given withdrawing the use of censers from the headmen of the tribes? If there had as yet been a certain temporary allowance of the tribal priesthood and ritual, we should not have to ask how incense and censers were in the hands of the two hundred and fifty, and why the brass of their vessels was held to be sacred and put to holy use.

The prayer of Moses in which he interceded for the people, ver. 22, is marked by an expression of singular breadth, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh." The men, misled on the fleshly side by appetite (ver. 13), and shrinking from pain, were against God. But their spirits were in His hand. Would He not move their spirits, redeem and save them? Would He not look on the hearts of all and distinguish the guilty from the innocent, the more rebellious from the less? One man had sinned, but would God burst out on the whole congregation? The form of the intercession is abrupt, crude. Even Moses with all his justice and all his pity could not be more just, more compassionate, than Jehovah. The purpose of destruction was not as the leader thought it to be.

Regarding the judgments, that of the earthquake and that of the fire, we are too remote in time to form any proper conception of what they were, how they were inflicted. "Moses," says Lange, "appears as a man whose wonderful presentiment becomes a miraculous prophecy by the Spirit of revelation." But this is not sufficient. There was more than a presentiment. Moses knew what was coming, knew that where the rebels stood the earth would open, the consuming fire burn. The plague, on the other hand, which next day spread rapidly among the excited people and threatened to destroy them, was not foreseen. It came as if

straight from the hand of Divine wrath. But it afforded an opportunity for Aaron to prove his power with God and his courage. Carrying the sacred fire into the midst of the infected people he became the means of their deliverance. As he waved his censer, and its fumes went up to heaven, faith in Jehovah and in Aaron as the true priest of Jehovah was revived in the hearts of men. Their spirits came again under the healing power of that symbolism which had lost its virtue in common use, and was now associated in a grave crisis with an appeal to Him who smites and heals, who kills and makes alive.

It has been maintained by some that the closing sentences of chap. xvii. should follow chap. xvi. with which they appear to be closely connected, the incident of the budding of Aaron's rod seeming to call rather for a festal celebration than a lament. The theory of the Book of Numbers we have seen reason to adopt would account for the introduction of the fresh episode, simply because it relates to the priesthood and tends to confirm the Aaronites in exclusive dignity. The symbolic test of the claim raised by the tribes corresponds closely to the signs that were used by some of the prophets, such as the girdle laid up by the river Euphrates, and the basket of summer fruits. The rod on which Aaron's name was written was of almond, a tree for which Syria was famous. Like the sloe it sends forth blossoms before the leaves; and the unique way in which this twig showed its living vigour as compared with the others was a token of the choice of Levi to serve and Aaron to minister in the holiest office before Jehovah.

The whole circumstances, and the closing cry of the people, leave the impression of a grave difficulty found

in establishing the hierarchy and centralising the worship. It was a necessity—shall we call it a sad necessity?—that the men of the tribes should be deprived of direct access to the sanctuary and the oracle. Earthly, disobedient, and far from trustful in God, they could not be allowed, even the hereditary chiefs among them, to offer sacrifices. The ideas of the Divine holiness embodied in the Mosaic law were so far in advance of the common thought of Israel, that the old order had to be superseded by one fitted to promote the spiritual education of the people, and prepare them for a time when there shall be “on the bells of the horses, HOLY UNTO THE LORD; and every pot in Judah shall be holy unto the Lord of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and seethe therein.” The institution of the Aaronic priesthood was a step of progress indispensable to the security of religion and the brotherhood of the tribes in that high sense for which they were made a nation. But it was at the same time a confession that Israel was not spiritual, was not the holy congregation Korah declared it to be. The greater was the pity that afterwards in the day of Israel’s opportunity, when Christ came to lead the whole people into the spiritual liberty and grace for which prophets had longed, the priestly system was held tenaciously as the pride of the nation. When the law of ritual and sacrifice and priestly mediation should have been left behind as no longer necessary because the Messiah had come, the way of higher life was opened in vain. Sacerdotalism held its place with full consent of those who guided affairs. Israel as a nation was blinded, and its day shone in vain.

Of all priesthoods as corporate bodies, however

estimable, zealous, and spiritually-minded individual members of them may be, must it not be said that their existence is a sad necessity? They may be educative. A sacerdotal system now may, like that of the Mosaic law, be a tutor to bring men to Christ. Realising that, those who hold office under it may bring help to men not yet fit for liberty. But priestly dominance is no perpetual rule in any church, certainly not in the Kingdom of God. The freedom with which Christ makes men free is the goal. The highest duty a priest can fulfil is to prepare men for that liberty; and as soon as he can he should discharge them for the enjoyment of it. To find in episodes like those of Korah's revolt and its suppression a rule applicable to modern religious affairs is too great an anachronism. For whatever right sacerdotalism now has is purely of the Church's tolerance, in the measure not of Divine right, but of the need of uninstructed men. To the spiritual, to those who know, the priestly system with its symbols and authoritative claim is but an interference with privilege and duty.

Can any Aaron now make an atonement for a mass of people, or even in virtue of his office apply to them the atonement made by Christ? How does his absolution help a soul that knows Christ the Redeemer as every Christian soul ought to know Him? The great fault of priesthoods always is, that having once gained power, they endeavour to retain it and extend it, making greater claims the longer they exist. Affirming that they speak for the Church, they endeavour to control the voice of the Church. Affirming that they speak for Christ, they deny or minimise His great gift of liberty. Freedom of thought and reason was to Cardinal Newman, for example, the

cause of all deplorable heresies and infidelities, of a divided Church and a ruined world. The candid priest of our day is found making his claim as largely as ever, and then virtually explaining it away. Should not the vain attempt to hold by Judaic institutions cease? And although the Church of Christ early made the mistake of harking back to Mosaism, should not confession now be made that priesthood of the exclusive kind is out of date, that every believer may perform the highest functions of the consecrated life?

The Divine choice of Aaron, his confirmation in high religious office by the budding of the almond twig as well as by the acceptance of his intercession, have their parallels now. The realities of one age become symbols for another. Like the whole ritual of Israel, these particular incidents may be turned to Christian use by way of illustration. But not with regard to the prerogative of any arch-hierarchy. The availing intercession is that of Christ, the sole headship over the tribes of men is that which He has gained by Divine courage, love, and sacrifice. Among those who believe there is equal dependence on the work of Christ. When we come to intercession which they make for each other, it is of value in consideration not of office but of faith. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It is as "righteous" men, humble men, not as priests they prevail. The sacraments are efficacious, "not from any virtue in them or in him that administers them," but through faith, by the energy of the omnipresent Spirit.

Yet there are men chosen to special duty, whose almond twigs bud and blossom and become their sceptres. Appointment and ordination are our expedients; grace is given by God in a higher line of calling

and endowment. While there are blessings pronounced that fall upon the ear or gratify the sensibility, theirs reach the soul. For them the world has need to thank God. They keep religion alive, and make it burgeon and yield the new fruits for which the generations hunger. They are new branches of the Living Vine. Of them it has often to be said, as of the Lord Himself, "The stone which the builders rejected the same has become head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

## XV

### TITHES AND CLEANSINGS

NUMBERS xviii., xix

I. **D**UTIES AND SUPPORT OF THE MINISTRY.—The statutes of chap. xviii. are related to the rebellion of Korah by a clause in ver. 9, "Ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary and the charge of the altar: that there be wrath no more upon the children of Israel." The enactments are directed anew against any intrusion into the sacred service by those who are not Levites, and into the priesthood by those who are not Aaronites. It is clearly implied that the ministry of the tabernacle is held under a grave responsibility. The "iniquity of the sanctuary" and the "iniquity of the priesthood" have to be borne; and the Aaronites alone are commissioned to bear that iniquity. The Levites, though they serve, are not to touch the holy vessels lest they die. The priesthood, "for everything of the altar, and for that within the veil," is given to the Aaronites as a service of gift.

A certain "iniquity," corresponding to the holiness of the tabernacle and its vessels, attends the service which is to be done by the priests. Their entrance into the sacred tent is an approach to Jehovah, and from His purity there is thrown a defilement on human life. The idea thus represented is capable of fine

spiritual realisation. With this embodied in the law and worship, there is no need to look in any other direction for that evangelical poverty of spirit which the better Israelites of an after time knew. Here prophecy found in the law a germ of deep religious feeling which, rising above tabernacle and altar, became the holy fear of Him who inhabits eternity. The creation throughout its whole range, in the very act of receiving existence, comes into contrast with the creative Will and is on a lower moral plane, to which the Divine purity does not accompany it. The seraphim of Isaiah's vision feel this severance to a certain extent. They are so far apart from God that His holiness is not enjoyed unconsciously, as the element of life. It shines above them and determines their attitude and the terms of their praise. With their wings they cover their faces, and they cry to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." Even they "bear the iniquity" of the great temple of the world in which they minister. On fallen man that iniquity lies with almost crushing weight. "Woe is me!" says the prophet, "for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." Thus the soul is brought into that profound consciousness of defect and pollution which is the preparation for reverent service of the Highest. The attribute of holiness remains with God always, and His mercy in forgiving sin in no way detracts from it. The eternity of God sets Him so far above transitory men that He can extend compassion to them. "Art Thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die." But His touch is, to the sinful earth, almost destruction.

When the Lord the God of hosts toucheth the land it melteth, and all that dwell therein mourn (Amos ix. 12). When a people falls from righteousness the Divine holiness burns against it like a consuming fire. "We are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment: and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind take us away. . . . Thou hast hid Thy face from us, and hast consumed us by means of our iniquities" (Isa. lxiv. 6, 7).

The idea of the identification with the Holy God of the sanctuary dedicated to Him, so that from the porch of it falls the shadow of iniquity, is still further carried out in Numb. xviii. 1, where it is declared that Aaron and his sons shall "bear the iniquity" of their priesthood. The meaning is that the priesthood as an abstract thing, an office held from Jehovah and for Him, has a holiness like the sanctuary, and that the entrance into it of a man like Aaron brings to light his human imperfection and taint. And this corresponds to a consciousness which every one who deals with sacred truth and undertakes the conduct of Divine worship in the right spirit is bound to have. Entering on those exalted duties he "bears his iniquity." The sense of daring intrusion may almost keep back a man who knows that he has received a Divine call.

To the heavenly muse the poet can but reply:—

"I am not worthy even to speak  
Of Thy prevailing mysteries;  
For I am but an earthly muse . . .  
And darken sanctities with song."

With regard to the Levites whom Aaron is to bring near "that they may be joined unto him," it is singular

that their duties and the restrictions put on them are detailed here as if now for the first time this branch of the sacred ministry was being organised. In the actual development of things this may be true. Difficulties had to be overcome, the nature of the statutes and ordinances had to be explained. Now the time of practical initiation may have arrived. On the other hand, the attempt of Korah to press into the priesthood may have made necessary a recapitulation of the law of Levitical service.

For the support of the Aaronites the heave offerings, "even all the hallowed things of the children of Israel" were to be given "by reason of the anointing." The meal offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings, as most holy, were to be for the male Aaronites alone: heave offerings of sacrifice, again, "all the wave offerings," were to be used by the Aaronites and their families, the reservation being made that only those without ceremonial defilement should eat of them. The first-fruits of the oil and vintage and the first ripe of all fruits in the land were other perquisites. Further, the first-born of man and of beast were to be nominally devoted; but first-born children were to be redeemed for five shekels, and the firstlings of unclean beasts were also to be redeemed. The children of Aaron were to have no inheritance in the land. In these ways however, and by the payment to the priests of the tenth part of the tithes collected by the Levites, ample provision was made for them.

For the Levites, nine-tenths of all tithes of produce would appear to have been not only sufficient, but far more than their proportion. According to the numbers reported in this book, twenty-two thousand Levites—about twelve thousand of them adult men—were to

receive tithes from six hundred thousand. This would make the provision for the Levite as much as for any five men of the tribes. An explanation is suggested that the regular payment of tithes could not be reckoned upon. There would always be Israelites who resented an obligation like this; and as the duty of paying tithes, though enjoined in the law, was a moral one, not enforced by penalty, the Levites were really in many periods of the history of Israel in a state of poverty. It was a complaint of Malachi even after the captivity, when the law was in force, that the tithes were not brought to the temple storehouses. The Deuteronomic laws of tithing, moreover, are different from those given in Numbers. While here we read of a single tithe which is to be for the Levites, which, if paid, would be more than sufficient for them, Deuteronomy speaks of an annual tithe of produce to be eaten by the people at the central sanctuary by way of a festival, to which children, servants, and Levites were to be invited. Each third year a special tithe was to be used in feasting, not necessarily at the sanctuary, and again the Levites were to have their share. It is supposed by some that there were two annual tithings and in the third year three tithings of the produce of the land. But this seems far more than even a specially fertile country could bear. There was no rent to be paid, of course; and if the tithes were used in a festival no great difficulty might be found. But it is clear at all events that more dependence was placed on the free will of the people than on the law; and the Levites and priests must have suffered when religion fell into neglect. Israel was not ideally generous.

2. WATER OF PURIFICATION.—The statute of xix.

1-22 is peculiar, and the rites it enjoins are full of symbolism. It is implied that water alone was unable to remove the defilement caused by touching a dead body; but at the same time the taint was so common and might be incurred so far from the sanctuary that sacrifice could not always be exacted. In order to meet the case an animal was to be offered, and the residue of its burning was to be kept for use whenever the defilement of death had to be taken away.

A red heifer was to be chosen, the colour of the animal pointing to the hue of blood. The heifer was to be free from blemish, a type of vigorous and prolific life. The charge of the sacrifice was to be given to Eleazar the priest, for the high-priest himself might not undertake a duty the performance of which caused uncleanness. The ceremonies must take place not only outside the tabernacle court, but outside the camp, that the intensity of the uncleanness to be transferred to the animal and purged by the sacrifice may be clearly understood. The heifer being slain, the priest takes of its blood and sprinkles it towards the tent of meeting seven times, in lieu of the ordinary sprinkling on the altar. The whole animal is then burnt, and while the flame ascends the virtue of the residuent ashes is symbolically increased by certain other elements. These are cedar wood, which was believed to have special medicinal qualities, and also may have been chosen on account of the long life of the tree; some threads of scarlet wool which would represent the arterial blood, instinct with vital power; and hyssop which was employed in purification.

The priest, having presided at the sacrifice, was to wash his clothes in water and bathe his flesh and hold himself unclean till the even. The assistant who fed

the fire was in like manner unclean. These were both to withdraw; and one who was clean was to gather the ashes of the burning and, having provided some clean vessel within the camp, he was to store up the purifying ashes for future use by the people. Finally, the person who did this last duty, having become tainted like the others, was to wash his clothes and be unclean for the day. The ashes were to be used by mixing them with water to make "water for pollution"; that is, water to take away pollution. Special care was to be exercised that only living water, or water from a flowing stream, should be used for this purpose. It was to be applied to the defiled person, vessel, or tent, by means of hyssop. But, again, the man who used the water of purification in this way was to wash his clothes and be unclean until even.

Here we have an extra-sacerdotal rite, not of worship—for as ordinarily used there was no prayer to God, nor perhaps even the thought of appeal to God. It was religious, for the sense of defilement belonged to religion; but when under the necessity of the occasion any one applied the water of purification, his sense of acting the priestly part was reduced to the lowest point. The efficacy came through the action of the accredited priest when the heifer was sacrificed, it might be a year previously. So, although provision was made for needs occurring far from the sanctuary, no opening was left for any one to claim the power belonging to the sacerdotal office. And in order to make this still more sure it was enacted (ver. 21), that though the sprinkled water of purification cleansed the unclean, any one who touched it being himself clean should *de facto* be defiled. The water was declared so sacred that unless in cases where it was really required no

one would be disposed to meddle with it. The sanctity of the tabernacle and the priesthood was symbolically carried forth to the most distant parts of the land. All were to be on their guard lest they should incur the judgment of God by abusing that which had ceremonial holiness and power.

The idea here is in a sense directly opposite to that which we associate with the sacred word, by which Divine will is communicated and souls are begotten anew. To use that word, to make it known abroad is the duty of every one who has heard and believed. He diffuses blessing and is himself blessed. There is no strict law hedging about with precautions the happy privilege of conveying to the sin-defiled the message of forgiveness and life. And yet may we not call to recollection here the words of Paul, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage; lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected." In a spiritual sense they should be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord; and every deed done, every word spoken in the sacred Name, if not with purity of purpose and singleness of heart, involves in guilt him who acts and speaks. The privilege has its accompanying danger; and the more widely it is used in the thousand organisations within and without the Church, the more carefully do all who use it need to guard the sanctity of the message and the Name. "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour, and some unto dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these"—the profane babblings of those who do not handle the word of God aright—"he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work."

3. DEFILEMENT BY THE DEAD.—The statute of the water of purification stands closely related to one form of uncleanness, that occasioned by death. When death took place in a tent, every one who came into the tent and every one who was in the tent, every open vessel that had no covering bound upon it, and the tent itself (ver. 18) were defiled; and the taint could not be removed in less than seven days. Whoever in the open field touched one who had been slain with a sword, or had otherwise died, or touched the bone of a man, or a grave—contracted like defilement. For purification the sacred water had to be sprinkled on the defiled person, on the third day and again on the seventh day. Not only the aspersion with sacred water, but, in addition, cleansing of clothes and of the body was necessary, in order to complete the removal of the taint. And further, while any one was unclean from this cause, if he touched another, his touch carried defilement that continued to the close of the day. To neglect the statute of purification was to defile the tabernacle of Jehovah: he who did so was to be cut off from his people.

The law was made stringent, as we have already seen, partly no doubt for the purpose of preventing the spread of disease. And to that extent the preservation of health was presented as a religious duty; for only in that sense can we understand the statement that he who did not purify himself defiled the tabernacle of Jehovah. Yet the stringency cannot be altogether due to this, for a bone or a grave would not often communicate infection. The general principle must be received by way of explanation, that death is peculiarly repugnant to the life of God, and therefore contact with it, in any form, takes away the right of

approach to the sanctuary. That this idea goes back to the fall and the death penalty then pronounced might seem a reasonable conclusion. But the same thought does not apply to the defilement connected with birth. If the statute regarding uncleanness by death rested on the connection of death with sin, making "death and mortal corruption an embodiment of sin," the thought was obscured by many other laws regarding uncleanness. The aim we must believe was to make the theocratic oversight of the people penetrate as many as possible of the incidents and contingencies of their existence.

## XVI

### *SORROW AND FAILURE AT KADESH*

#### NUMBERS XX

THERE is a mustering at Kadesh of the scattered tribes, for now the end of the period of wandering approaches, and the generation that has been disciplined in the wilderness must prepare for a new advance. The spies who searched Canaan were sent from Kadesh (xiii. 26), to which, in the second year from the exodus, the tribes had penetrated. Now, in the first month of the fortieth year it would seem, Kadesh is again the headquarters. The adjacent district is called the desert of Zin. Eastward, across the great plain of the Arabah, reaching from the Dead Sea to the Elanitic Gulf, are the mountains of Seir, the natural rampart of Edom. To the head of the Gulf at Elath the distance is some eighty miles in a straight line southward; to the southern end of the Dead Sea it is about fifty miles. Kadesh is almost upon the southern border of Canaan; but the way of the Negeb is barred by defeat, and Israel must enter the Promised Land by another route. In preparation for the advance the tribes gather from the wadies and plateaus in which they have been wandering, and at Kadesh or near it the earlier incidents of this chapter occur.

First among them is the death of Miriam. She has

survived the hardships of the desert and reached a very great age. Her time of influence and vigour past, all the joys of life now in the dim memories of a century, she is glad, no doubt, when the call comes. It was her happiness once to share the enthusiasm of Moses and to sustain the faith of the people in their leader and in God. But any service of this kind she could render has been left behind. For some time she has been able only now and then with feeble steps to move to the tent of meeting that she might assure herself of the welfare of Moses. The tribes will press on to Canaan, but she shall never see it.

How is a life like this of Miriam's to be reckoned? Take into account her faith and her faithfulness; but remember that both were maintained with some intermixture of poor egotism; that while she helped Moses she also claimed to rival and rebuke him; that while she served Jehovah it was with some of the pride of a prophetess. Her devotion, her endurance, the long interest in her brother's work, which indeed led to the great error of her life—these were her virtues, the old great virtues of a woman. So far as opportunity went she doubtless did her utmost, with some independence of thought and decision of character. Even though she gave way to jealousy and passed beyond her right, we must believe that, on the whole, she served her generation in loyalty to the best she knew, and in the fear of the Most High. But into what a strange disturbed current of life was her effort thrown! Downcast, sorely burdened women, counting for very little when they were cheerful or when they complained, heard Miriam's words and took them into their narrow thoughts, to resent her enthusiasm, perhaps, when she was enthusiastic, to grudge her the power she enjoyed,

which to herself seemed so slight. In the camp generally she had respect, and perhaps, once and again, she was able to reconcile to Moses and to one another those whose quarrels threatened the common peace. When she was put forth from the camp in the shame of her leprosy, all were affected, and the march was stayed till her time of separation was over. Was she one of those women whose lot it is to serve others all their lives and to have little for their service? Still, like many another, she helped to make Israel. Of good and evil, of Divine elements and some that are anything but Divine, lives are made up. And although we cannot gather the results of any one and tell its worth, the stream of being retains and the unerring judgment of God accepts whatever is sincere and good. Miriam from first to last fills but a few lines of sacred history; yet of her life, as of others, more has to be told; the end did not come when she died at Kadesh and was buried outside Canaan.

Spread through a diversified and not altogether barren region, over many square miles, the tribes have been able during the thirty-seven years to provide themselves with water. Gathered more closely now, when the dry season begins they are in want. And at once complaints are renewed. Nor can we wonder much. In flaming sunshine, in the parched air of the heights and the stifling heat of the narrow valleys, the cattle gasping and many of them dying, the children crying in vain for water, the little that is to be had, hot and almost putrid, carefully divided, yet insufficient to give each family a little,—the people might well lament their apparently inevitable fate. It may be said, "They should have confided in God." But while that might

apply in ordinary circumstances, would not be out of place if the whole history were ideal, the reality, once understood, forbids so easy a condemnation of unbelief. Nothing is more terrible to endure, nothing more fitted to make strong men weep or turn them into savage critics of a leader and of Providence, than to see their children in the extremity of want which they cannot relieve. And a leader like Moses, patient as he may have been of other complaints, should have been most patient of this. When the people chode with him and said, "Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die, we and our cattle?" they ought surely to have been met with pity and soothing words.

It is indeed a tragedy we are to witness when we come to the rock; and one element of it is the old age and the weary spirit of the leader. Who can tell what vexed his soul that day? how many cares and anxieties burdened the mind that was clear yet, but not so tolerant, perhaps, as once it had been? The years of Moses, his long and arduous service of the people, are not remembered as they ought to be. Even in their extremity the men of the tribes ought to have appealed to their great chief with all respect, instead of breaking in upon him with reproaches. Was no experience sufficient for these people? After the discipline of the wilderness, was the new generation, like that which had died, still a mere horde, ungrateful, rebellious? From the leader's point of view this thought could not fail to arise, and the old magnanimity did not drive it away.

Another point is the forbearance of Jehovah, who has no anger with the people. The Divine Voice com-

mands Moses to take his rod and go forth to the rock and speak to it before the assembly. This does not fall in with Moses' mood. Why is God not indignant with the men of this new generation who seize the first opportunity to begin their murmuring? Relapsing from his high inspiration to a poor human level, Moses begins to think that Jehovah, whose forgiveness he has often implored on Israel's behalf, is too ready now to forgive. It is a failing of the best men thus to stand for the prerogative of God more than God Himself; that is, to mistake the real point of the circumstances they judge and the Divine will they should interpret. The story of Jonah shows the prophet anxious that Nineveh, the inveterate foe of Israel, the centre of proud, God-defying idolatry, should be destroyed. Does God wish it to be spared, to repent and obtain forgiveness? So does not Jonah. His creed is one of doom for wickedness. He resents the Divine mercy and, in effect, exalts himself above the Most High. In like temper is Moses when he goes out followed by the crowd. There is the rock from which water shall be made to flow. But with the thought in his mind that the people do not deserve God's help, Moses takes the affair upon himself. The tragedy is fulfilled when his own feelings guide him more than the Divine patience, his own displeasure more than the Divine compassion; and with the words on his lips, "Hear now, ye rebels; shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" he smites it twice with his rod.

For the moment, forgetting Jehovah the merciful, Moses will himself act God; and he misrepresents God, dishonours God, as every one who forgets Him is sure to do. Is he confident in the power of his wonder-working rod? Does he wish to show that its old

virtue remains? He will use it as if he were smiting the people as well as the rock. Is he willing that this thirsting multitude should drink? Yet he is determined to make them feel that they offend by the urgency with which they press upon him for help. There have been crises in the lives of leaders of men when, with all the teaching of the past to inspire them, they should have risen to a faith in God far greater than they ever exercised before; and more or less they have failed. This is not the will of Providence, they have thought, though they should have known that it was. They have said, "Advance: but God goes not with you," when they should have seen the heavenly light moving on. So Moses failed. He touched his limit; and it was far short of that breadth of compassion which belongs to the Most Merciful. He stood as God, with the rod in his hand to give the water, but with the condemnation upon his lips which Jehovah did not speak.

In this mood of assumed majesty, of moral indignation which has a personal source, with an air of superiority not the simplicity of inspiration, a man may do what he will for ever regret, may betray a habit of self-esteem which has been growing upon him and will be his ruin if it is not checked. In the strong mind of Moses there had lain the germs of hauteur. The early upbringing in an Egyptian court could not fail to leave its mark, and the dignity of a dictator could not be sustained, after the anxieties of the first two years in the desert, without some slight growth of a tendency or disposition to look down on people so spiritless, and play among them the part of Providence, the decrees of which Moses had so often interpreted. But pride, even beginning to show itself towards men, is an aping of God. Unconsciously the mind that looks

down on the crowd falls into the trick of a superhuman claim. Moses, great as he is, without personal ambition, the friend of every Israelite, reaches unaware the hour when a habit long suppressed lifts itself into power. He feels himself the guardian of justice, a critic not only of the lives of men but of the attitude of Jehovah towards them. It is but for an hour; yet the evil is done. What appears to the uplifted mind justice, is arrogance. What is meant for a defence of Jehovah's right, is desecration of the highest office a man can hold under the Supreme. The words are spoken, the rock is struck in pride; and Moses has fallen.

Think of the realisation of this which comes when the flush of hasty resentment dies, and the true self which had been suppressed revives in humble thought. "What have I done?" is the reflection—"What have I said? My rod, my hand, my will, what are they? My indignation! Who gave me the right to be indignant? A king against whom they have revolted! A guardian of the Divine honour! Alas! I have denied Jehovah. I, who stood for Him in my pride, have defamed Him in my vanity. The people who murmured, whom I rebuked, have sinned less than I. They distrusted God, I have declared Him unmerciful, and thereby sown the seeds of distrust. Now I, too, am barred from Israel's inheritance. Unworthy of the promise, I shall never cross the border of God's land. Aaron my brother, we are the transgressors. Because we have not honoured God to sanctify Him in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore we shall not bring this assembly unto the land He gives them." By the lips of Moses himself the oracle was given. It was tragical indeed.

But how could the brothers who had yielded to this

dictatorial hierarchical temper be men of God again, fit for another stroke of work for Him, unless, coming forth into action, their pride had disclosed itself, and with whatever bad result shown its real nature? We deplore the pride; we almost weep to see its manifestation; we hear with sorrow the judgment of Moses and Aaron. But well is it that the worst should come to light, that the evil thing should be seen, God-dishonouring, sacrilegious; should be judged, repented of, punished. Moses must "feel himself and find the blessedness of being little." "By that sin fell the angels," that sin unconfessed. Here in open sight of all, in hearing of all, Moses lays down the godhead he had assumed, acknowledges unworthiness, takes his place humbly among those who shall not inherit the promise. The worst of all happens to a man when his pride remains unrevealed, uncondemned; grows to more and more, and he never discovers that he is attempting to carry himself with the air of Providence, of Divinity.

The error of Moses was great, yet only showed him to be a man of like passions with ourselves. Who can realise the mercy and lovingkindness that are in the heart of God, the danger of limiting the Holy One of Israel? The murmuring of the Israelites against Jehovah had often been rebuked, had often brought them into condemnation. Moses had once and again intervened as their mediator and saved them from death. Remembering the times when he had to speak of Jehovah's anger, he feels himself justified in his own resentment. He thought the murmuring was over; it is resumed unexpectedly, the same old complaints are made and he is carried away by what appears zeal for Jehovah. Yet there is in him even, the man, much more in God, a better

than the seeming best. Pathetic indeed is it to find Moses judged as one who has failed from the high place he could have reached by a final effort of self-mastery, one more generous thought. And we see him fail at a point where we often fail. Sternly to judge our own right of condemning before we speak sternly in the name of God; neither to do nor say anything which implies the assumption of knowledge, justice, charity we do not possess—how few of us are in these respects blameless for a day! Far back in sacred history this high duty is presented so as to evoke the best endeavour of the Christian soul and warn it from the place of failure.

There is preserved in the Book of Exodus (xxxvi.) a list of the Kings of Edom reaching down apparently to about the establishment of the monarchy of Israel. Recent archæology sees no reason to question the genuineness of this historical notice or the names of the Dukes of Edom given in the same passage. With varying boundaries the region over which they ruled extended southward from Moab and the Dead Sea as far as the Elanitic Gulf. Kadesh, considerably west of the Arabah, is described as being on its uttermost border. But the district inhabited by the Edomites proper was a narrow strip of rugged country eastward of the range of Mount Seir. One pass giving entrance to the heart of Edom led by the base of Mount Hor towards Selah, afterwards called Petra, which occupied a fine but narrow valley in the heart of broken mountains. To reach the south of Moab the Israelites desired probably to take a road a good deal farther north. But this would have led them by Bozrah the capital, and the king who reigned at the time refused

them the route. The message sent him in Moses' name was friendly, even appealing. The brotherhood of Edom and Israel was claimed; the sore travail of the tribes in Egypt and the deliverance wrought by Jehovah were given as reasons; promise was made that no harm should be done to field or vineyard: Israel would journey by the king's way turning neither to the right nor the left. When the first request was refused Moses added that if his people drank of the water while passing through Edom they would pay for it. The appeal, however, was made in vain. An attempt to advance without permission was repelled. An armed force barred the way, and most reluctantly the desert road was again taken.

We can easily understand the objection of the King of Edom. Many of the defiles through which the main road wound were not adapted for the march of a great multitude. The Israelites could scarcely have gone through Edom without injuring the fields and vineyards; and though the undertaking was given in good faith by Moses, how could he answer for the whole of that undisciplined host he was leading towards Canaan? The safety of Edom lay in denying to other peoples access to its strongholds. The difficulty of approaching them was their main security. Israel might go quietly through the land now; but its armies might soon return with hostile intent. Water, too, was very precious in some parts of Edom. Enough was stored in the rainy season to supply the wants of the inhabitants; beyond that there was none to spare, and for this necessary of life money was no equivalent. A multitude travelling with cattle would have made scarcity, or famine,—might have left the region almost desolate. With the information they

had, Moses and Joshua may have believed that there were no insuperable difficulties. Yet the best generalship might have been unequal to the task of controlling Israel in the passes and among the cultivated fields of that singular country.

There is no need to go back on the history of Jacob and Esau in order to account for the apparent incivility of the King of Edom to the Israelites and Moses. That quarrel had surely been long forgotten! But we need not wonder if the kinship of the two peoples was no availing argument in the case. Those were not times when covenants like that proposed could be easily trusted, nor was Israel on an expedition the nature of which could reassure the Idumæans. And we have parallels enough in modern life to show that from the only point of view the king could take he was amply justified. There are demands men make on others without perceiving how difficult it will be to grant them, demands on time, on means, on goodwill, demands that would involve moral as well as material sacrifice. The foolish intrusions of well-meaning people may be borne for a time, but there is a limit beyond which they cannot be suffered. Our whole life cannot be exposed to the derangements of every scheme-maker, every claimant. If we are to do our own work well, it is absolutely necessary that a certain space shall be jealously guarded, where the gains of thought may be kept safely and the ideas revealed to us may be developed. That any one's life should be open so that travellers, even with some right of close fraternity, may pass through the midst of it, drink of the wells, and trample down the fields of growing purpose or ripening thought, this is not required. Good-will makes an open gate; Christian feeling makes

one still wider and bids many welcome. But he who would keep his heart in fruitfulness must be careful to whom he grants admission. There is beginning to be a sort of jealousy of any one's right to his own reserve. It is not a single Israel approaching from the West, but a score, with their different schemes, who come from every side demanding right of way and even of abode. Each presses a Christian claim on whatever is wanted of our hospitality. But if all had what they desire there would be no personal life left.

On the other hand, some whose highways are broad, whose wells and streams are overflowing, whose lives are not fully engaged, show themselves exclusive and inhospitable—like those proprietors of vast moors who refuse a path to the waterfall or the mountain-top. Without Edom's excuse, some modern Idumæans warn every enterprise off their bounds. Neither brotherhood nor any other claim is acknowledged. They would find advantage, not injury, in the visit of those who bring new enthusiasms and ideas to bear on existence. They would learn of other aims than occupy them, a better hope than they possess. Their sympathy would be enlisted in heavenly or humane endeavours, and new alliances would quicken as well as broaden their life. But they will not listen; they continue selfish to the end. Against all such Christianity has to urge the law of brotherhood and of sacrifice.

We have assumed that Kadesh was on the western side of the Arabah, and it is necessary to take ver. 20 as referring to an incident that occurred after the Israelites had crossed the valley. Not otherwise can we explain how they came to encamp among the mountains on the eastern side. The repulse must have

been sustained by the tribes after they had left Kadesh and penetrated some distance into the northern defiles of Idumæa. Bozrah, the capital, appears to have been situated about half way between Petra and the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and a force issuing from that stronghold would divert the march southward so that the Israelites could safely encamp only when they reached the open plain near Mount Hor. Hither therefore they retreated: and here it was that Moses and Aaron were parted. The time had come for the high priest to be gathered to his people.

Scarcely any locality in the whole track of the wandering is better identified than this. From the plain of the Arabah the mountains rise in a range parallel to the valley, in ridges of sandstone, limestone, and chalk, with cliffs and peaks of granite. The defile that leads by Mount Hor to Petra is peculiarly grand, for here the range attains its greatest height. . "Through a narrow ravine," says one traveller, "we ascended a steep mountain side, amid a splendour of colour from bare rock or clothing verdure, and a solemnity of light on the broad summits, of shade in the profound depths—a memory for ever. . . . It was the same narrow path through which in old times had passed other trains of camels laden with the merchandise of India, Arabia, and Egypt. And thus having ascended, we had next a long descent to the foot of Mount Hor, which stands isolated." The mountain rises about four thousand feet above the Arabah and has a peculiar double crest. On its green pastures there graze flocks of sheep and goats; and inhabited caves—used perhaps since the days of the old Horites—are to be seen here and there. The ascent of the mountain is aided by steps cut in the rock, "indeed a tolerably complete

winding staircase," for the chapel or mosque on the summit, said to cover the grave of Aaron, is a notable Arab sanctuary, resorted to by many pilgrims. "From the roof of the tomb—now only an ordinary square building with a dome—northward and southward, a hilly desert; eastward, the mountains of Edom, within which Petra lies hid; westward, the desert of the Arabah, or wilderness of Zin; beyond that, the desert of Et-Tih; beyond that again, in the far horizon, the blue-tinted hills of the Land of Promise."

Such is the mountain at the foot of which Israel lay encamped when the Lord said unto Moses, "Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people and shall die there." We imagine the sorrowful gaze of the multitude following the three climbers, the aged brothers who had borne so long the burden and heat of the day, and Eleazar, already well advanced in life, who was to be invested with his father's office. Coming soon after the death of Miriam, this departure of Aaron broke sharply one other link that still bound Israel with its past. The old times were receding, the new had not yet come into sight.

The life of a good man may close mournfully. While some in leaving the world cross cheerfully the river beyond which the smiling fields of the heavenly land are full in view, others there are who, even with the faith of the Conqueror of death to sustain them, have no gladdening prospect at the last. Only from a distance Aaron saw the Land of Promise; from so great a distance that its beauty and fruitfulness could not be realised. The sullen gleam of the Lake of Sodom, lying in its grim hollow, was visible away to the north.

Besides that the dim eyes could make out little. But Edom lay below ; and the tribes would have a great circuit round that inhospitable land, would have to traverse another desert beyond the horizon to the east, ere they could reach Moab and draw near to Canaan. A true patriot, Aaron would think more of the people than of himself. And the confidence he had in the friendliness of God and the wisdom of his brother would scarcely dispel the shadow that settled on him as he forecast the journey of the tribes and saw the difficulties they were yet to meet. So not a few are called away from the world when the great ends for which they have toiled are still remote. The cause of liberty or of reformation with which life has been identified may even appear farther from success than years before. Or again, the close of life may be darkened by family troubles more pressing than any that were experienced earlier. A man may be heavily burdened without distrusting God on his own account, or doubting that in the long run all shall be well. He may be troubled because the immediate prospect shows no escape from painful endurance for those he loves. He does not sorrow perhaps that he has found the promises of life to be illusory ; but he is grieved for dear friends who must yet make that discovery, who shall travel many a league and never win the battle or pass beyond the wilderness.

The mind of Aaron as he went to his death was darkened by the consciousness of a great failure. Kadesh lay westward across the valley, and the thought of what took place there was with the brothers as they climbed Mount Hor and stood upon its summit. They had repented, but they had not yet forgiven themselves. How could they, when they saw in the temper of the

people too plain proofs that their lese-majesty had borne evil fruit? It needs much faith to be sure that God will remedy the evil we have done; and so long as the means cannot be seen, the shadow of self-reproach must remain. Many a good man, climbing the last slope, feels the burden of transgressions committed long before. He has done his utmost to restore the defences of truth and rebuild the altars of witness which in thoughtless youth or proud manhood he cast down. But circumstances have hindered the work of reparation; and many who saw his sin have passed far beyond the reach of his repentance. The thought of past faults may sadly obscure the close of a Christian life. The end would indeed be hopeless often were it not for trust in the omnipotent grace which brings again that which was driven away and binds up that which was broken. Yet since the very work of God and the victory of Christ are made more difficult by things a believer has done, is it possible that he should always have happy recollections of the past as life draws near its end?

It was no doubt honourable to Aaron that his death was appointed to be on that mountain in Seir. Old as he was, he would never think of complaining that he was ordained to climb it. Yet to the tired limbs it was a steep, difficult path, a way of sorrow. Here, also, we find resemblance to the close of many a worthy life. High office in the Church has been well served, overflowing wealth has been used in beneficence; but at the last reverses have come. The man who was always prosperous is now stripped of his possessions. Darkened in mind by successive losses, bereaved of friends and of power, he has to climb a dreary mountain-path to the sharp end. It may be really honourable to such

a man that God has thus appointed his death to be not in the midst of luxury, but on the rugged peak of loss. Understanding things aright, he should say: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But if dependence is felt as shame, if he who gave freely to others feels it a sore thing to receive from others, who can have the heart to blame the good man because he does not triumph here? And if he has to climb alone, no Eleazar with him, scarcely one human aid, what shall we say? Now life must gird itself and go whither it would not. Sad is the journey, but not into night. The Christian does not impeach Divine providence nor grieve that earthly good is finally taken away. Though his life has been in his generosity, not in his possessions, yet he will confess that the last bitter trial is needful to the perfecting of faith.

Should the believer triumph over death through Christ? It is his privilege; but some display unwarranted complacency. They have confidence in the work of Christ; they boast that they rest everything on Him. But is it well with them if they have no sorrow because of days and years that ran to waste? Is it well with them if they deplore no failure in Christian effort when the reason is that they never gave heart and strength to any difficult task? Who can be satisfied with the apparent victory of faith at the last of one who never had high hopes for himself and others, and therefore was never disappointed? Better the sorrowful ending to a life that has dared great things and been defeated, that has cherished a pure ideal and come painfully short of it, than the exultation of those who even as Christians have lived to themselves.

Perhaps the circumstances that attended the death

of Aaron were to him the finest discipline of life. Climbing the steep slope at the command of God, would he not feel himself brought into a closer relation with the Eternal Will? Would he not feel himself separated from the world and gathered up into the quiet massiveness of life with Him who is from everlasting to everlasting? The years of a high priest, dealing constantly with sacred things and symbols, might easily fall into a routine not more helpful to generous thought and spiritual exaltation than the habits of secular life. One might exist among sacrifices and purifications till the mind became aware of nothing beyond ritual and its orderly performance. True, this had not been the case with Aaron during a considerable portion of the time since he began his duties. There had been many events by means of which Jehovah broke in upon the priests with His great demands. But thirty-seven years had been comparatively uneventful. And now the little world of camp and tabernacle court, the sacred shrine with its ark, the symbolic dwelling-place of God, must have their contrast in the broad spaces filled with gleaming light, the blue vault, the widespread hills and valleys, the heavens which are Jehovah's throne, the earth which is His footstool. The bustle of Israel's little life is left behind for the calm of the mountain land. The high priest finds another vestibule of the dwelling of Jehovah than that which he has been accustomed to enter with sprinkled blood and the pungent fumes of the incense.

Is it not good thus to be called away from the business of the world, immersed in which every day men have lost the due proportions of things, both of what is earthly and what is spiritual? They have to leave the computations recorded in their books, and what

bulks largely in the gossip of the way and the news of the town ; they are to climb where greater spaces can be seen, and human life, both as brief and as immortal, shall be understood in its relations to God. Often those who have this call addressed to them are most unwilling to obey. It is painful to lose the old standards of proportion, to hear no longer the familiar noise of wheels, to see no machinery, no desks, no ledgers, to read no newspapers, to have the quiet, the slow-moving days, the moonless or moonlit nights. But if reflection follows, as it should, and brings wisdom, the change has saved a man who was near to being lost. The things he toiled for once, as well as the things he dreaded,—that success, this breath of adverse opinion,—seem little in the new light, scarcely disturb the new atmosphere. One thus called apart with God, learning what are the real elements of life, may look with pity on his former self, yet gather out of the experience that had small value, for the most part, here and there a jewel of price. And the wise, becoming wiser, will feel preparation made for the greater existence that lies beyond.

Moses accompanied his brother to the mountain top. By his hands, with all considerateness, the priestly robes were taken from Aaron's shoulders and put on Eleazar. The true friend he had all along relied upon was with the dying man at the last, and closed his eyes. In this there was a palliation of the decree under which it would have been terrible to suffer alone ; yet in the end the loneliness of death had to be felt. We know a Friend who passed through death for us, and made a way into the higher life, but still we have our dread of the solitude. How much heavier must it have weighed when no clear hope of immortality shone upon the hill. Thé vastness of nature was around the dying priest of

Israel, his face was turned to the skies. But the thrill of Divine love we find in the touch of Christ did not reassure him. "These all . . . received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Eleazar followed Aaron and took up the work of the priesthood, not less ably, let us believe, yet not precisely with the same spirit, the same endowments. And indeed to have one in all respects like Aaron would not have served. The new generation, in new circumstances, needs a new minister. Office remains ; but, as history moves on, it means always something different. When the hour comes that requires a clear step to be taken away from old notions and traditions of duty, neither he who holds the office nor those to whom he has ministered should complain or doubt. It is not good that one should cling to work merely because he has served well and may still seem able to serve ; often it is the case that before death commands a change the time for one has come. Even the men who are most useful to the world, Paul, Apollos, Luther, do not die too soon. It may appear to us that a man who has done noble work has no successor. When, for instance, England loses its Dr. Arnold, Stanley, Lightfoot, and we look in vain for one to whom the robes are becoming, we have to trust that by some education they did not foresee the Church has to be perfected. The same theory, nominally, is not the same when others undertake to apply it. The same ceremonies have another meaning when performed by other hands. There are ways to the full fruition of Christ's government which go as far about as Israel's to Canaan round the land of Moab, for a time as truly retrogressive. But the great Leader

the one High Priest of the new covenant, never fails His Church or His world, and the way that does not hasten, as well as that which makes straight for the goal, is within His purpose, leads to the fulfilment among men of His mediatorial design.

## XVII

### *THE LAST MARCH AND THE FIRST CAMPAIGN*

#### NUMBERS *xxi*

IT has been suggested in a previous chapter that the repulse of the Israelites by the King of Arad took place on the occasion when, after the return of the spies, a portion of the army endeavoured to force its way into Canaan. If that explanation of the passage with which chap. *xxi.* opens cannot be accepted, then the movements of the tribes after they were driven back from Edom must have been singularly vacillating. Instead of turning southward along the Arabah they appear to have moved northward from Mount Hor and made an attempt to enter Canaan at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Arad was in the Negeb or South Country, and the Canaanites there, keeping guard, must have descended from the hills and inflicted a defeat which finally closed that way.

From the time of the departure from Kadesh onward no mention is made of the pillar of cloud. It may have still moved as the standard of the host; yet the unsuccessful attempt to pass through Edom, followed possibly by a northward march, and then by a southward journey to the Elanitic Gulf when they "compassed Mount Seir many days" (Deut. *ii.* 1), would appear to prove that the authoritative guidance had in

some way failed. It is a suggestion, which, however, can only be advanced with diffidence, that after the day at Kadesh when the words fell from Moses' lips, "Hear now, ye rebels," his power as a leader declined, and that the guidance of the march fell mainly into the hands of Joshua,—a brave soldier indeed, but no acknowledged representative of Jehovah. It is at all events clear that attempts had now to be made in one direction and another to find a feasible route. Moses may have retired from the command, partly on account of age, but even more because he felt that he had in part lost his authority. Israel, moreover, had to become a military nation: and Moses, though nominally the head of the tribes, had to stand aside to a great extent that the new development might proceed. In a short time Joshua would be sole leader; already he appears to hold the military command.

The journey from Mount Hor to the borders of Moab by way of the Red Sea, or Yâm-Suph, is very briefly noticed in the narrative. Oboth, Iye-abarim, Zared, are the only three names mentioned in chap. xxi. before the border of Moab is reached. Chap. xxxiii. gives Zalmonah, Punon, Oboth, and lastly Iye-abarim, which is said to be in the border of Moab. The mention of these names suggests nothing as to the extremely trying nature of the journey; that is only indicated by the statement, "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." The truth is, that of all the stages of the wandering, these along the Arabah, and from the Elanitic Gulf eastward and northward to the valley of Zared, were perhaps the most difficult and perilous. The Wady Arabah is "an expanse of shifting sands, broken by innumerable undulations, and countersected by a hundred watercourses." Along this plain

the route lay for fifty miles, in the track of the furious sirocco and amidst terrible desolation. Turning eastward from the palm-groves of Elath and the beautiful shores of the Gulf, the way next entered a tract of the Arabian wilderness outside the border of Edom. Oboth lay, perhaps, east from Maan, still an inhabited city, and the point of departure for one who journeys from Palestine into central Arabia. Out from Maan this desert lies, and is thus described :—" Before and around us extended a wide and level plain, blackened over with countless pebbles of basalt and flint, except when the moonbeams gleamed white on little intervening patches of clear sand, or on yellowish streaks of withered grass, the scanty produce of the winter rains, and now dried into hay. Over all a deep silence which even our Arab companions seemed fearful of breaking ; when they spoke it was in a half whisper and in few words, while the noiseless tread of our camels sped stealthily but rapidly through the gloom without disturbing its stillness." \* For one hundred miles the route for Israel lay through this wilderness ; and it is hardly possible to escape the conviction that although little is said of the experiences of the way the tribes must have suffered enormously and been greatly reduced in number. As for cattle, we must conclude that hardly any survived. Where camels sustain themselves with the greatest difficulty, oxen and sheep would certainly perish. There had come the necessity for a rapid advance, to be made at whatever hazard. All that would retard the progress of the people had to be sacrificed. There is indeed some ground for the supposition that part of the tribes remained near Kadesh while the main body made the

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\* Palgrave, "Central and Eastern Arabia," p. 2.

long and perilous detour. The army entering Canaan by way of Jericho would as soon as possible open communication with those who had been left behind.

The only recorded episode belonging to the period of this march is that of the fiery serpents. In the Arabah and the whole North Arabian region the cobra, or *naja haie*, is common, and is superstitiously dreaded. Other serpents are so innocuous by comparison that this chiefly receives the attention of travellers. One incident is recorded thus by Mr. Stuart-Glennie:—  
“Two cobras have been caught, and one, which has been dexterously pinned by the neck in the slit end of a stick, its captor comes up triumphantly to exhibit. . . . After a time the fellow let it go, refusing to kill it, and permitting it to glide away unharmed. This I understood to be from fear—fear of the vengeance after death of what, in life, had been incapable of defending itself. At Petra . . . the snakes which Hamilton, a fearless hunter of them, killed, the Arabs would not allow to lie within the encampment, asserting that we should thus bring the whole snake-tribe to which the individual belonged to avenge the death of their kinsman.” Whether all the serpents that attacked the Israelites were cobras is doubtful; but the description “fiery” seems to point to the effects of the cobra-poison, which produces an intense burning sensation in the whole body. Another explanation of the adjective is found in the metallic sparkle of the reptiles.

“Much people of Israel died” of the bites of these serpents, which, disturbed by the travellers as they went sullenly and carelessly along, issued from crevices of the ground and from the low shrubs in which they lurked, and at once fastened on feet and hands. The peculiar character of the new enemy caused universal

alarm. As one and another fell writhing to the ground, and after a few convulsive movements died in agony, a feeling of terrified revulsion spread through the ranks. Pestilence was natural, familiar, as compared with this new punishment which their murmuring about the light food and the thirst of the desert had brought on them. The serpent, lithe and subtle, scarcely seen in the twilight, creeping into the tents at night, quick at any moment, without provocation, to use its poisoned fangs, has appeared the hereditary enemy of man. As the instrument of the Tempter it was connected with the origin of human misery; it appeared the embodied evil which from the very dust sprang forth to seek the evil-doer. Many ways had Jehovah of reaching men who showed distrust and resented His will. This was in a sense the most dreadful.

The serpents that lurked in the Israelites' way and darted suddenly upon them are always felt to be analogues of the subtle sins that spring on man and poison his life. What traveller knows the moment when he may feel in his soul the sharp sting of evil desire that will burn in him to a deadly fever? Men who have been wounded can, for a time, hide from fellow-travellers their mortal hurt. They keep on the march and make shift to look like others. Then the madness reveals itself. Words are spoken, deeds are done, that show the vile inoculation taking effect. By-and-by there is another moral death. Humanity may well fear the power of evil thoughts, of lusts, of envious feelings, that serpent-like attack and madden the soul; may well look up and cry aloud to God for a sufficient remedy. No herb nor balm to be found in the gardens or fields of earth is an antidote to this

poison; nor can the surgeon excise the tainted flesh, or destroy the virus by any brand of penance.

Resuming his generous part as intercessor for the people, Moses sought and found the means to help them. He was to make a serpent of brass, an image of the foe, and erect it on a standard full in sight of the camp, and to it the eyes of the stricken people were to be turned. If they realised the Divine purpose of grace and trusted Jehovah while they looked, the power of the poison would be destroyed. The serpent of brass was nothing in itself, was, as long afterwards Hezekiah declared it to be, *nehushtan*; but as a symbol of the help and salvation of God it served the end. The stricken revived: the camp, almost in a panic through superstitious fear, was calmed. Once more it was known that He who smote the sinful, in wrath remembered mercy. It must be assumed that there was repentance and faith on the part of those who looked. The serpents appear as the means of punishment, and the poison loses its effect with the growth of the new spirit of submission. It has rightly been pointed out that the heathen view of the serpent as a healing power has no countenance here. That singular belief must have had its origin in the worship of the serpent which arose from dread of it as an embodiment of demoniacal energy. Our passage treats it as a creature of God, ready, like the lightning and the pestilence, or like the frogs and insects of the Egyptian plagues, to be used as an instrument in bringing home to men their sins.

And when our Lord recalled the episode of the healing of Israel by means of the brazen serpent, He certainly did not mean that the image in itself was in any sense a type or even symbol of Him. It was lifted up; He was to be lifted up: it was to be looked upon

with the gaze of repentance and faith; He is to be regarded, as He hangs on the cross, with the contrite, believing look: it signified the gracious interposition of God, who was Himself the True Healer; Christ is lifted up and gives Himself on the cross in accordance with the Father's will, to reveal and convey His love—these are the points of similarity. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." The uplifting, the healing, are symbolic. The serpent-image fades out of sight. Christ is seen giving Himself in generous love, showing us the way of life when He dies, the just for the unjust. He is the power of God unto salvation. With Him we die that He may live in us. He judges us, condemns us as sinners, and at the same time turns our judgment into acquittal, our condemnation into liberty. Israel's past and the grace of Jehovah to the stricken tribes are connected by our Lord's words with the redemption provided through His own sacrifice. The Divine Healer of humanity is there and here; but here in spiritual life, in quickening grace, not in an empirical symbol. Christ on the cross is no mere sign of a higher energy; the very energy is with Him, most potent when He dies.

Like the serpent poison, that of sin creates a burning fever, a mortal disease. But into all the springs and channels of infected life the renovating grace of God enters through the long deep look of faith. We see the Man, our brother, full of sympathy, the Son of God our sin-bearer. The pity is profound as our need; the strong spiritual might, sin-conquering, life-giving, is enough for each, more than sufficient for all. We look—to wonder, to hope, to trust, to love, to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. We see our con-

demnation, the handwriting of ordinances that is against us—and we see it cancelled through the sacrifice of our Divine Redeemer. Is it the death that moves us first? Then we perceive love stronger than death, love that can never die. Our souls go forth to find that love, they are bound by it for ever to the Infinite Truth, the Eternal Purity, the Immortal Life. We find ourselves at length whole and strong, fit for the enterprises of God. The trumpet call is heard; we respond with joy. We will fight the good fight of faith, suffering and achieving all through Christ.

At Iye-abarim, the Heaps of the Outlands, "which is toward the sunrising," the worst of the desert march was over. That the long and dreary wilderness did not swallow up the host is, humanly speaking, matter of astonishment. Yet singular light is thrown on the journey by an incident recorded by Mr. Palmer. In the midst of the broken country extending from the neighbourhood of the ancient Kadesh to the Arabah, he and his companions encamped at the head of the Wady Abu Taraimh, which slopes to the south-east. Here in the midst of the desolate mountains a quite young girl, small, solitary traveller, was found. She was on her way to Abdeh, some twenty miles behind, and had come from a place called Hesmeh, six days' journey beyond Akabah, a distance of some hundred and fifty miles. "She had been without bread or water, and had only eaten a few herbs to support herself by the way." The simple trust of the child could achieve what strong men might have pronounced impossible. And the Israelites, knowing little of the road, trusted and hoped and pressed on till the green hills of Moab were at last in sight. The march was

eastward of the present highway, which keeps within the border of Edom and passes through El Buseireh, the ancient Bozrah. We may suppose that the Israelites followed a track afterwards chosen for a Roman road and still traceable. The valley of Zared, perhaps the modern Feranji, would be reached about fifteen miles east from the southern gulf of the Dead Sea. Thence, striking on a watercourse and keeping to the desert side of Ar, the modern Rabba, the Hebrews would have a march of about twenty miles to the Arnon, which at that time formed the boundary between Moab and the Amorites.

At this point the history incorporates, why we cannot tell, part of an old song from the "Book of the Wars of Jehovah."

"Vaheb in Suphah,  
And the valleys of Arnon,  
And the slope of the valleys  
That inclineth toward the dwelling of Ar,  
And leaneth upon the border of Moab."

The picturesque topography of this chant, the meaning of which as a whole is obscured for us by the first line, may be the sole reason of its quotation. If we read "Vaheb in storm" we have a word-picture of the scene under impressive conditions; and if the storm is that of war the relique may belong to the time of the contest described in ver. 26 when the Amorite chief, crossing Jordan, gained the northern heights and drove the Moabites in confusion across the Arnon toward the stronghold of Ar, some twelve or fifteen miles to the south. Yet another ancient song is connected with a station called Beer, or the Well, some spot in the wilderness north of the Arnon valley.

Moses points out the place where water may be found, and as the digging goes on the chant is heard :

“Spring up, O well ; sing ye unto it :  
The well which the princes digged,  
Which the nobles of the people delved,  
With the sceptre, and with their staves.

The seeking of the precious water by rude art in a thirsty valley kindles the mind of some poet of the people. And his song is spirited, with ample recognition of the zeal of the princes who themselves take part in the labour. While they dig he chants, and the people join in the song till the words are fixed in their memory, so as to become part of the traditions of Israel.

The finding of a spring, the discovery that by their own effort they can reach the living water laid up for them beneath the sand, is an event to the Israelites, worth preserving in a national ballad. What does this imply? That the resources of nature and the means of unlocking them were still only beginning to be understood? We are almost compelled to think so, whatever conclusions this may involve. And Israel, slowly finding out the Divine provision lying beneath the surface of things, is a type of those who very gradually discover the possibilities that are concealed beneath the seemingly ordinary and unpromising. By the beaten tracks of life, in its arid valleys, there are, for those who dig, wells of comfort, springs of truth and salvation. Men are athirst for inspiration, for power. They think of these as endowments for which they must wait. In point of fact they have but to open the fountains of conscience and of generous feeling in order to find what they desire. Multitudes faint by the way because they will not seek for themselves the water of Divine truth that would reinvigorate their

being. When we trust to wells opened by others we cannot obtain the supply suited to our special need. Each for himself must discover Divine providence, duty, conviction, the springs of repentance and of love. The many wait, and never get beyond spiritual dependence. The few, some with sceptre, some with staff, dig for themselves and for the rest wells of new ardour and sustaining thought. The whole of human life, we may say, has beneath its surface veins and rills of heavenly water. In heart and conscience we can find the will of our Maker, the springs of His promises, revelations of His power and love. More than we know of the living water that flows through the world of humanity like a river has its source in springs that have been dug in waste places by those who reflected, who saw in man's world and man's soul the work of the "faithful Creator."

From Beer in the wilderness the march skirted the green fields and valleys of the country once held by the Moabites, now under Sihon the Amorite. When they had gone but a few stages along this route the leaders of the host found it necessary to enter into negotiations. They were now some twenty miles only by road from the fords of Jordan, but Heshbon, a strong fortress, confronted them. The Amorites must be either conciliated or attacked. This time there was no circuitous way that could be taken; a critical hour had come.

The presence of the Amorites on the eastern side of Jordan is accounted for in a passage extending from vv. 26-30. Moab had apparently, as at a later time referred to by one of the prophets, been at ease, resting securely behind her mountain rampart. Suddenly the

Amorite warriors, crossing the ford of Jordan and pressing up the defile, had attacked and taken Heshbon; and with the loss of that fortress Moab was practically defenceless. Field by field the old inhabitants had been driven back, out into the desert, southward beyond the Arnon. Even as far as Ar itself the victors had carried fire and sword. Retiring, they left all south of the Arnon to the Moabites, and themselves occupied the country from Arnon to Jabbok, a stretch of sixty miles. The song of vv. 27-30 commemorates this ancient war:—

“Come ye to Heshbon,  
 Let the city of Sihon be built and established;  
 For a fire is gone out of Heshbon,  
 A flame from the city of Sihon:  
 It hath devoured Ar of Moab,  
 The Lords of the High Places of Arnon.  
 Woe to thee, Moab!  
 Thou art undone, O people of Chemosh.”

The chant rejoicing over the defeated goes on to tell how the sons of Moab fled, and her daughters were taken captive; how the arms of the Amorite were victorious from Heshbon to Dibon, over Nophah and Medeba. The Israelites arriving soon after this sanguinary conflict, found the conquered region immediately beyond the Arnon open to their advance. The Amorites had not yet occupied the whole of the land; their power was concentrated about Heshbon, which according to the song had been rebuilt.

The request made of Sihon to allow the passage of a people on its way to Jordan and the country beyond came possibly at a time when the Amorites were scarcely prepared for resistance. They had been successful, but their forces were insufficient for the large district

they had taken, larger considerably than that on the other side of Jordan from which they had migrated. In the circumstances Sihon would not grant the request. These Israelites were bent on establishing themselves as rivals: the answer accordingly was a refusal, and war began. Refreshed by the spoil of the fields of Arnon, and now almost within sight of Canaan, the Hebrew fighting men were full of ardour. The conflict was sharp and decisive. Apparently in a single battle the power of Sihon was broken. Leaving his fortress the Amorite chief had gone out against Israel "into the wilderness"; and at Jahaz the fight went against him. From Arnon to Jabbok his land lay open to the conquerors.

And having once tasted success the warriors of Israel did not sheathe their swords. The fortress of Amman guarded the land of the Ammonites so strongly that it seemed for the time perilous to strike in that direction. Crossing the valley of the Jabbok, however, and leaving the fierce Ammonites unattacked, the Israelites had Bashan before them; a fertile region of innumerable streams, populous, and with many strongholds and cities. There was hesitation for a time, but the oracle of Jehovah reassured the army. Og the king of Bashan waited the attack at Edrei in the north of his kingdom, about forty miles east from the Sea of Galilee. Israel was again victorious. The king of Bashan, his sons, and his army were cut to pieces.

Such was the rapid success the Israelites had in their first campaign, amazing enough, though partly explained by the strifes and wars which had reduced the strength of the peoples they attacked. We must not suppose, however, that though the Amorites and

the people of Bashan were defeated, their lands were occupied or could be occupied at once. What had been done was rather in the way of defending the passage of the Jordan than providing a settlement for any of the tribes. When the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites came to dwell in those districts east of the Jordan, they had to make good their ground against the old inhabitants who remained.

The army had passed into the north, but the main body of the people descended from the neighbourhood of Heshbon by a pass leading to the Jordan Valley. The return of the victorious troops after a few months gave them the assurance that at last they could safely prepare for the long expected entrance into the Land of Promise.

Suffering and the discipline of the wilderness had educated the Israelites for the day of action. By what a long and tedious journey they reached their success! Behind them, yet with them still, was Sinai, whose lightnings and awful voices made them aware of the power of Jehovah into covenant with whom they entered, whose law they received. As a people bound solemnly to the unseen Almighty God they left that mountain and journeyed towards Kadesh. But the covenant had neither been thoroughly accepted nor thoroughly understood. They began their march from the mountain of the Lord as the people of Jehovah, yet expecting that He was to do all for them, require little at their hands. The other side of privilege, the duty they owed to God, had to be impressed by many a painful chastisement, by the sorrows and disasters of the way. Wonderfully, all things considered, had they sped, though their murmurings were the sign of an ignorant rebellious temper which was incompatible

with any moral progress. By the long delay in the wilderness of Kadesh that disposition had to be cured. In a region not fertile like Canaan itself, yet capable of supporting the tribes, they had to forget Egypt, realise that forward not backward was their only way, that while desert after desert intervened now between them and Goshen, they were within a day's march of the Promised Land. But even this was not enough. Perhaps they might have crept gradually northward; shifting their headquarters a few miles at a time till they had taken possession of the Negeb and made a settlement of some kind in Canaan. But if they had done so, as a nation of shepherds, advancing timorously, not boldly, they would have had no strength at the opening of their career. And it was decreed that by another door, in another spirit, they should enter. Edom refused them access to the east country. They had again to gird up their loins for a long journey. And that last terrible march was the discipline they required. Resolutely kept to it by their leader, on through the Arabah, across the desert, to the "Heaps of the Outlands towards the sunrising" they went, with new need for courage, a new call to endure hardness every day. Did they faint once, and turn murmurers again? The serpents stung them in judgment, and the cure was provided in grace. They learned once more that it was One they could not elude with whom they had to do, One who could be severe and also kind, who could strike and also save. Decimated, but knit together as they had never been, the tribes reached the Arnon. And then, the first trial of their arms made, they knew themselves a conquering people, a people with power, a people with a destiny.

It is so in the making of manhood, in the discipline of the soul. Sinai, and the awful declarations of duty and of the Divine claim there, must enter into our life; it would be light, frivolous, and incapable otherwise. But the revelation of power and righteousness does not insure our submission to the power, our conformity to the righteousness. Divine words have to be followed by Divine deeds; we have to learn that in God's kingdom there is to be no murmuring, no shrinking even from death, no turning back. It is a lesson that tries the generations. How many will not learn it! In society, in the Church, the rebellious spirit is shown and has to be corrected. At the "Graves of Lust," at the "Place of Burning," murmurers are judged, those who refuse God's way fall and are left behind. And when the Land of Promise is in sight possession of it shall not be easily obtained by those who are still half-wedded to the old life, distrustful of the righteousness of God and His demand on the whole love and service of the soul. There is indeed no heaven for those who look back, who even if angels were to hurry them on would still lament the losses of this life as irremediable. There must be the courage of the daring soul that adventures all on faith, on the Divine promise, on the eternity of the spiritual.

Wherefore, that the earthly temper may be taken out of us, we have to cross desert after desert, to make long circuits through the hot and thirsty wilderness even when we think our faith complete and our hope nigh its fulfilment. It is as those who overcome we are to enter the kingdom. Not as "the world's poor routed leavings," not obtaining permission from Edomites or Amorites to slip ingloriously through their land, but as those who with the sword of the Spirit can

hew our own way through falsehoods and bring down the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, as warriors of God we are to reach and cross the border. How many survive, having gone through discipline like this? How many overcome and have the right to pass through the gate into the city?

## XVIII

### *BALAAAM INVOKED*

NUMBERS xxii. 1-19

WHILE a part of the army of Israel was engaged in the campaign against Bashan, the tribes remained "in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho." The topography is given here, as elsewhere, from the point of view of one dwelling in Canaan; and the locality indicated is a level stretch of land, some five or six miles broad, between the river and the hills. In this plain there was ample room for the encampment, while along the Jordan and on the slopes to the east all the produce of field and garden, the spoil of conquest, was at the disposal of the Israelites. They rested therefore, after their long journey, in sight of Canaan, waiting first for the return of the troops, then for the command to advance; and the delay may very likely have extended to several months.

Now the march of Israel had kept to the desert side of Moab, so that the king and people of that land had no reason to complain. But the campaign against the Amorites, ending so quickly and decisively for the invaders, showed what might have taken place if they had attacked Moab, what might yet come to pass if they turned southward instead of crossing the Jordan. And there was great dismay. "Moab was sore afraid

of the people, because they were many : and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel." Manifestly it would have been unwise for Balak the king of the Moabites to attack Israel single-handed. But others might be enlisted against this new and vigorous enemy, among them the Midianites. And to these Balak turned to consult in the emergency.

By the "Midianites" we must understand the Bedawin of the time, the desert tribes which possibly had their origin in Midian, east of the Elanitic Gulf, but were now spread far and wide. On the borders of Moab a large and important clan of this people fed their flocks ; and to their elders Balak appealed. "Now," he said, "shall this multitude lick up all that is round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." The result of the consultation was not an expedition of war but one of a quite different kind. Even the wild Bedawin had been dismayed by the firm resolute tread of the Israelites, a people marching on, as no people had ever been seen to march, from far-away Egypt to find a new home. The elders of Moab and of Midian cannot decide on war ; but superstition points to another means of attack. May they not obtain a curse against Israel, under the influence of which its strength shall decay ? Is there not in Pethor one who knows the God of this people and has the power of dreadful malediction ? They will send for him ; Balaam shall invoke disaster on the invaders, then peradventure Balak will prevail, and smite them, and drive them out of the land.

There can be no doubt in what direction we are to look for Pethor, the dwelling-place of the great diviner. It is "by the River," that is to say, by the River Euphrates. It is in Aram, for thence Balaam

says Balak has brought him. It is in "the land of the children of Ammo" (xxii. 5), for such is the preferable translation of the words rendered "children of his people." The situation of Pethor has been made out. "At an early period in Assyrian research," says Mr. A. H. Sayce,<sup>1</sup> "Pethor was identified by Dr. Hincks with the Pitru of the cuneiform inscriptions. Pitru stood on the western bank of the Euphrates, close to its junction with the Sajur, and a little to the north of the latter. It was consequently only a few miles to the south of the Hittite capital Carchemish. Indeed, Shalmaneser II. tells us explicitly that the city was called Pethor by 'the Hittites.' It lay on the main road from east to west, and so occupied a position of military and commercial importance." Originally an Aramæan town, Pethor had received, on its conquest by the Hittites, a new element of population from that race, and the two peoples lived in it side by side. The Aramæans of Pethor called themselves "the sons of (the god) Ammo"; and, according to Mr. Sayce, Dr. Neubauer is right in explaining the name of Balaam as a compound of Baal with Ammi, which occurs as a prefix in the Hebrew names Ammiel, Amminadab, and others. It is also worthy of mention that the name of Balak's father—Zippor, or "Bird"—occurs in the notice, still extant, of a despatch sent by the Egyptian government to Palestine in the third year of Menephtah II.

It may be further said with regard to Mr. Sayce's valuable work, that he does not attempt to deal particularly with the prophecies of Balaam. "They must," he says, "be explained by Hebrew philology before

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<sup>1</sup> "The Higher Criticism and the Monuments," p. 274.

the records of the monuments can be called upon to illustrate them. It may be that the text is corrupt; it may be that passages have been added at various times to the original prophecy of the Aramæan seer; these are questions which must be settled before the Assyriologist can determine when it was that the Kenite was carried away captive, or when Asshur himself was 'afflicted.'

The divination of which so great things were expected by Balak is amply illustrated in the Babylonian remains. Among the Chaldeans the art of divination rested "on the old belief in every object of inanimate nature being possessed or inhabited by a spirit, and the later belief in a higher power, ruling the world and human affairs to the smallest detail, and constantly manifesting itself through all things in nature as through secondary agents, so that nothing whatever could occur without some deeper significance which might be discovered and expounded by specially trained and favoured individuals." The Chaldeo-Babylonians "not only carefully noted and explained dreams, drew lots in doubtful cases by means of inscribed arrows, interpreted the rustle of trees, the plashing of fountains and murmur of streams, the direction and form of lightnings, not only fancied that they could see things in bowls of water, and in the shifting forms assumed by the flame which consumed sacrifices and the smoke which rose therefrom, and that they could raise and question the spirits of the dead, but drew presages and omens, for good or evil, from the flight of birds, the appearance of the liver, lungs, heart, and bowels of the animals offered in sacrifice and opened for inspection, from the natural defects or monstrosities of babies or the young of animals—in short, from any and everything that

they could possibly subject to observation." There were three classes of wise men, astrologers, sorcerers, and soothsayers; all were in constant demand, and all used rules and principles settled for them by the so-called science which was their study.

We cannot of course affirm that Balaam was one of these Chaldeans, or that his art was precisely of the kind described. He is declared by the narrative to have received communications from God. There can, however, be no doubt that his wide reputation rested on the mystical rites by which he sought his oracles, for these, and not his natural sagacity, would impress the common mind. When the elders of Moab and Midian went to seek him they carried the "rewards of divination" in their hands. It was believed that he might obtain from Jehovah the God of the Israelites some knowledge concerning them on which a powerful curse might be based. If then, in right of his office, he pronounced the malediction, the power of Israel would be taken away. The journey to Pethor was by the oasis of Tadmor and the fords at Carchemish. A considerable time, perhaps a month, would be occupied in going and returning. But there was no other man on whose insight and power dependence could be placed. Those who carried the message were men of rank, who might have gone as ambassadors to a king. It was confidently expected that the soothsayer would at once undertake the important commission.

Arriving at Pethor they find Balaam and convey the message, which ends with the flattering words, "I know that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." But they have to treat with no vulgar thaumaturgist, no mere weaver of spells and incantations. This is a man of intellectual power,

a diplomatist, whose words and proceedings have a tone of high purpose and authority./ He hears attentively, but gives no immediate answer. From the first he takes a position fitted to make the ambassadors feel that if he intervenes it will be from higher motives than desire to earn the rewards with which they presume to tempt him. He is indeed a prince of his tribe, and will be moved by nothing less than the oracle of that unseen Being whom the chiefs of Moab and Midian cannot approach. Let the messengers wait, that in the shadow and silence of night Balaam may inquire of Jehovah. His answer shall be in accordance with the solemn, secret word that comes to him from above.

Three of the New Testament writers, the Apostles Peter, John, and Jude, refer to Balaam in terms of reprobation. He is "Balaam the son of Beor who loved the hire of wrongdoing"; he "taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication"; he is the type of those who run riotously in the way of error for hire. (Gathering up the impressions of his whole life, these passages declare him avaricious and cunningly malignant, a prophet who perverting his gifts brought on himself a special judgment. At the outset, however, Balaam does not appear in this light. The pictorial narrative shows a man of imposing personality, who claims the "vision and the faculty Divine." He seems resolute to keep by the truth rather than gratify any dreams of ambition or win great pecuniary rewards. It is worth while to study a character so mingled, in circumstances that may be called typical of the old world.

Did Balaam enjoy communications with God? Had he real prophetic insight? Or must we hold with

some that he only professed to consult Jehovah, and found the answer to his inquiries in the conclusions of his own mind ?

It would appear at first sight that Balaam, as a heathen, was separated by a great gulf from the Hebrews. But at the time to which the narrative of Numbers refers, if not at the period of its composition, the boundary line implied by the word "gentile" did not exist. Moses had clearly taught to the Hebrews ethical and religious truths which neighbouring nations saw very indistinctly ; and the Israelites were beginning to know themselves a chosen race. Yet Abraham was their father, and other peoples could claim descent from him. Edom, for example, is in Numbers xx. acknowledged as Israel's brother.

At the stage of history, then, to which our passage belongs, the strongly marked differences between nation and nation afterwards insisted upon were not realised. And this is so far true in respect of religion, that though the Kenites, a Midianite tribe, did not follow the way of Jehovah, Moses, as we have seen, had no difficulty in joining with them in a sacrificial feast in honour of the Lord of Heaven. If beyond the circle of the tribes any one, impressed by their history, attributing their rescue from Egypt and their successful march towards Canaan to Jehovah, acknowledged His greatness and began to approach Him with sacred rites, no doubt would have existed among the Hebrews generally that by such a man their God could be found and His favour won. The narrative before us, stating that Jehovah called Balaam and communicated with him, simply declares what the more patriotic and religious Israelites would have had no difficulty whatever in receiving. (This diviner of Pethor had heard of

Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea, had followed with keen interest the progress of the tribes, had made himself acquainted with the law of Jehovah given at Sinai. Why, then, should he not worship Jehovah? And why should not Jehovah speak to him, make revelations to him of things still in the future?

So far, however, we touch only the beliefs, or possible beliefs, of the Israelites. The facts may be quite different. We are in the way of considering revelations of the Divine will to have been so uncommon and sacred that a man of very high character alone could have enjoyed them. If indeed God spoke to Balaam, it must have been in another way than to Abraham, Moses, Elijah. Especially since his history shows him to have been a man bad at heart, we are inclined to pronounce his consultation of God mere pretence; and as for his prophecies, did he not simply hear of Israel's greatness and forecast the future with the prescience of a clear calculator, who used his eyes and reason to good purpose? But with this the gist of the Bible narrative cannot be said to agree. It seems to be certainly implied that God did speak to Balaam, open his eyes, unfold to him things far off in the future. Although many cases might be adduced which go to prove that an acute man of the world, weighing causes and tracing the drift of things, may show wonderful foresight, yet the language here used points to more than that. It seems to mean that Divine illumination was given to one beyond the circle of the chosen people, to one who from the first was no friend of God and at the last showed himself a malicious enemy of Israel. And the doctrine must be that any one who, looking beneath the surface of things, studying the character of men and peoples, connects the past and the present and anticipates

events which are still far off, has his illumination from God. Further it is taught that in a real sense the man who has some conception of Providence, though he is false at heart, may yet, in the sincerity of an hour, in the serious thought roused at some crisis, have a word of counsel, a clear indication of duty, a revelation of things to come which others do not receive. Still we must interpret the words, "God said to Balaam," in a way which will not lift him into the ranks of the heaven-directed who are in any sense mediators, prophets of the age and the world. This man has his knowledge so far from above, has his insight as a true gift, receives the word of prohibition, of warning, veritably from a Divine source. Yet he does not stand in a high position, lifted above other men. The whole history is of value for our instruction, because as surely as Balaam received directions from God, we also receive them through conscience; because as he opposed God so we also may oppose Him in self-will or the evil mind. When we are urged to do what is right the urgency is Divine, as certainly as if a voice from heaven fell on our ears. Only when we realise this do we feel aright the solemnity of obligation. If we fail to ascribe our knowledge and our sense of duty to God, it will seem a light thing to neglect the eternal laws by which we should be ruled.

Reaching Pethor the messengers of Balak state their request. Instead of going with them at once, as a false man might be expected to do, Balaam declares that he must consult Jehovah; and the result of his consultation is that he declines. In the morning he says to the princes of Moab, "Get you into your land, for Jehovah refuseth to give me leave to go with you." The question whether Israel was a fit

subject for blessing or for cursing has been practically settled in his mind. When he lays the matter before Jehovah, as he knows Him through His law and the history of Israel, it is made unmistakable that no malediction is to be pronounced. But what, then, was the secret of Balaam's delay, of his consultation of the oracle? If it had been an absolute determination to serve the interests of righteousness, he could now frame his reply to the princes in such a way that they would understand it to be final. He would not say demurely, "Jehovah refuseth to give me leave," for these words allow the belief that somehow the power to curse may yet be obtained. Balaam permits himself to hope that he will find some flaw in Israel's relation to Jehovah which will leave room for a malediction. He delays, and professes to consult God, diplomatically, that even by the refusal his fame as a diviner acquainted with the Unseen Power may be established. And the answer he returns means that his own reputation is not to be hazarded by any divination which Jehovah will discredit.

Had not the future proceedings of Balaam cast their shadow back on his career and words, he might have been pronounced at the outset a man of integrity. The rewards offered him were probably large. We may believe that whatever reputation Balaam had previously enjoyed this embassy was the most important ever sent to him, the greatest tribute to his fame. And we would have been inclined to say, Here is an example of conscientiousness. Balaam might go with the princes at least, though he can pronounce no curse on Israel; but he does not; he is too honourable even to profess the desire to gratify his patrons. This favourable judgment, however, is forbidden. It was

of himself, of his fame and position, he was thinking. He would not have gone in any case unless it had precisely suited his purpose. Understanding that Israel is not to be cursed, he manages so that his refusal shall enhance his own reputation.

Still, the small amount of sincerity there is in Balaam, superimposed on his self-love and diplomacy, is in contrast to the utter want of it which men often show. They are of a party, and at the first call they will make shift to denounce whatever their leaders bid them denounce. There is no pretence even of waiting for a night to have time for quiet reflection; much less any anxious thought regarding Divine providence, righteousness, mercy, by means of which duty may be discovered. It is possible for men to appear earnest defenders of religion who never go even as far as Balaam went in seeking the guidance of truth and principle. They pass judgments with a haste that shows the shallow heart. Tempted by some envious Balak within, even when no appeal is made, they set up as soothsayers and take on them to prophesy evil.

The messengers of Balak returned with the report of their disappointment; but what they had to say caused, as Balaam no doubt intended, greater anxiety than ever to secure his services. One who was so lofty, and at the same time so much in the secrets of the God Israel worshipped, was indeed a most valuable ally, and his help must be obtained at any price. Did he say that Jehovah refused to give him leave? Balak will assure him of rewards which no God of Israel can give, very great recompense, tangible, immediate. Other messengers are sent, more, and more honourable than the former, and they carry very flattering offers. If

he will curse Israel, Balak the son of Zippor will do for him whatever he desires. Nothing is to hinder him from coming; neither the prohibition of Jehovah nor anything else.

The conduct of Balaam when he is appealed to the second time confirms the judgment it has been found necessary to pronounce on his character. He behaves like a man who has been expecting, and yet, with what conscience he has, dreading, the renewed invitation. He appears indeed to be emphatic in declaring his superiority to the offer of reward: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." The air of incorruptible virtue is kept. The Moabites and Midianites are to understand that they have to do with a man whose whole soul is set on truth. And the protestation would deceive us—only Balaam does not dismiss the men. Giving him all credit for an intention still to keep right with the Almighty, or, shall we say? allowing that he was too clever a man to imperil his reputation by intending a curse which would not be followed by any ill effects, we find immediately that he is unwilling to let the opportunity pass. He asks the messengers to tarry for the night, that he may again consult Jehovah in the matter. He has already seen the truth as to Israel, the promise of its splendid career. Yet he will repeat the inquiry, ask once more regarding the prospect he has distinctly seen. It is ambition that moves him, and perhaps, along with that, avarice. May he not be able to say something that will sound like a curse, something on which Balak shall fasten in the belief that it gives him power against Israel? It would, at all events, be a gratification to travel in state

across the desert, to appear amongst the princes of Midian and Moab as the man after whom kings had to run. And there was the possibility that without absolutely forfeiting his reputation as a seer of things to come he might obtain at least a portion of the reward. He will at all events do the messengers the honour of seeking another oracle for their sakes, though he dishonours the name of God from whom he seeks it.

It was possible for Balaam during the interval of the two embassies to recover himself. He was one who could understand integrity, who knew enough of the conditions of success to see that absolute consistency is the only strength. There was a straight way which he might have followed. But temptation pressed on him. Tired of the narrow field within which he had as yet exercised his powers, he saw one wider and more splendid open to him. The wealth was no small inducement. He was in the way of divining for reward; this was the greatest ever in his reach. And Balaam, knowing well how base and vain his pretext was, resigned his integrity, even the pretence of it, when he bade the messengers wait.

Yet was his fault a singular one? We cannot say that he showed extraordinary covetousness in desiring Balak's silver and gold. For the time, in the circumstances, scarcely anything else could be expected of a man like him. To judge Balaam by modern Christian rules is an anachronism. The remarkable thing is to find one of his class at all scrupulous about the means he employs to promote himself. We say that he was guilty of perverting conscience; and so he was. But his conscience did not see or speak so clearly as ours. And are not Christian men liable to have their heads turned by the countenance of those in a higher rank

than their own, and to succumb to the enticement of great wealth? When they are asked to reconsider a decision they know to be right, do they never tamper with conscience? It is one of the commonest things to find persons nominally religious indulging in the same desires and acting in the same way as Balaam. But the earthly craving that makes any one go back to God a second time about a matter which ought to have been settled once for all, involves the greatest moral hazard. (No human being, in any situation, has spiritual strength to spare.) There is a point where he who hesitates casts the whole of his life into the balance. For young persons, especially, a great warning, often needed, lies here.

The fault of Balaam, a fault of which he could not fail to be conscious, was that of tampering with his inspiration. The insight he possessed—and which he valued—had come through his sincere estimate of things and men apart from any pressure brought to bear on him to take a side either for money or for fame. His mind using perfect freedom, travelling in a way of sincere judgment, had reached a height from which he enjoyed wide prospects. As a man and a prophet he had his standing through this superiority to the motives that swayed vulgar minds. The admission of sordid influences, whether it began with the visit of Balak's messengers or had been previously allowed, was perhaps the first great error of his life. And it is so in the case of every man who has found the strength of integrity and reached the vision of the true. The Christian who has held himself free from the entanglements of the world, refusing to touch its questionable rewards, or to be influenced by its jealousy and envy, has what may be called his inspiration, though it lifts

him to no prophetic height. He has a clear mind, a clear eye. His own way is plain, and he can also see the crookedness of paths which others follow and reckon straight enough. He can go with a firm step and say fearlessly, "Be ye followers of me." But if the base considerations of gain and loss, of ease or discomfort, of the applause or enmity of other men, intrude, if even in a small way he becomes a man of the world, at once there is declension. He may not be ambitious nor covetous. Yet the withdrawal of his mind from its sole allegiance to God and the righteousness of God tells at once on his moral vision. It is clouded. The oracle becomes ambiguous. He hears two voices, many voices; and the counsels of his mind are confused. Like others, he now takes a crooked course, he feels that he has lost the old firmness of speech and action.

It is a sad thing when one who has felt himself "born to the good, to the perfect," who has gained the power that comes through reverence, and sees greater power before him, yields to that which is not venerable, not pure. The beginnings of the fatal surrender may be small. Only a throb of self-consciousness and satisfaction when some one speaks a word of flattery or with show of much deference prefers an astute request. Only a disposition to listen when in seeming friendship counsel of a plausible kind is offered, and milder ways of judging are recommended to lessen friction and put an end to discord. Even the strong are so weak, and those who see are so easily blinded, that no one can count himself safe. And indeed it is not the great temptations, like that which came to Balaam, we have chiefly to dread. The very greatness of a bribe and magnificence of an opportunity put conscience on its guard. Peril comes rather when the appeal for

charity, or the casuistry of protesting virtue, sends one to reconsider judgment that has been solemnly pronounced by a voice we cannot mistake; when we forget that the matter is only rightly determined for men when it is clearly and irrevocably decided by the law of God, whatever men may think, however they may deplore or rebel.

“Thou and God exist—  
So think!—for certain; think the mass—mankind—  
Disparts, disperses, leaves thyself alone!  
Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee—  
Thee and no other,—stand or fall by them!  
That is the part for thee: regard all else  
For what it may be—Time’s illusion.”

Men in their need, in their sorrow, their self-esteem, would have the true man revoke his judgment, yield a point at least to their entreaties. He will do them kindness, he will show himself human, reasonable, judicious. But on the other side are those to whom, in showing this consideration, he will be unjust, declaring their honour worthless, their sore struggle a useless waste of strength; and he himself stands before the Judge. The one sure way is that which keeps the life in the line of the statutes of God, and every judgment in full accord with His righteousness.

## XIX

### *BALAAH ON THE WAY*

NUMBERS xxii. 20-38

THE history is moving towards a great vindication of Israel and prediction of its coming power, all the more impressive that they are to be wrung from an unwilling witness, a man who would pronounce a curse rather than a blessing; all the more impressive, too, because the enemies of Israel will themselves arrange on a mountain pinnacle the scene of the revelation, with smoking altars and princely spectators. The great Actor in the drama is unseen; but His voice is heard. However tractable the omens may have been under other circumstances in the hands of the soothsayer, he now finds a Master. As the story unfolds, Balaam is seen attempting the impossible, endeavouring to force the hands of Providence, held as in a chain at every stage. There is a Power that treats him as if he were a child. Finally, with most unwilling eloquence, he is compelled to fling far and wide a challenge to Israel's enemies, the praises of her rising star.

In harmony with this general movement is the result of Balaam's second appeal for permission to take the journey to Moab. He receives it, but with a reservation. Fear of the great God whom he invokes holds him to the conviction that whatever he may do no

word must pass his lips other than Jehovah gives him to speak. In repeating his inquiry he has assumed that the God of Israel is amenable to human urgency; and as he will have Jehovah to be, so within limits he seems to find Him. Yet there is more to reckon with than a dubious oracle, discovered through signs and portents of the sky or whisperings of the breeze at night. Jehovah has brought His people from Egypt, fed them in the desert, given them victory. Balaam finds that this God can send angels upon His errands, that there is no escape from His presence nor evasion of His will.

It was in a kind of madness the diviner set out from Pethor by the way of the Euphrates' ford. Excited by the hope of gaining the rewards and enjoying the fame awaiting him in Moab, he was at the same time conscious of being in opposition to the God of Israel, and committed to an adventure that might end disastrously. He went in a mood of wilfulness, hoping and yet half doubting that his way would become clear, irritable therefore, ready to resent every hindrance. A diviner of repute, credited with powers of blessing and cursing, he perhaps felt himself safe on ordinary occasions, especially among his own people, even when he went against those who consulted him. But could he count on the forbearance of the king of Moab into whose country he was venturing? Jehovah might be opening his way only to destruction. Such fears could hardly be avoided.

And men who have gone back to conscience endeavouring to extort from it a sanction or permission previously denied, who, with some half assurance that the way is open, set out on a desired course, are practically in the same mad mood, have equal reason to

dread the issue. Is this understood? It may be safely asserted that half the wrong things men do—taking an average of human action, half at least—are done not in despite of conscience, but with its dubious consent, when the first clear decision has been set aside. No doubt the urgency is often very great, as it was in Balaam's case, and frequently of a less questionable kind. Not the desire of envious persons to have others cursed or evil intreated, but possibly the desire of some to have the shadow of adverse judgment taken away, may be the plea, and be supported by the promise of large reward. The first word of conscience is distinct—Have nothing whatever to do with the matter: the shadow has fallen on the wrongdoer; he has not repented; let him suffer still. But his agents come with gold and silver, with plausible words, with seeming Christian arguments. Then the appeal to conscience is renewed, and he who should be firm in judgment finds a false permission. Or the case may be of one in business, tempted to some practice, common enough, but dishonest, vile. His first feeling has been that of disgust. He could not for a moment contemplate a thing so base. But under the pressure of what appears to be necessity, plausible arguments and pretexts gain ground. The fact that reputable men find no difficulty about the matter, the notion that a custom is excusable because it is followed by most if not by all, along with other considerations of a personal kind, are allowed to have some weight, and then to overbalance the sense of duty. And the result is that the moral atmosphere is confused. The man sets out on a way which appears to be opened for him; but he goes under the shadow of a haunting fear.

Like Balaam, one who thus extorts from conscience,

that is from God, permission to go where he himself desires, knowing it to be a wrong way, is quite aware, may indeed be eager to acknowledge to himself, that he is still held by a Divine command extending over a part of his conduct. He will not speak a word that shall be against truth. He will resume friendship with the rich transgressor; but he will not in words excuse or palliate his crime. He will adulterate certain commodities in which he deals, but he will never assert that they are genuine. This is the tribute to religion and to conscience that sustains decaying self-respect. By this the man who passes for a Christian endeavours to keep himself separate from those who have no conscience. The most is made of the difference. As compared with those who unblushingly defend the wrong, this man may think himself a saint. He would on no account speak a falsehood. Does he not fear God? Is he a dog that he should do this thing? Nevertheless, the way leads into a bottomless quagmire. For a time the waning light of religion may shine. It may even burst before it dies into a bright flame of indignation against sin—the crimes others commit—or of loud protestation against what are called false charges. But the man dies a Balaam, with a perverted conscience, and must face the dreadful result.

( Well has it been said that no virtue is safe without enthusiasm. ) A man cannot be true to the highest law unless he has the motive within him of pure devotion to God as his personal Redeemer, unless he recognises that his joy in God and his salvation are bound up with fidelity to the moral ideal which is presented to him. Faith, hope, love must inspire and keep the soul in fervour of desire to reach the heights to which it

is called by the Divine voice. But the most of men come far short of this enthusiasm. It is rather with reluctance, after a kind of struggle with themselves, that they look duty in the face. And even when they do they find no pleasure in resolving to press on where the absolutely right is seen. Their pleasure lies in doing less than that. They seek accordingly some way of observing the letter of duty while they avoid its spirit. But the sense of having come short in a matter that involves their highest wellbeing, their standing before God, their very right to hope and to live, remains with them. Marriage, for example, is often entered upon after a struggle with conscience in which a clear mandate has been set aside. The desire to please self is allowed to overcome the conviction that the new bond will keep life on the low worldly ground, or drag it back from spirituality. The merely expedient is chosen rather than the ideal of moral independence and power. And of this come fretfulness, dissatisfaction with self, with others, with Providence. All the sophistries that can be used fail to set the mind at rest. Events continually occur which throw flashes of light on the past and reveal the lost hope, the forfeited vision.

(God does not make the wrong way smooth for one who has extorted permission to follow it.) A man desiring to enter on a course which he sees to be dishonourable or at least dubious may be absolutely prevented at first. His appeal is to Providence. If circumstances allowed his plan he would reckon the Divine will favourable to it. But they do not. Every door he tries in the direction he wishes to take is barred against him. Afterwards one yields to pressure, or is thrown wide because he knocks at it persistently.

Then he advances, taking for granted that he has obtained permission from God. But he does not go far till he is undeceived. So, Balaam sets out on his adventure, riding on his ass and attended by his two servants. Yet he does not get clear of the vineyards of Pethor without hindrance. Obstacles to his journey which do not appear in the narrative may have at first stood in his way, certain political complications, we may suppose. Now they are removed. But he is met by others. The angel of the Lord opposes him, one who stands with a drawn sword in hand in a hollow way between the vineyards, a path closely fenced on the one side and the other. Balaam fails to see the adversary; he is absorbed in his own thoughts. But the ass sees, and will not go forward, and as Balaam becomes aware of resistance his anger is kindled.

The narrative here is confessedly difficult. One of the most reverent commentators on the passage declares that he feels too deeply the essential veracity of the story to be troubled with minute questions about its details. "I would not," he says, "force them upon any one's belief merely by uttering the coarse sentence, that they are in the Bible and therefore must be received. One is afraid of leading people to fancy that they do believe what they do not believe, and so of propagating hypocrisy under the name of faith." To some the narrative may present no serious difficulty. They accept it literally at every point. Others again are not so easily satisfied that the occasion called for miracles like those which appear on the face of the history. It seems to them of no great moment whether Balaam went or did not go to Moab, whether he cursed Israel or blessed it. Neither the curse nor the blessing

of a man of Balaam's sort could make the least difference to Israel. These readers accordingly would find a parabolical or pictorial explanation of the incidents. / Literal belief, in any case, need not be made a test of reverence; the spirit is surely more than the letter. ) The point of greatest importance is to believe that God dealt with this man, opposed his perverse will by gracious influences and unexpected protests. To Balaam, no doubt, the angel's appearance and the ass's rebuke were real, as real and impressive as any experiences he ever had. He was humbled; he acknowledged his sin and offered to return. When he reached the land of Moab, the recollection of what befell him by the way had a salutary influence on all he said and did.

In many unforeseen, singular, and often homely ways, men are checked in the endeavour to carry out the schemes which ambition and avarice prompt. The angel of the Lord who opposes one bent on a bad enterprise often appears in familiar guise. To some men their wives stand in the way, some are challenged by their children. What in voluntary blindness they have declined to see—the madness of the wrong course, the intrinsic baseness of the thing undertaken—those who look with pure eyes perceive clearly and are brave enough to condemn. At other times obstacles are placed in the way by the simple ordinary duties which claim attention, occupy thought and time, and tend to bring back the mind to humility and saneness. Yet covetousness can make men very blind. Under the influence of it they suppose themselves to be acting cleverly, while all the time those whom they think they are outwitting see them posting on the way to bankruptcy and shame.

Even a good man may lose his spiritual discrimination occasionally when he fancies himself called to curse not Israel but Moab, and sets out in heat upon the errand. He fails to see that the case of Balaam is so far parallel to his own that he ought to expect an angel to oppose him. The critical Balaam who feels it his high duty to pronounce maledictions on some theological opponent, not for silver and gold, but for the cause of God, is resisted by many an angel bearing the sharp sword of the Word, set to declare the great tolerance of Christ, and to vindicate the liberty that is in Him. That men fail to see these angels, or else ride past them, is abundantly evident, for the altars smoke on many a height, and scrolls of futile condemnation are flung upon the breeze.

Balaam smites the ass even when she falls down under him in her abject terror. He endeavours to force her on till at last he is put to shame by her rebuke. We are pointed to the irrational way in which those act whose moral judgment is blinded. Their course being wrong, they do not turn against themselves, but rise in passion against every person or thing that hinders. The husband who is resolved to take a wrong path thrusts away his faithful wife; the son bent on what will be his ruin pushes off his weeping mother when she pleads before him. Often an apparently inexplicable fit of temper in public or in private means that a man is in the wrong and is aware of a mistake, from the consequences of which he would fain escape. One's heart bleeds for none more than for those victims of selfish anger who suffer under the abuse of the Balaams of society. They have seen the angel in the way. They have sought by a gesture or a warning word to arrest the friend who would go on

to evil. Then the cruel strokes fall on them, curses, foul abuse, taunts often directed against their religion. They are charged with setting themselves up as holier and better than other people. They are denounced as meddlers and fools. They protest without effect often, and suffer apparently to no purpose. Yet shall we suppose their endeavours altogether lost? Good is surely stronger than evil. Every right act and word is germinal. After long years it bears fruit.

In Balaam's case there was a happier issue than is often seen. The protest against his cruelty opened his eyes to the truth that a messenger of God stood in his way. The rebuke came home to him. So might a hard, self-willed man who rode rough-shod over the feelings and rights of others be brought suddenly to a sense of his cruelty by the look on the face of a dog. Bad as men and women may be, violent and abusive as they may become in times of anger and impatience, there are ways of softening their hearts. They go on for years attempting to justify themselves in a rough and selfish course. But who shall say that even the seeming worst are beyond recovery? When there appears to be no redeeming feature left in the character, the crisis may be at hand, the transgressor may be so taught by the piteous look of a dumb animal that his infatuation will come to an end. Recoiling from himself he will acknowledge his perversity and turn to better thoughts.

How far did Balaam's repentance go? There can be little doubt the motive of it was the sudden discovery that the God of Israel was mightier and more observant than he had imagined; in short, that Jehovah was his master. Balaam yields, changes his mind, not because he is in the least degree more disposed to do what is

right, but because he finds the antagonism of God falling suddenly upon his life. To the angel he says: "I have sinned: for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." This is an acknowledgment of authority, but not of an obligation into which any sense of God's goodness enters. It is the sullen acquiescence of a foiled adventurer, who at the very outset is made to understand the terms and narrow limits of his power. He has his knowledge, his vision. When he set out he intended to use them, if possible, under such conditions as would secure his own liberty. He is now made to understand that he is not free. The angel with the drawn sword will be in Moab before him, ready to cut him down if he should do or say anything opposed to the mind of the God of Israel. He is cowed, not converted.

And so it often is with men who find their schemes counteracted, and are made to feel their weakness in presence of the forces of human government, or of the natural world. Their confession of sin is really a sullen acknowledgment of impotence. Sift their feelings and you discover no sense of guilt. They miscalculated, and they regret having done so, because it is to their shame. They will go back to make other plans, to lay the foundations deeper with greater subtlety, and by-and-by, if they can, to carry out their ideas and gratify their covetousness and ambition in other ways. Sometimes indeed it may become clear to a man that his efforts to advance himself, such as he is, cannot prosper because Omnipotence is against him. Then acknowledgment of defeat is confession of despair. Of this we see an example in the first Napoleon after his final capture when he was on the voyage to St. Helena.

He had forced his way over obstacles enough, leaving blood and ruin behind him. But at length the stronger power came down to meet him, and he knew that the game was lost. Beneath the seeming acquiescence there lurked rebellion. He often spoke as a believer in God; but the God he knew was one he could have wished to foil. In the island to which he was confined he schemed desperately to regain his freedom that he might renew the vain conflict with Providence for his own glory and the glory of France. "I have sinned: I will get me back again." Yes. But will it be to lay other and more cunning plots for self-aggrandisement, and recover the lost ground by some daring stroke? Then it will be also to meet other angels, and at the last the minister who bears the sword of doom.

Balaam will return, confessing himself defeated for the time. But he learns that he may not. He has come so far with designs of his own; he must now go on to Moab to serve the purposes of God. The permission he wrested, so to speak, from Providence, was not wrested after all. There are deeper schemes than Balaam can form, the great far-reaching plans of the God of Israel, and by these, however unwillingly, the soothsayer of Pethor is now bound. This journey has been of his own perverse choosing; now he must finish it, feeling himself at every point a servant, an instrument; and if danger and even death await him, still he must proceed. Easy it is to begin in the craftiness of human purpose and the foolishness of earthly hope; but the end is not under the control of him who begins. There is One who orders all things so that the gifts of men and their perversity and their wrath shall all praise Him, shall all be woven into the web of His evolving purpose, universal, holy, sure.

It is a startling thought that in a sense whatever we begin in pride or self-will, playing, as it were, the first act of the drama on some stage we ourselves select, the movement cannot be arrested when we choose. In one way or another, act after act must proceed to the very end which God foreordains. Many human purposes appear to be sharply and completely broken off. In the midst of his days man hears the call he cannot disobey. His tools, his hopes, his declared intentions must be laid aside. But the end is not yet. The curtain has fallen here. It will be raised again. And in many unfoldings of Divine purpose we witness scene after scene, in scene after scene have to play our part. One who has begun ill may sincerely repent, and then the development takes a direction which will be to the glory of Divine grace. That act of repentance over, another comes, in which the humble thought of the penitent reveals itself. He is seen a new man, timorous where he was bold, bold where he was timorous. Beyond there are other scenes, in which he shall be found endeavouring to repair the evil he has done, to gather the poisoned arrows he has strewed about the world. And the consummation shall be reached when the task at which he has vainly laboured is completed for him by Christ, and his recovery and the restitution he toiled for shall be complete.

But if there is no penitence, still the drama must go on to its finish. The man resenting, yet unable to resist, shall do what God requires, what God permits. He shall attempt to curse, yet be constrained to bless. He shall in bitterness of anger frame new devices and carry them out. Then, when the cup of his iniquity is full, and all is done Providence allows, retribution shall overtake him. In the thick of battle the sword

of the angel shall smite him to the ground. For each man, under God's rule, in the midst of the forces He upholds, there is a destiny, some stages of which we can trace. Entering on life we of necessity become subject to great laws which our revolt cannot in the least affect. And these are moral laws. The seeming success of the immoral who are intellectually or brutally strong is within the narrow limits of time and space. In the breadths of eternity and infinity there is no strength for any but the good.

There is a purpose of God which Balaam is unwilling to subserve; and of that the man becomes gradually aware. When he is met by Balak and his train and upbraided with his reluctance to come where honours and rewards are to be had, the soothsayer realises his peril and begins at once to prepare the Moabite king for disappointment. "Lo, I am come unto thee," he says: "have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." What we see now is a contest between the influence of Balak, with his power to reward and also to punish, and the consciousness of a constraint which had entered deeply into Balaam's mind. The sense of Jehovah's authority over him on this occasion was indeed supported by another strong motive which the diviner never allowed to fall into the background. He had his reputation to maintain. At whatever hazard, he must show himself to Moabites, Midianites, Aramæans, a man who knew the knowledge of the Most High. The ignorance of Balak is seen in his absurd hope that for the sake of some bribe of his the prophet of Pethor will be induced to fling away his fame.

There are things which even money cannot buy. There is a limit beyond which even a false and

avaricious man cannot venture for the sake of honours and rewards. It is a vulgar judgment that every man has his price. One who is not particularly conscientious on most occasions will sometimes touch the bounds of concession and take his stand for what is left, all the self he has in any true sense. Neither will money buy nor threats compel his further acquiescence in what he deems wrong. Again, as in Balaam's case, the limit of the power of gold or of threats may be fixed by pride. There are gifts, qualities, distinctions possessed by some, in virtue of which they seem to themselves to occupy a place which all might covet. The veteran has his decoration, once attached to his uniform by some honoured commander under whom he served. No money could buy that. He would die rather than part with it. Another is proud of his name. To dishonour that would be treachery to his ancestors. Balaam has his unique power of vision, and for a while at least he preserves it. A man like Balak, measuring others by himself, regards a diviner as one of a lower order who may be moved by menaces and promises. He finds that Balaam has pride enough to lift him above them. Thus vanity counteracts vanity; the comparatively base keeps the base in check.

## XX

### *BALAAAM'S PARABLES*

NUMBERS xxii. 39-xxiv. 9

THE scene is now on some mountain of Moab from which the encampment of the Hebrew tribes in the plain of the Jordan is fully visible. At Kiriath-huzoth, possibly the modern Shihan, about ten miles east of the Dead Sea, and to the south of the Arnon valley, preparation for the attempt against Israel's destiny has been made by a great sacrifice of oxen and sheep intended to secure the good-will of Chemosh, the Baal or Lord of Moab. On the range overhanging the Dead Sea, somewhat to the north of the Arnon, perhaps, are the Bamoth-Baal, or high places of Baal, and the "bare height" where Balaam is to seek his auguries and will be met by God.

The evening of Balaam's arrival has been spent in the sacrificial festival, and in the morning Balak and his princes escort the diviner to the Bamoth-Baal that he may begin his experiment. After his usual manner, Balaam pompously requires that great arrangements be made for the trial of auguries by means of which his oracle is to be found. Balak has offered sacrifices to Chemosh; now Jehovah must be propitiated, and seven altars have to be built, and on each of them a bullock and a ram offered by fire. The altars

erected, the carcasses of the animals prepared, Balaam does not remain beside them to take actual part in the sacrifice. It is, in fact, to be Balak's, not his; and if the God of Israel should refuse His sanction to the curse, that will be because the offering of the king of Moab has not secured His favour. Accordingly, while the seven wreaths of smoke ascend from the altars, and the invocations of the Divine power which usually accompany sacrifice are chanted by the king and his princes, the soothsayer withdraws to a peak at some distance that he may read the omens. "Peradventure," he says, "Jehovah will come to meet me."

It was now a critical hour for the ambitious prophet. He had indeed already found distinction, for who in Moab or Midian could have commanded with so royal an air and received attention so obsequious? But the reward remained to be won. Yet may we not assume that when Balaam reached Moab and saw the pitiable state of what had been once a strong kingdom, the cities half ruined, filled with poor and dejected inhabitants, he conceived a kind of contempt for Balak and perceived that his offers must be set aside as worthless? God met Balaam, we are told. And this may have been the sense in which God met him and put a word into his mouth. What was Moab compared with Israel? A glance at Kiriath-huzoth, a little experience of Balak's empty boastfulness and the entreaties and anxiety which betrayed his weakness, would show Balaam the vanity of proposing to reinvigorate Moab at the expense of Israel. His way led clearly enough where the finger of the God of Israel pointed, and his mind almost anticipated what the Voice he heard as Jehovah's declared. He saw the smoke streaming south-eastward, and casting a black shadow between

him and Moab; but the sun shone on the tents of Israel, right away to the utmost part of the camp (xxii. 41). The mind of Balaam was made up. It would be better for him in a worldly sense to win some credit with Israel than to have the greatest honour Moab could offer. Chemosh was in decline, Jehovah in the ascendant. Perhaps the Hebrews might need a diviner when their great Moses was dead, and he, Balaam, might succeed to that exalted office. We never can tell what dreams will enter the mind of the ambitious man, or rather, we do not know on what slender foundations he builds the most extravagant hopes. There was nothing more unlikely, the thing indeed was absolutely impossible, yet Balaam may have imagined that his oracle would come to the ears of the Israelites, and that they would send for him to give favourable auguries before they crossed the Jordan.

Rapidly the diviner had to form his decision. That done, the words of the oracle could be trusted to the inspiration of the moment, inspiration from Jehovah, whose superiority to all the gods of Syria Balaam now heartily acknowledged. He accordingly left his place of vision and returned to the Bamoth where the altars still smoked. Then he took up his parable and spoke.

“From Aram Balak brought me,  
 Moab’s king from the mountains of the east;  
 ‘Come, curse for me Jacob,  
 And come, menace Israel.’  
 How can I curse whom God hath not cursed?  
 And how can I menace whom God hath not menaced?  
 For from the head of the rocks I see him,  
 And from the hills I behold him.

Lo, a people apart he dwells,  
 And among the nations he is not counted.  
 Who can reckon the dust of Jacob,

And in number the fourth of Israel?  
Let my soul die the death of the righteous;  
And be my last end like his!"

In this parable, or *mashal*, along with some elements of egotism and self-defence, there are others that have the ring of inspiration. The opening is a vaunt, and the expression, "How can I curse whom God hath not cursed?" is a form of self-vindication which savours of vanity. We see more of the cowed and half-resentful man than of the prophet. Yet the vision of a people dwelling apart, not to be reckoned among the others, is a real revelation, boldly flung out. Something of the difference already established between Israel and the *goyim*, or peoples of the Syrian district, had been caught by the seer in his survey of past events, and now came to clear expression. (For a moment, at least, his soul rose almost into spiritual desire in the cry that his last end should be of the kind an Israelite might have; one who with calm confidence laid himself down in the arms of the great God, the Lord of providence, of death as well as life.)

A man has learned one lesson of great value for the conduct of life when he sees that he cannot curse whom God has not cursed, that he would be foolish to menace whom God has not menaced. Reaching this point of sight, Balaam stands superior for the time to the vulgar ideas of men like the king of Moab, who have no conception of a strong and dominant will to which human desires are all subjected. However reluctantly this confession is made, it prevents many futile endeavours and much empty vapouring. There are some indeed whose belief that fate must be on their side is simply immovable. Those whom they choose to reckon enemies are established in the protection of heaven; but they

think it possible to wrest their revenge even from the Divine hand. Not till the blow they strike recoils with crushing force on themselves do they know the fatuity of their hope. In his "Instans Tyrannus" Mr. Browning pictures one whose persecution of an obscure foe ends in defeat.

"I soberly laid my last plan  
To extinguish the man.  
Round his creep-hole, with never a break,  
Ran my fires for his sake ;  
Overhead, did my thunder combine  
With my underground mine :  
Till I looked from my labour, content  
To enjoy the event.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end ?  
Did I say, 'Without friend' ?  
Say rather from marge to blue marge  
The whole sky grew his targe,  
With the sun's self for visible boss,  
While an Arm ran across,  
Which the earth heaved beneath, like a breast  
Where the wretch was safe prest !  
Do you see ? Just my vengeance complete,  
The man sprang to his feet,  
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts and prayed !  
—So, I was afraid !"

In smaller matters, the attempts at impudent detraction which are common, when the base, girding at the good, think it possible to bring them to contempt, or at least stir them to unseemly anger, or prick them to humiliating self-defence, the law is often well enough understood, yet neither the assailants nor those attacked may be wise enough to recognise it. A man who stands upon his faithfulness to God does not need to be vexed by the menaces of the base ; he should despise them. Yet he often allows himself to be harassed, and so yields all the victory hoped for by his detractor.

Calm indifference, if one has a right to use it, is the true shield against the arrows of envy and malice.

Balaam's vision of Israel as a separated people, a people dwelling alone, had singular penetration. The others he knew—Amorites, Moabites, Ammonites, Midianites, Hittites, Aramæans—went together, scarcely distinguishable in many respects, with their national Baals all of the same kind. Was Ammon or Chemosh, Melcarth or Sutekh, the name of the Baal? The rites might differ somewhat, there might be more or less ferocity ascribed to the deities; but on the whole their likeness was too close for any real distinction. And the peoples, differing in race, in culture, in habit, no doubt, were yet alike in this, that their morality and their mental outlook passed no boundary, were for the most part of the beaten, crooked road. Strifes and petty ambitions here and there, temporary combinations for ignoble ends, the rise of one above another for a time under some chief who held his ground by force of arms, then fell and disappeared—such were the common events of their histories. But Israel came into Balaam's sight as a people of an entirely different kind, generically distinct. Their God was no Baal ferocious by report, really impotent, a mere reflection of human passion and lust. Jehovah's law was a creation, like nothing in human history ascribed to a God. His worship meant solemn obligation, imposed, acknowledged, not simply to honour Him, but to be pure and true and honest in honouring Him. Israel had no part in the orgies that were held in professed worship of the Baals, really to the disgrace of their devotees. The lines of the national development had been laid down, and Balaam saw to some extent how widely they diverged from those along which other

peoples sought power and glory. Amorites and Hittites and Canaanites might keep their place, but Israel had the secret of a progress of which they never dreamed. Wherever the tribes settled, when they advanced to fulfil their destiny, they would prove a new force in the world.

For the time Israel might be called the one spiritual people. It was this Balaam partly saw, and made the basis of his striking predictions. The modern nations are not to be distinguished by the same testing idea. The thoughts and hopes of Christianity have entered more or less into all that are civilised, and have touched others that can scarcely be called so. Yet if there is any oracle for the peoples of our century it is one that turns on the very point which Balaam seems to have had in view. But it is, that not one of them, as a nation, is distinctly moved and separated from others by spirituality of aim. Of not one can it be said that it is confessedly, eagerly, on the way to a Canaan where the Living and True God shall be worshipped, that its popular movements, its legislation, its main endeavours look to such a heavenly result. If we saw a people dwelling apart, with a high spiritual aim, resolutely excluding those ideas of materialism which dominate the rest, of them it would not be presumptuous to prophesy in the high terms to which the oracles of Balaam gradually rose.

Regarding the wish with which the diviner closed his first *mashal*, hard things have been said, as for example, that "even in his sublimest visions his egotism breaks out; in the sight of God's Israel he cries, 'Let me die the death of the righteous.'" (Here, however, there may be personal sorrow and regret, a pathetic confession of human fear by one who has been brought

to serious thought, rather than any mere egoistic craving. Why should he speak of death? That is not the theme of the egotist. We hear a sudden ejaculation that seems to open a glimpse of his heart. For this man, like every son of Adam, has his burden, his secret trouble, from which all the hopes and plans of his ambition cannot relieve his mind. Now for the first time he speaks in a genuinely religious strain. "There are the righteous whom the Great Jehovah regards with favour, and gathers to Himself. When their end comes they rest. Alas! I, Balaam, am not one of them; and the shadows of my end are not far away! Would that by some mighty effort I could throw aside my life as it has been and is, revoke my destiny, and enter the ranks of Jehovah's people—were it only to die among them."

Wistfully, men whose life has been on the low ground of mere earthly toil and pleasure may, in like manner, when the end draws near, envy the confidence and hope of the good. For the old age of the sensualist, and even of the successful man of the world, is under a dull wintry sky, with no prospect of another morning, or even of a quiet night of dreamless sleep.

"The weariest and most loathed worldly life,  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
To what we fear of death."

/ Courage and peace at the last belong to those alone who have kept in the way of righteousness. / To them and no others light shall arise in the darkness. The faithfulness of God is their refuge even when the last shadows fall. He whom they trust goes before them in the pillar of fire when night is on the world, as well as in the pillar of cloud by day. To the man of this

earth even the falling asleep of the good is enviable, though they may not anticipate a blessed immortality. Their very grave is a bed of peaceful rest, for living or dying they belong to the great God.

It was with growing dissatisfaction, rising to anxiety, Balak heard the first oracle that fell from the diviner's lips. Despite the warning he had received that only the words which Jehovah gave should be spoken, he hoped for some kind of a curse. His altars had been built, his oxen and rams sacrificed, and surely, he thought, all would not be in vain! Balaam had not travelled from Pethor to mock him. But the prophecy carried not a single word of heartening to the enemies of Israel. The camp lay in the full sunshine of fortune, unobscured by the least cloud. It was the first blow to Balak's malignant jealousy, and might well have put him to confusion. But men of his sort are rich in conjectures and expedients. He had set his mind on this as the means of finding advantage in a struggle that was sure to come; and he clung to his hope. Although the curse would not light on the whole camp of Israel, yet it might fall on a part, the remote outlying portion of the tribes. In superstition men are for ever catching at straws. If the anger of some heavenly power, what power mattered little to Balak, could be once enlisted against the tribes, even partially, the influence of it might spread. And it would at least be something if pestilence or lightning smote the utmost part of that threatening encampment.

One must be sorry for men whose impotent anger has to fall on expedients so miserably inadequate. Moab defeated by the Amorites sees them in turn vanquished and scattered by this host which has

suddenly appeared, and to all ordinary reckoning has no place nor right in the region. Sad as was the defeat which deprived Balak of half his land and left his people in poverty, this incursion and its success foreboded greater trouble. The king was bound to do something, and, feeling himself unable to fight, this was his scheme. The utter uselessness of it from every point of view gives the story a singular pathos. But the world under Divine providence cannot be left in a region where superstition reigns and progress is impossible—simply that a people like the Moabites may settle again on their lees, and that others may continue to enjoy what seem to them to be their rights. There must be a stirring of human existence, a new force and new ideas introduced among the peoples, even at the expense of war and bloodshed. And our sympathy with Balak fails when we recollect that Israel had refrained from attacking Moab in its day of weakness, had even refrained from asking leave to pass through its impoverished territory. The feelings of the vanquished had been respected. Perhaps Balak, with the perversity of a weak man and an incompetent prince, resented this as much as anything.

Balaam was now brought into the field of Zophim, or the Watchers, to the "top of Pisgah," whence he could see only a part of the camp of Israel. The Hebrew here as well as in xxii. 41 is ambiguous. It has even been interpreted as meaning that on the first occasion part of the encampment only was in view, and on the second occasion the whole of it (so Keil *in loco*). But the tenor of the narrative corresponds better with the translation given in the English Version. The precise spot here called the top of Pisgah has not been identified. In the opinion

of some the name Pisgah survives in the modern Siaghah ; but even if it does we are not helped in the least. Others take Pisgah as meaning simply "hill," and read "the field of Zophim on the top of the hill." The latter translation would obviate the difficulty that in Deut. xxxiv. 1 it is said that Moses, when the time of his death approached, "went up from the plains of Moab unto Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah that is over against Jericho." Pisgah may have been the name of the range ; yet again in Numb. xxvii. 12, and Deut. xxxii. 49, Abarim is given as the name of the range of which Nebo is a peak. We are led to the conclusion that Pisgah was the name in general use for a hill-top of some peculiar form. The root meaning of the word is difficult to make out. It may at all events be taken as certain that this top of Pisgah is not the same as that to which Moses ascended to die. Balak and his princes had not as yet ventured so far beyond the Arnon.

At Balaam's request the same arrangements were made as at Bamoth-Baal. Seven altars were built, and seven bullocks and seven rams were offered ; and again the diviner withdrew to some distance to seek omens. This time his meeting with Jehovah gave him a more emphatic message. It would seem that with the passing of the day's incidents the vatic fire in his mind burned more brightly. Instead of endeavouring to conciliate Balak he appears to take delight in the oracle that dashes the hopes of Moab to the ground. He has looked from the new point of vision and seen the great future that awaits Israel. It is vain to expect that the decree of the Almighty One can be revoked. Balak must hear all that the spirit of Elohim has given to the seer.

“Up, Balak, and hear ;  
Hearken to me, son of Zippor :  
No man is God, that He should lie ;  
And no son of man, that He should repent.  
Hath He said, and shall He not do it ?  
And spoken, and shall He not make good ?  
Behold to bless I have received ;  
And He hath blessed and I cannot undo.  
He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob,  
Nor seen perverseness in Israel.  
Jehovah his God is with him ;  
And the shout of a King is with him.  
God brings them forth from Egypt :  
Like the horns of the wild ox are his.  
Surely no snake-craft is in Jacob,  
And no enchantment with Israel.  
At the time it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,  
What hath God wrought !  
Behold the people as a lioness arises,  
And as a lion lifts himself up ;  
He shall not lie down till he eat the prey,  
And drink the blood of the slain.”

The confirmation of the first oracle by what Balaam has realised on his second approach to Jehovah compels the question which rebukes the king's vain desire. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it ?” Balak did not know Jehovah as Balaam knew Him. This God never went back from His decision, nor recalled His promises. And He is able to do whatever He wills. Not only does He refuse to curse Israel, but He has given a blessing which Balaam even, powerful as he is, cannot possibly hinder. It has become manifest that the judgment of God on His people's conduct is in no respect adverse. Reviewing their past, the diviner may have found such failure from the covenant as would give cause for a decision against them, partial at least, if not general. But there is no excuse for supposing that Jehovah has turned against

the tribes. Their recent successes and present position are proofs of His favour unrevoked, and, it would seem, irrevocable. There is a King with this people, and when they advance it is with a shout in His honour. The King is Jehovah their God ; mightier far than Balak or any ruler of the nations. When the loud Hallelujah rose from the multitude at some sacred feast, it was indeed the shout of a monarch.

Singular is it to find a diviner like Balaam noting as one of the great distinctions of Israel that the nation used neither augury nor divination. The hollowness of his own arts in presence of the God of Israel who could not be moved by them, who gave His people hope without them, would seem to have impressed Balaam profoundly. He speaks almost as if in contempt of the devices he himself employs. Indeed, he sees that his art is not art at all, as regards Israel. The Hebrews trust no omens ; and either for or against them omens give no sign. It was another mark of the separateness of Israel. Jehovah had fenced His people from the spells of the magician. True to Him, they could defy all the sorcery of the East. And when the time for further endeavour came, the nations around should have to hear of the God who had brought the Hebrew tribes out of Egypt. With a lion-like vigour they would rise from their lair by the Jordan. The Canaanites and Amorites beyond should be their prey. Already perhaps tidings had come of the defeat of Bashan : the cities on the other side Jordan should fall in their turn.

As yet there is nothing in the predictions of Balaam that can be said to point distinctly to any future event in Israel's history. The oracles are of that general kind which might be expected from a man of the world

who has given attention to the signs of the times and perceived the value to a people of strong and original faith. But taking them in this sense they may well rebuke that modern disbelief which denies the inspiring power of religion and the striking facts which come to light not only in the history of nations like Israel but in the lives of men whose vigour springs from religious zeal. Balaam saw what any whose eyes are open will also see, that when the shout of the Heavenly King is among a people, when they serve a Divine Master, holy, just, and true, they have a standing ground and an outlook not otherwise to be reached. The critics of religion who take it to be a mere heat of the blood, a transient emotion, forget that the grasp of great and generous principles, and the thought of an Eternal Will to be served, give a sense of right and freedom which expediency and self-pleasing cannot supply. However man comes to be what he is, this is certain, that for him strength depends not so much on bodily physique as on the soul, and for the soul on religious inspiration. The enthusiasm of pleasure-seeking has never yet made a band of men indomitable, nor need it be expected to give greatness; we cannot persuade ourselves that apart from God our blessedness is a matter of surpassing importance. We are a multitude whose individual lives are very small, very short, very insignificant, unless they are known to serve some Divine end.

It has been seen by one philosopher that if the religious sanction be taken away from morality some other must be provided to fill up the vacuum. Further, it may be said that if the religious support and stimulus of human energy be withdrawn there will be a greater vacuum more difficult to fill. The would-be benefactors

of our race, who think that the superstition of a personal God is effete and should be swept away as soon as possible, so that man may return to nature, might do well to return to Balaam. He had a penetration which they do not possess. And singularly, the very apostle of that impersonal "stream of tendency making for righteousness," which was once to be put in the place of God, did on one occasion unwittingly remind us of this prophet. Mr. Matthew Arnold had a difficult thing to do when he tried to encourage a toiling population to go on toiling without hope, to plod on in the underground while a select few above enjoyed the sunlight. The part was that of a diviner finding auguries for the inevitable. But he spoke as one who had to pity a poor blind Israel, no longer inspired by the shout of a king or the hope of a promised land, an Israel that had lost its faith and its way and seemed about to perish in the desert. Well did he know how difficult it is for men under this dread to endure patiently when those above have abolished God and the future life; men, who are disposed to say, yet must be told that they say vainly, "If there is nothing but this life, we must have it. Let us help ourselves, whenever we can, to all we desire." Was that Israel to be blessed or cursed? There was no oracle. Yet the cultured Balak, hoping for a spell at least against the revolutionaries, had a rebuke. The prophet did not curse; he had no power to bless. But Moab was shown to be in peril, was warned to be generous.

Balaams enough there are, after a sort, with more or less penetration and sincerity. But what the peoples need is a Moses to revive their faith. The hollow maledictions and blessings that are now launched incessantly from valley to hill, from hill to valley, would

be silenced if we found the leader who can re-awaken faith. It would be superfluous, then, for the race in its fresh hope to bless itself, and vain for the pessimists to curse it. With the ensign of Divine love leading the way, and the new heavens and earth in view, all men would be assured and hopeful, patient in suffering, fearless in death.

The second oracle produced in the mind of Balak an effect of bewilderment, not of complete discomfiture. He appears to be caught so far in the afflatus that he must hear all the prophet has to tell. He desires Balaam neither to curse nor bless; neutrality would be something. Yet, with all he has already heard giving clear indication what more is to be expected, he proposes another place, another trial of the auguries. This time the whole of Israel shall again be seen. The top of Peor that looketh down upon Jeshimon, or the desert, is chosen. On this occasion when the altars and sacrifices are prepared the order is not the same as before. The diviner does not retire to a distance to seek for omens. He makes no profession of mystery now. The temperature of thought and feeling is high, for the spot on which the company gathers is almost within range of the sentinels of Israel. The adventure is surely one of the strangest which the East ever witnessed. In the dramatic unfolding of it the actors and spectators are alike absorbed.

The third prophetic chant repeats several of the expressions contained in the second, and adds little; but it is more poetical in form. The prophet standing on the height saw "immediately below him the vast

encampment of Israel amongst the acacia groves of Abel Shittim—like the water-courses of the mountains, like the hanging gardens beside his own river Euphrates, with their aromatic shrubs and their wide-spreading cedars. Beyond them on the western side of Jordan rose the hills of Palestine, with glimpses through their valleys of ancient cities towering on their crested heights. And beyond all, though he could not see it with his bodily vision, he knew well that there rolled the deep waters of the great sea, with the Isles of Greece, the Isle of Chittim—a world of which the first beginnings of life were just stirring, of which the very name here first breaks upon our ears.” From the deep meditation which passed into a trance the diviner awoke to gaze for a little upon that scene, to look fixedly once more on the camp of the Hebrew tribes, and then he began :—

“Balaam the son of Beor saith,  
And the man whose eye was closed saith :  
He saith who heareth the words of El,  
Who seeth the vision of Shaddai,  
Falling down and having his eyes opened.”

Thus in the consciousness of an exalted state of mind which has come with unusual symptoms, the ecstasy that overpowers and brings visions before the inward eye, he vaunts his inspiration. There is no small resemblance to the manner in which the afflatus came to seers of Israel in after-times ; yet the description points more distinctly to the rapture of one like King Saul, who has been swept by some temporary enthusiasm into a strain of thought, an emotional atmosphere, beyond ordinary experience. The far-reaching encampment is first poetically described, with images that point to perennial vitality and strength. Then

as a settled nation Israel is described, irrigating broad fields and sowing them to reap an abundant harvest. Why comparison is made between the power of Israel and Agag one can only guess. Perhaps the reigning chief of the Amalekites was at this time distinguished by the splendour of his court, so that his name was a type of regal magnificence. The images of the wild ox and the lion are repeated with additional emphasis; and the strain rises to its climax in the closing apostrophe:—

“Blessed be every one that blesseth thee  
And cursed be every one that curseth thee.”

So strongly is Israel established in the favour of Shaddai, the Almighty One, that attempts to injure her will surely recoil on the head of the aggressor. And on the other hand, to help Israel, to bid her God-speed, will be a way to blessedness. Jehovah will make the overflowing of His grace descend like rain on those who take Israel's part and cheer her on her way.

In the light of what afterwards took place, it is clear that Balaam was in this last ejaculation carried far beyond himself. He may have seen for a moment, in the flash of a heavenly light, the high distinction to which Israel was advancing. He certainly felt that to curse her would be perilous, to bless her meritorious. But the thought, like others of a more spiritual nature, did not enter deeply into his mind. Balaam could utter it with a kind of strenuous cordiality, and then do his utmost to falsify his own prediction. What matter fine emotions and noble protestations if they are only momentary and superficial? Balak's open jealousy and hatred of Israel were, after all, more complimentary to her than the high-sounding praises of

Balaam, who spoke as enjoying the elation of the prophet, not as delighting in the tenor of his message. Israel was nothing to him. Soon the prosperity to which she was destined became like gall and wormwood to his soul. The encampment roused his admiration at the time, but afterwards, when it became clear that the Israelites would have none of him, his mood changed towards them. (Ambition ruled him to the end;) and if the Hebrews did not offer in any way to minister to it, a man like Balaam would by-and-by set himself to bring down their pride. Weak humanity gives many examples of this. The man who has been an expectant flatterer of one greater than himself, but is denied the notice and honour he looks for, becomes, when his hopes have finally to be renounced, the most savage assailant, the most bitter detractor of his former hero. And so strong often are the minds which fall in this manner, that we look sometimes with anxiety even to the highest.

## XXI

### THE MATTER OF BAAL-PEOR

NUMBERS xxiv. 10-xxv. 18

THE last oracle of Balaam, as we have it, ventures into far more explicit predictions than the others, and passes beyond the range of Hebrew history. Its chief value for the Israelites lay in what was taken to be a Messianic prophecy contained in it, and various bold denunciations of their enemies. Whether the language can bear the important meanings thus found in it is a matter of considerable doubt. On the whole, it appears best not to make over-much of the prescience of this *mashal*, especially as we cannot be sure that we have it in the original form. One fact may be given to prove this. In Jeremiah xlvi. 45, an oracle regarding Moab embodies various fragments of the Book of Numbers, and one clause seems to be a quotation from chap. xxiv. 17. In Numbers the reading is, "and break down [וַיִּקְרַר], all the sons of tumult [שֵׁת];" in Jeremiah it is, "and the crown of the head [וַיִּקְרַר] of the sons of tumult [שֵׁתוֹ]." The resemblance leaves little doubt of the derivation of the one expression from the other, and at the same time shows diversity in the text.

The earlier deliverances of Balaam had disappointed the king of Moab; the third kindled his anger. It

was intolerable that one called to curse his enemies should bless them again and again. Balaam would do well to get him back to his own place. That Jehovah of whom he spake had kept him from honour. If he delayed he might find himself in peril. But the diviner did not retire. The word that had come to him should be spoken. He reminded Balak of the terms on which he had begun his auguries, and, perhaps to embitter Moab against Israel, persisted in advertising Balak "what this people should do to his people in the latter days."

The opening was again a vaunt of his high authority as a seer, one who knew the knowledge of Shaddai. Then, with ambiguous forms of speech covering the indistinctness of his outlook, he spoke of one whom he saw far away, in imagination, not reality, a personage bright and powerful, who should rise star-like out of Jacob, bearing the sceptre of Israel, who should smite through the corners of Moab and break down the sons of tumult. Over Edom and Seir he should triumph, and his dominion should extend to the city which had become the last refuge of a hostile people. Of spiritual power and right there is not a trace in this prediction. It is unquestionably the military vigour of Israel gathered up into the headship of some powerful king Balaam sees on the horizon of his field of view. But he anticipates with no uncertainty that Moab shall be attacked and broken, and that the victorious leader shall even penetrate to the fastnesses of Edom and reduce them. A people like Israel, with so great vitality, would not be content to have jealous enemies upon its very borders, and Balak is urged to regard them with more hatred and fear than he has yet shown.

The view that this prophecy "finds its preliminary

fulfilment in David, in whom the kingdom was established, and by whose victories the power of Moab and Edom was broken, but its final and complete fulfilment only in Christ," is supported by the unanimous belief of the Jews, and has been adopted by the Christian Church. Yet it must be allowed that the victories of David did not break the power of Moab and Edom, for these peoples are found again and again, after his time, in hostile attitude to Israel. And it is not to the purpose to say that in Christ the kingdom reaches perfection, that He destroys the enemies of Israel. Nor is there an argument for the Messianic reference worth considering in the fact that the pseudo-Messiah in the reign of Hadrian styled himself Bar-cochba, son of the star. A pretender to Messiahship might snatch at any title likely to secure for him popular support; his choice of a name proves only the common belief of the Jews, and that was very ignorant, very far from spiritual. There is indeed more force in the notion that the star by which the wise men of the East were guided to Bethlehem is somehow related to this prophecy. Yet that also is too imaginative. The oracle of Balaam refers to the virility and prospective dominance of Israel, as a nation favoured by the Almighty and destined to be strong in battle. The range of the prediction is not nearly wide enough for any true anticipation of a Messiah gaining universal sway by virtue of redeeming love. It is becoming more and more necessary to set aside those interpretations which identify the Saviour of the world with one who smites and breaks down and destroys, who wields a sceptre after the manner of oriental despots.

In Balaam's vision small nations with which he

happens to be acquainted bulk largely—the Kenites, Amalek, Moab, and Edom. To him the Amalekites appear as having once been “the first of the nations.” We may explain, as before, that he had been impressed on some occasion by what he had seen of their force and the royal state of their king. The Kenites, dwelling either among the cliffs of Engedi or the mountains of Galilee, were a very small tribe; and the Amalekites, as well as the people of Moab and Edom, were of little account in the development of human history. At the same time the prophecy looks in one direction to a power destined to become very great, when it speaks of the ships of Chittim. The course of empire is seen to be westward. Asshur, or Assyria, and Eber—the whole Abrahamic race, perhaps, including Israel—are threatened by this rising power, the nearest point of which is Cyprus in the Great Sea. Balaam is, we may say, a political prophet: to class him among those who testified of Christ is to exalt far too much his inspiration and read more into his oracles than they naturally contain. There is no deep problem in the narrative regarding him—as, for instance, how a man false at heart could in any sense enter into those gracious purposes of God for the human race which were fulfilled by Christ.

Balaam, we are told, “rose up and returned to his own place”; and from this it would seem that with bitterness in his heart he betook himself to Pethor. If he did so, vainly hoping still that Israel would appeal to him, he soon returned to give Balak and the Midianites advice of the most nefarious kind. We learn from xxxi. 16, that through his counsel the Midianite women caused the children of Israel to

commit trespass against Jehovah in the matter of Peor. The statement is a link between chaps. xxiv. and xxv. Vainly had Balaam as a diviner matched himself against the God of Israel. Resenting his defeat, he sought and found another way which the customs of his own people in their obscure idolatrous rites too readily suggested. The moral law of Jehovah and the comparative purity of the Israelites as His people kept them separate from the other nations, gave them dignity and vigour. To break down this defence would make them like the rest, would withdraw them from the favour of their God and even defeat His purposes. The scheme was one which only the vilest craft could have conceived; and it shows us too plainly the real character of Balaam. He must have known the power of the allurements which he now advised as the means of attack on those he could not touch with his maledictions nor gain by his soothsaying. In the shadow of this scheme of his we see the diviner and all his tribe, and indeed the whole morality of the region, at their very worst.

The tribes were still in the plain of Jordan; and we may suppose that the victorious troops had returned from the campaign against Bashan, when a band of Midianites, professing the utmost friendliness, gradually introduced themselves into the camp. Then began the temptation to which the Midianitish women, some of them of high rank, willingly devoted themselves. It was to impurity and idolatry, to degradation of manhood in body and soul, to abjuration at once of faith and of all that makes individual and social life. The orgies with which the Midianites were familiar belonged to the dark side of a nature-cultus which carried the distinction between male and female into

religious symbolism, and made abject prostration of life before the Divinity a crowning act of worship. Surviving still, the same practices are in India and elsewhere the most dreadful and inveterate barriers which the Gospel and Christian civilisation encounter. The Israelites were assailed unexpectedly, it would appear, and in a time of comparative inaction. Possibly, also, the camp was composed to some extent of men whose families were still in Kadesh waiting the conquest of the land of Canaan to cross the border. But the fact need not be concealed that the polygamy which prevailed among the Hebrews was an element in their danger. That had not been forbidden by the law; it was even countenanced by the example of Moses. The custom, indeed, was one which at the stage of development Israel had reached implied some progress; for there are conditions even worse than polygamy against which it was a protest and safeguard. But like every other custom falling short of the ideal of the family, it was one of great peril; and now disaster came. The Midianites brought their sacrifices and slew them; the festival of Baal-peor was proclaimed. "The people did eat and bowed down to their gods." It was a transgression which demanded swift and terrible judgment. The chief men of the tribes who had joined in the abominable rites were taken and "hanged up before the Lord against the sun"; the "judges of Israel" were commanded to slay "every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor."

The narrative of the "Priests' Code," beginning at ver. 6, and going on to the close of the chapter, adds details of the sin and its punishment. Assuming that the row of stakes with their ghastly burden is in full view, and the dead bodies of those slain by the exe-

cutioners are lying about the camp, this narrative shows the people gathered at the tent of meeting, many of them in tears. There is a plague, too, which is rapidly spreading and carrying off the transgressors. In the midst of the sorrow and wailing, when the chief men should have been bowed down in repentance, one of the princes of Simeon is seen leading by the hand his Midianitish paramour, herself a chief's daughter. In the very sight of Moses and the people the guilty persons enter a tent. Then Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, following them, inflicts with a javelin the punishment of death. It is a daring but a true deed; and for it Phinehas and his seed after him are promised the "covenant of peace," even the "covenant of an everlasting priesthood." His swift stroke has vindicated the honour of God, and "made an atonement for the children of Israel." An act like this, when the elemental laws of morality are imperilled and a whole people needs a swift and impressive lesson, is a tribute to God which He will reward and remember. True, one of the priestly house should keep aloof from death. But the emergency demands immediate action, and he who is bold enough to strike at once is the true friend of men and of God.

The question may be put, whether this is not justice of too rude and ready a kind to be praised in the name of religion. To some it may seem that the honour of God could not be served by the deed attributed to Phinehas; that he acted in passion rather than in the calm deliberation without which justice cannot be dealt out by man to man. Would not this excuse the passionate action of a crowd, impatient of the forms of law, that hurries an offender to the nearest tree or lamp-post? And the answer cannot be that

Israel was so peculiarly under covenant to God that its necessity would exonerate a deed otherwise illegal. We must face the whole problem alike of personal and of united action for the vindication of righteousness in times of widespread license.

It is not necessary now to slay an offender in order clearly and emphatically to condemn his crime. In that respect modern circumstances differ from those we are discussing. Upon Israel, as it was at the time of this tragedy, no impression could have been made deep and swift enough for the occasion otherwise than by the act of Phinehas. But for an offender of the same rank now, there is a punishment as stern as death, and on the popular mind it produces a far greater effect—publicity, and the reprobation of all who love their fellowmen and God. The act of Phinehas was not assassination; a similar act now would be, and it would have to be dealt with as a crime. The stroke now is inflicted by public accusation, which results in public trial and public condemnation. From the time to which the narrative refers, on to our own day, social conditions have been passing through many phases. Occasionally there have been circumstances in which the swift judgment of righteous indignation was justifiable, though it did seem like assassination. And in no case has such action been more excusable than when the purity of family life has been invaded, while the law of the land would not interfere. We do not greatly wonder that in France the avenging of infidelity is condoned when the sufferer snatches a justice otherwise unattainable. That is not indeed to be praised, but the imperfection of law is a partial apology. The higher the standard of public morality the less needful is this venture on the Divine right to kill. And certainly it is not private

revenge that is ever to be sought, but the vindication of the elemental righteousness on which the well-being of humanity depends. Phinehas had no private revenge to seek. It was the public good.

It is confidently affirmed by Wellhausen that the "Priestly Code" makes the cultus the principal thing, and this, he says, implies retrogression from the earlier idea. The passage we are considering, like many others ascribed to the "Priests' Code," makes something else than the cultus the principal thing. We are told that in the teaching of this code "the bond between cultus and sensuality is severed; no danger can arise of an admixture of impure, immoral elements, a danger which was always present in Hebrew antiquity." But here the danger is admitted, the cultus is entirely out of sight, and the sin of sensuality is conspicuous. When Phinehas intervenes, moreover, it is not in harmony with any statute or principle laid down in the "Priests' Code"—rather, indeed, against its general spirit, which would prohibit an Aaronite from a deed of blood. According to the whole tenor of the law the priesthood had its duties, carefully prescribed, by doing which faithfulness was to be shown. Here an act of spontaneous zeal, done not "on the positive command of a will outside," but on the impulse arising out of a fresh occasion,<sup>1</sup> receives the approval of Jehovah, and the "covenant of an everlasting priesthood" is confirmed for the sake of it. Was Phinehas in any sense carrying out statutory instructions for atonement on behalf of Israel when he inflicted the punishment of death on Zimri and his paramour?

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<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen, "Prolegomena," p. 424.

To identify the "Priestly Code" with "cultus legislation," and that with theocracy, and then declare the cultus to have become a "pedagogic instrument of discipline," "estranged from the heart," is to make large demands on our inattention.

In the closing verses of the chapter another question of a moral nature is involved. It is recorded that after the events we have considered Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, "Vex the Midianites, and smite them; for they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of the prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain on the day of the plague in the matter of Peor." Now is it for the sake of themselves and their own safety the Israelites are to smite Midian? Is retaliation commanded? Does God set enmity between the one people and the other, and so doing make confession that Israel has no duty of forgiveness, no mission to convert and save?

There is difficulty in pronouncing judgment as to the point of view taken by the narrator. Some will maintain that the historian here, whoever he was, had no higher conception of the command than that it was one which sanctioned revenge. And there is nothing on the face of the narrative which can be brought forward to disprove the charge. Yet it must be remembered that the history proceeds on the theocratic conception of Israel's place and destiny. To the writer Israel is of less account in itself than as a people rescued from Egypt and called to nationality in order to serve Jehovah. The whole tenor of the "Priests' Code" narrative as well as of the other

bears this out. There is no patriotic zeal in the narrow sense,—“My country right or wrong.” Scarcely a passage can be pointed to implying such a sentiment, such a drift of thought. The underlying idea in the whole story is the sacredness of morality, not of Israel; and the suppression or extinction of this tribe of Midianites with their obscene idolatry is God’s will, not Israel’s. Too plain, indeed, is it that the Israelites would have preferred to leave Midian and other tribes of the same low moral cast unmolested, free to pursue their own ends.

And Jehovah is not revengeful, but just. The vindication of morality at the time the Book of Numbers deals with, and long afterwards, could only be through the suppression of those who were identified with dangerous forms of vice. The forces at command in Israel were not equal to the task of converting; and what could be achieved was commanded—opposition, enmity; if need were, exterminating war. The better people has a certain spiritual capacity, but not enough to make it fit for what may be called moral missionary work. It would suffer more than it would gain if it entered on any kind of intercourse with Midian with the view of raising the standard of thought and life. All that can be expected meanwhile is that the Israelites shall be at issue with a people so degraded; they are to be against the Midianites, keep them from power in the world, subject them by the sword.

Our judgment, then, is that the narrative sustains a true theocracy in this sense, exhibits Israel as a unique phenomenon in human history, not impossible,—there lies the clear veracity of the Bible accounts,—but playing a part such as the times allowed, such as the world required. From a passage like that now

before us, and the sequel, the war with Midian, which some have regarded as a blot on the pages of Scripture, an argument for its inspiration may be drawn. We find here no ethical anachronisms, no impracticable ideas of charity and pardon. There is a sane and strenuous moral aim, not out of keeping with the state of things in the world of that time, yet showing the rule and presenting the will of a God who makes Israel a protesting people. The Hebrews are men, not angels; men of the old world, not Christians—true! Who could have received this history if it had represented them as Christians, and shown us God giving them commands fit for the Church of to-day? They are called to a higher morality than that of Egypt, for theirs is to be spiritual; higher than that of Chaldea or of Canaan, for Chaldea is shrouded in superstition, Canaan in obscene idolatry. They can do something; and what they can do Jehovah commands them to do. And He is not an imperfect God because His prophet does not give from the first a perfect Christian law, a redeeming gospel. He is the "I Am." Let the whole course of Old Testament development be traced, and the sanity and coherency of the theocratic idea as it is presented in law and prophecy, psalm and parable, cannot fail to convince any just and frank inquirer.

The end of Balaam's life may be glanced at before the pages close that refer to his career. In xxxi. 8, it is stated that in the battle which went against the Midianites Balaam was slain. We do not know whether he was so maddened by his disappointment as to take the sword against Jehovah and Israel, or whether he only joined the army of Midian in his capacity of augur. F. W. Robertson imagines "the

insane frenzy with which he would rush into the field, and finding all go against him, and that lost for which he had bartered heaven, after having died a thousand worse than deaths, find death at last upon the spears of the Israelites." It is of course possible to imagine that he became the victim of his own insane passion. But Balaam never had a profound nature, was never more than within sight of the spiritual world. He appears as the calculating, ambitious man, who would reckon his chances to the last, and with coolness, and what he believed to be sagacity, decide on the next thing to attempt. But his penetration failed him, as at a certain point it fails all men of his kind. He ventured too far, and could not draw back to safety.

The death he died was almost too honourable for this false prophet, unless, indeed, he fell fleeing like a coward from the battle. One who had recognised the power of a higher faith than his countrymen professed, and saw a nation on the way to the vigour that faith inspired, who in personal spleen and envy set in operation a scheme of the very worst sort to ruin Israel, was not an enemy worth the edge of the sword. Let us suppose that a Hebrew soldier found him in flight, and with a passing stroke brought him to the ground. There is no tragedy in such a death; it is too ignominious. Whatever Balaam was in his boyhood, whatever he might have been when the cry escaped him, "Let me die the death of the righteous," selfish craft had brought him below the level of the manhood of the time. Balak with his pathetic faith in cursing and incantation now seems a prince beside the augur. For Balaam, though he knew Jehovah after a manner, had no religion, had only the envy of the religion of others. He came on the stage with an air that almost

deceived Balak and has deceived many. He leaves it without one to lament him. Or shall we rather suppose that even for him, in Pethor beyond the Euphrates, a wife or child waited and prayed to Sutekh and, when the tidings of his death were brought, fell into inconsolable weeping? Over the worst they think and do men draw the veil to hide it from some eyes. And Balaam, a poor, mean tool of the basest cravings, may have had one to believe in him, one to love him. He reminds us of Absalom in his character and actions—Absalom, a man void of religion and morals; and for him the father he had dethroned and dishonoured wept bitterly in the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim, “My son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” So may some woman in Pethor have wailed for Balaam fallen under the spear of a Hebrew warrior.

## XXII

### *A NEW GENERATION*

NUMBERS xxvi., xxvii

THE numbering at Sinai before the sojourn in the Desert of Paran has its counterpart in the numbering now recorded. In either case those reckoned are the men able to go forth to war, from twenty years old and upward. Once, an easy entrance into the land of promise may have been expected; but that dream has long passed away. Now the Israelites are made clearly to understand that the last effort will require the whole warlike energy they can summon, the best courage of every one who can handle sword or spear. There has been hitherto comparatively little fighting. The Amalekites at an early stage, afterwards the Amorites and the Bashanites, have had to be attacked. Now, however, the serious strife is to begin. Peoples long established in Canaan have to be assailed and dispossessed. Let the number of capable men be reckoned that there may be confidence for the advance.

Nothing is to be won without energy, courage, unity, wise preparation and adjustment of means to ends. True, the battle is the Lord's, and He can give victory to the few over the many, to the feeble over the strong. But not even in the case of Israel are the ordinary laws

suspended. This people has an advantage in its faith. That is enough to support the army in the coming struggle ; and the Israelites must make Canaan theirs by force of arms. For, surely, in a sense, there is right on the other side, the right of prior possession at least. The Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites have tilled the land, planted vineyards, built cities, and fulfilled, so far, their mission in the world. They, indeed, never feel themselves secure. Often one tribe falls on the territory of another, and takes possession. The right to the soil has to be continually guarded by military power and courage. It is not wonderful to Amorites that another race should attempt the conquest of their land. But it would be strange, humanly speaking impossible, that a weaker, less capable people should master those who are presently in occupation. By the great laws that govern human development, the dominant laws of God we may call them, this could not be. Israel must show itself powerful, must prove the right of might, otherwise it shall not even yet obtain the inheritance it has long been desiring. The might of some nations is purely that of animal physique and dogged determination. Others rise higher in virtue of their intellectual vigour, splendid discipline, and ingenious appliances. Man for man, Israelites should be a match for any people, because there is trust in Jehovah, and hope in His promise. Now the trial of battle is to be made ; the Hebrews are to realise that they will need all their strength.

Do we ever imagine that the law of endeavour shall be relaxed for us, either in the physical or in the spiritual region ? Is it supposed that at some point, when after struggling through the wilderness we have but a narrow stream between us and the coveted

inheritance, the object of our desire shall be bestowed in harmony with some other law, having been procured by other efforts than our own? Thinking so, we only dream. What we gain by our endeavour—physical, intellectual, spiritual—can alone become a real possession. The future discipline of humanity is misunderstood, the forecast is altogether wrong, when this is not comprehended. In this world we have that for which we labour; nothing more. So-called properties and domains do not belong to their nominal owners, who have merely “inherited.” The literature of a country does not belong to those who possess books in which it is contained; it is the domain of men and women who have toiled for every ell and inch of ground. And spiritually, while all is the gift of God, all has to be won by efforts of the soul. Before humanity lies a Canaan, a Paradise. But no easy way of acquisition shall ever be found, no other way indeed than has all along been followed. The men of God able to go forth to war need to be numbered and brought under discipline for the conquests that remain. And what is yet to be won by moral courage and devotion to the highest shall have to be kept in like manner.

The second numbering of the people showed that a new generation filled the ranks. Plagues that swept away thousands, or the slow, sure election of death, had taken all who left Egypt excepting a few. It was the same Israel, yet another. Is, then, the nation of account, and not the individuals who compose it? Perhaps the two numberings may be intended to guard us against this error; at all events, we may take them so. Man by man, the host was reckoned at Sinai; man by man it is reckoned again in the plains of Moab. There were six hundred and three thousand five

hundred and fifty: there are six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty. The numberings by the command of Jehovah could not but mean that His eye was upon each. And when the new race looked back along the wilderness way, each group remembering its own graves over which the sand of the desert was blown, there might at least be the thought that God also remembered, and that the mouldering dust of those who, despite their transgression, had been brave and loving and honest, was in His keeping. Israel was experiencing a singular break in its history. It would begin its new career in Canaan without memorials, except that cave at Machpelah where, centuries before, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, had been buried, and the field at Shechem where the body of Joseph was laid. No graves but these would be the monuments of Israel. In Jehovah, the Ancient of Days, lay the history, with Him the career of the tribes.

The past receding, the future advancing, and God the sole abiding link between them. For us, as for Israel, notwithstanding all our care of the monuments and gains of the past, that is the one sustaining faith; and it is adequate, inspiring. The swift decay of life, the constant flux of humanity, would be our despair if we had not God.

“Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep:  
In the morning they are like grass which groweth up.  
In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up;  
In the evening it is cut down and withereth.”

So the “Prayer of Moses the man of God,” under the saddening thought of mortality. But God is “from everlasting to everlasting,” “the dwelling place of His people in all generations.” The life that begins in the

Divine will, and enjoys its day under the Divine care, blends with the current, yet is not absorbed. A generation or a people lives only as the men and women that compose it live. Such is the final judgment, Christ's judgment, by which all providence is to be interpreted. An Israelite might enter much into the national hope, and to some extent forget himself for the sake of it. But his proper life was never in that forgetfulness: it was always in personal energy of will and soul that contributed to the nation's strength and progress. The tribes, Reuben, Simeon, Judah, and the rest, are mustered. But the men make the tribes, give them quality, value; or rather, of the men, those who are brave, faithful, and true.

That each life is a fact in the Eternal overflowing Life, conscious of all—in this there is comfort for us who are numbered among the millions, with no particular claim to reminiscence, and aware, at any rate, that when a few years pass the world will forget us. In vain the most of us seek a niche in the Valhalla of the race, or the record of a single line in the history of our time. Whatever our suffering or achieving, are we not doomed to oblivion? The grave-yard will keep our dust, the memorial stone will preserve our names—but for how long? Until in the evolutions that are to come the ploughshare of a covetous age tears up the soil we imagine to be consecrated for ever. But there is a memory that does not grow old, in which for good or evil we are enshrined. "We all live unto God." The Divine consciousness of us is our strength and hope. It alone keeps the soul from despair—or, if the life has not been in faith, stings with a desperate reassurance. Does God remember

us with the love He beareth to His own? In any case each human life is held in an abiding consciousness, a purpose which is eternal.

The page of Israel's history we are reading preserves many names. It is in outline a genealogy of the tribes. Reuben's sons are Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, Carmi. The son of Pallu is Eliab. The sons of Eliab are Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. And of Dathan and Abiram we are reminded that they strove against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah; and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up. The judgment of evildoers is commemorated. The rest have their praise in this alone, that they held aloof from the sin. Turn to other tribes, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, for instance, and in the case of each the names of those who were heads of families are given. In the First Book of Chronicles the genealogy is extended, with various details of settlement and history. In what are we to find the explanation of this attempt to preserve the lineage of families, and the ancestral names? If the progenitors were great men, distinguished by heroism, or by faith, the pride of the descendants might have a show of reason. Or again, if the families had kept the pure Hebrew descent we should be able to understand. But no greatness is assigned to the heads of families, not a single mark of achievement or distinction. And the Israelites did not preserve their purity of race. In Canaan, as we learn from the Book of Judges, they "dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite: and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods" (iii. 5, 6).

The sole reason we can find for these records is

the consciousness of a duty which the Israelites felt, but did not always perform—to keep themselves separate as Jehovah's people. In the more energetic minds, through all national defection and error, that consciousness survived. And it served its end. The Bene-Israel, tracing their descent through the heads of families and tribes to Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, realised their distinctness from other races and entered upon a unique destiny which is not yet fulfilled. It is a singular testimony to what on the human side appears as an idea, a sentiment; to what on the Divine side is a purpose running through the ages. Because of this human sentiment and this Divine purpose, the former maintained apparently by the pride of race, by genealogies, by traditions often singularly unspiritual, but really by the over-ruling providence of God, Israel became unique, and filled an extraordinary place among the nations. Many things co-operated to make her a people regarding whom it could be said: "Israel never stood quietly by to see the world badly governed, under the authority of a God reputed to be just. Her sages burned with anger over the abuses of the world. A bad man, dying old, rich, and at ease, kindled their fury; and the prophets in the ninth century B.C. elevated this idea to the height of a dogma. . . . The childhood of the elect is full of signs and prognostics, which are only recognised afterwards." A race may treasure its ancient records and venerated names to little purpose, may preserve them with no other result than to mark its own degeneracy and failure. Israel did not. The Unseen King of this people so ordered their history that greater and still greater names were added to the rolls of their leaders, heroes, and prophets, until the Shiloh came.

By the computations that survive, a diminished yet not greatly diminished number of fighting men was reckoned in the plains of Moab. Some tribes had fallen away considerably, others had increased, Simeon notably among the former, Judah and Manasseh among the latter. The causes of diminution and increase alike are purely conjectural. Simeon may have been involved in the sin of Baal-peor more than the others and suffered proportionately. Yet we cannot suppose that, on the whole, character had much to do with numerical strength. Assuming the transgressions of which the history informs us and the punishments that followed them, we must believe that the tribes were on much the same moral plane. In the natural course of things there would have been a considerable increase in the numbers of men. The hardships and judgments of the desert and the defection of some by the way are general causes of diminution. We have also seen reason to believe that a proportion, not perhaps very great, remained at Kadesh, and did not take the journey round Edom. It is certainly worthy of notice with regard to Simeon that the final allocation of territory gave to this tribe the district in which Kadesh was situated. The small increase of the tribe of Levi is another fact shown by the second census; and we remember that Simeon and Levi were brethren (Gen. xlix. 5).

The numbering in the plains of Moab is connected in vv. 52-6 with the division of the land among the tribes. "To the more thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to the fewer thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one according to those that were numbered of him shall his inheritance be given." The principle of allocation is obvious and just. No doubt

the comparative value of different parts of Canaan was to be taken into account. There were fertile plains on the one hand, barren highlands on the other. These reckoned for, the greater the tribe the larger was to be the district assigned to it. An elementary rule; but how has it been set aside! Vast districts of Great Britain are almost without inhabitants; others are overcrowded. An even distribution of people over the land capable of tillage is necessary to the national health. In no sense can it be maintained that good comes of concentrating population in immense cities. But the policy of proprietors is not more at fault than the ignorant rush of those who desire the comforts and opportunities of town life.

The twenty-seventh chapter is partly occupied with the details of a case which raised a question of inheritance. Five daughters of one Zelophehad of the tribe of Manasseh appealed to Moses on the ground that they were the representatives of the household, having no brother. Were they to have no possession because they were women? Was the name of their father to be taken away because he had no son? It was not to be supposed that the want of male descendants had been a judgment on their father. He had died in the wilderness, but not as a rebel against Jehovah, like those who were in the company of Korah. He had "died in his own sins." They petitioned for an inheritance among the brethren of their father.

The claim of these women appears natural if the right of heirship is acknowledged in any sense, with this reservation, however, that women might not be able properly to cultivate the land, and could not do much in the way of defending it. And these, for the time,

were considerations of no small account. The five sisters may of course have been ready to undertake all that was necessary as occupiers of a farm, and no doubt they reckoned on marriage. But the original qualification that justified heirship of land was ability to use the resources of the inheritance and take part in all national duties. The decision in this case marks the beginning of another conception—that of the personal development of women. The claim of the daughters of Zelophehad was allowed, with the result that they found themselves called to the cultivation of mind and life in a manner which would not otherwise have been open to them. They received by the judgment here recorded a new position of responsibility as well as privilege. The law founded on their case must have helped to make the women of Israel intellectually and morally vigorous.

The rules of inheritance among an agricultural people, exposed to hostile incursions, must, like that of ver. 8, assume the right of sons in preference to daughters; but under modern social conditions there are no reasons for any such preference, except indeed the sentiment of family, and the maintenance of titles of rank. But the truth is that inheritance, so-called, is every year becoming of less moral account as compared with the acquisitions that are made by personal industry and endeavour. Property is only of value as it is a means to the enlargement and fortifying of the individual life. The decision on behalf of the daughters of Zelophehad was of importance for what it implied rather than for what it actually gave. It made possible that dignity and power which we see illustrated in the career of Deborah, whose position as a "mother in Israel" does not seem to have depended

much, if at all, on any accident of inheritance ; it was reached by the strength of her character and the ardour of her faith.

The generation that came from Egypt has passed away, and now (xxvii. 12) Moses himself receives his call. He is to ascend the mountain of Abarim and look forth over the land Israel is to inhabit ; then he is to be gathered to his people. He is reminded of the sin by which Aaron and he dishonoured God when they failed to sanctify Him at the waters of Meribah. The burden of the Book of Numbers is revealed. The brooding sadness which lies on the whole narrative is not cast by human mortality but by moral transgression and defect. There is judgment for revolt, as of those who followed Korah. There are men who like Zelophehad die "in their own sins," filling up the time allowed to imperfect obedience and faith, the limit of existence that falls short of the glory of God. And Moses, whose life is lengthened that his honourable task may be fully done, must all the more conspicuously pay the penalty of his high misdemeanour. With the goal of Israel's great destiny in view the narrative moves from shadow to shadow. Here and throughout, this is a characteristic of Old Testament history. And the shadows deepen as they rest on lives more capable of noble service, more guilty in their disbelief and defiance of Jehovah.

The rebuke which darkens over Moses at the close and lies on his grave does not obscure the greatness of the man ; nor have all the criticisms of the history in which he plays so great a part overclouded his personality. The opening of Israel's career may not now seem so marvellous in a sense as once it seemed, nor

so remote from the ordinary course of Providence. Development is found where previously the complete law, institution, or system appeared to burst at once into maturity. But the features of a man look clearly forth on us from the Pentateuchal narrative; and the story of the life is so coherent as to compel a belief in its veracity, which at the same time is demanded by the circumstances of Israel. A beginning there must have been, in the line which the earliest prophets continued, and that beginning in a single mind, a single will. The Moses of these books of the exodus is one who could have unfolded the ideas from which the nationality of Israel sprang: a man of smaller mind would have made a people of more ordinary frame. Institutions that grow in the course of centuries may reflect their perfected form on the story of their origin; it is, however, certain this cannot be true of a faith. That does not develop. What it is at its birth it continues to be; or if a change takes place it will be to the loss of definiteness and power. Kuenen himself makes the three universal religions to be Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. The analogy of the two latter is conclusive with regard to the first—that Moses was the author of Israel's faith in Jehovah.

And this involves much, both with regard to the human characteristics and the Divine inspiration of the founder, much that an after-age would have been utterly incapable of imagining. When we find a life depicted in these Pentateuchal narratives, corresponding in all its features with the place that has to be filled, revealing one who, under the conditions of Israel's nativity, might have made a way for it into sustaining faith, it is not difficult to accept the details in their substance. The records are certainly not Moses' own. They are

exoteric, now from the people's point of view, now from that of the priests. But they present with wonderful fidelity and power what in the life of the founder went to stamp his faith on the national mind. And the marvellous thing is that the shadows as well as the lights in the biography serve this great end. The gloom that falls at Meribah and rests on Nebo tells of the character of Jehovah, bears witness to the Supreme Royalty which Moses lived and laboured to exalt. A living God, righteous and faithful, gracious to them that trusted and served Him, who also visited iniquity—such was the Jehovah between whom and Israel Moses stood as mediator, such the Jehovah by whose command he was to ascend the height of Abarim to die.

To die, to be gathered to his people—and what then? It is at death we reckon up the account and estimate the value and power of faith. Has it made a man ready for his change, ripened his character, established his work on a foundation as of rock? The command which at Horeb Moses received long ago, and the revelation of God he there enjoyed, have had their opportunity; to what have they come?

The supreme human desire is to know the nature, to understand the distinctive glory of the Most High. At the bush Moses had been made aware of the presence with him of the God of his fathers, the Fear of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His duty also had been made clear. But the mystery of being was still unsolved. With sublime daring, therefore, he pursued the inquiry: "Behold when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?" The answer

came in apocalypse, in a form of simple words:—  
“I AM THAT I AM.” The solemn Name expressed an intensity of life, a depth and power of personal being, far transcending that of which man is conscious. It belongs to One who has no beginning, whose life is apart from time, above the forces of nature, independent of them. Jehovah says, “I am not what you see, not what nature is, standing forth into the range of your sight; I Am in eternal separation, self-existent, with underived fulness of power and life.” The remoteness and incomprehensibility of God remain, although much is revealed. Whatever experience of life each man sums up for himself in saying “I am,” aids him in realising the life of God. Have we aspired? have we loved? have we undertaken and accomplished? have we thought deeply? Does any one in saying “I am” include the consciousness of long and varied life?—the “I AM” of God comprehends all that. And yet He changes not. Beneath our experience of life which changes there is this great Living Essence. “I AM THAT I AM,” profoundly, eternally true, self-consistent, with whom is no beginning of experience or purpose, yet controlling, harmonising, yea, originating all in the unfathomable depths of an eternal Will.

Ideas like these, we must believe, shaped themselves, if not clearly, at least in dim outline before the mind of Moses, and made the faith by which he lived. And how had it proved itself as the stay of endeavour, the support of a soul under heavy burdens of duty, trial, and sorrowful consciousness? The reliance it gave had never failed. In Egypt, before Pharaoh, Moses had been sustained by it as one who had a sanction for his demands and actions which no king or priest could claim. At Sinai it had given spiritual strength and

definite authority to the law. It was the spirit of every oracle, the underlying force in every judgment. Faith in Jehovah, more than natural endowments, made Moses great. His moral vision was wide and clear because of it, his power among the people as a prophet and leader rested upon it. And the fruit of it, which began to be seen when Israel learned to trust Jehovah as the one living God and girt itself for His service, has not even yet been all gathered in. We pass by the theories of philosophy regarding the unseen to rest in the revelation of God which embodies Moses' faith. His inspiration, once for all, carried the world beyond polytheism to monotheism unchallengeably true, inspiring, sublime.

There can be no doubt that death tested the faith of Moses as a personal reliance on the Almighty. How he found sufficient help in the thought of Jehovah when Aaron died, and when his own call came, we can only surmise. For him it was a familiar certainty that the Judge of all the earth did right. His own decision went with that of Jehovah in every great moral question; and even when death was involved, however great a punishment it appeared, however sad a necessity, he must have said, Good is the will of the Lord. But there was more than acquiescence. One who had lived so long with God, finding all the springs and aims of life in Him, must have known that irresistible power would carry on what had been begun, would complete to its highest tower that building of which the foundation had been laid. Moses had wrought not for self but for God; he could leave his work in the Divine hand with absolute assurance that it would be perfected. And as for his own destiny, his personal life, what shall we say? Moses had been what he was through the grace

of Him whose name is "I AM THAT I AM." He could at least look into the dim region beyond and say, "It is God's will that I pass through the gate. I am spiritually His, and am strong in mind for His service. I have been what He has willed, excepting in my transgression. I shall be what He wills; and that cannot be ill for me; that will be best for-me." God was gracious and forgave sin, though He could not suffer it to pass unjudged. Even in appointing death the Merciful One could not fail to be merciful to His servant. The thought of Moses might not carry him into the future of his own existence, into what should be after he had breathed his last. But God was His; and he was God's.

So the personal drama of many acts and scenes draws to a close with forebodings of the end, and yet a little respite ere the curtain falls. The music is solemn as befits the night-fall, yet has a ring of strong purpose and inexhaustible sufficiency. It is not the "still sad music of humanity" we hear with the words, "Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim, and behold the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered." It is the music of the Voice that awakens life, commands and inspires it, cheers the strong in endeavour and soothes the tired to rest. He who speaks is not weary of Moses, nor does He mean Moses to be weary of his task. But this change lies in the way of God's strong purpose, and it is assumed that Moses will neither rebel nor repine. Far away, in an evolution unforeseen by man, will come the glorification of One who is the Life indeed; and in His revelation as the Son of the Eternal Father Moses will share. With Christ he will

speak of the change of death and that faith which overcomes all change.

The designation of Joshua, who had long been the minister of Moses, and perhaps for some time administrator of affairs, is recorded in the close of the chapter. The prayer of Moses assumes that by direct commission the fitness of Joshua must be signified to the people. It might be Jehovah's will that, even yet, another should take the headship of the tribes. Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, "Let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation which may go out before them, and which may come in before them, and which may lead them out and which may bring them in; that the congregation of Jehovah be not as sheep which have no shepherd." One who has so long endeavoured to lead, and found it so difficult, whose heart and soul and strength have been devoted to make Israel Jehovah's people, can relax his hold of things without dismay only if he is sure that God will Himself choose and endow the successor. What aimless wandering there would be if the new leader proved incompetent, wanting wisdom or grace! How far about might Israel's way yet be, in another sense than the compassing of Edom! Before the Friend of Israel Moses pours out his prayer for a shepherd fit to lead the flock.

And the oracle confirms the choice to which Providence has already pointed. Joshua the son of Nun, "a man in whom is the spirit," is to have the call and receive the charge. His investiture with official right and dignity is to be in the sight of Eleazar the priest and all the congregation. Moses shall put of his own honour upon Joshua and declare his commission.

Joshua shall not have the whole burden of decision resting upon him, for Jehovah will guide him. Yet he shall not have direct access to God in the tent of meeting as Moses had. In the time of special need Eleazar "shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah." Thus instructed, he shall exercise high authority.

"A man in whom is the spirit"—such is the one outstanding personal qualification. "The God of the spirits of all flesh" finds in Joshua the sincere will, the faithful heart. The work that is to be done is not of a spiritual kind, but grim fighting, control of an army and of a people not yet amenable to law, under circumstances that will try a leader's firmness, sagacity, and courage. Yet, even for such a task, allegiance to Jehovah and His purpose regarding Israel, the enthusiasm of faith, high spirit, not experience—these are the commendations of the chief. Qualified thus, Joshua may occasionally make mistakes. His calculations may not always be perfect, nor the means he employs exactly fitted to the end. But his faith will enable him to recover what is momentarily lost; his courage will not fail. Above all, he will be no opportunist guided by the turn of events, yielding to pressure or what may appear necessity. The one principle of faithfulness to Jehovah will keep him and Israel in a path which must be followed even if success in a worldly sense be not immediately found.

The priest who inquires of the Lord by Urim has a higher place under Joshua's administration than under that of Moses. The theocracy will henceforth have a twofold manifestation, less of unity than before. And here the change is of a kind which may involve the gravest consequences. The simple statement of ver. 21

denotes a very great limitation of Joshua's authority as leader. It means that though on many occasions he can both originate and execute, all matters of moment shall have to be referred to the oracle. There will be a possibility of conflict between him and the priest with regard to the occasions that require such a reference to Jehovah. In addition there may be the uncertainty of responses through the Urim, as interpreted by the priest. It is easy also to see that by this method of appealing to Jehovah the door was opened to abuses which, if not in Joshua's time, certainly in the time of the judges, began to arise.

It may appear to some absolutely necessary to refer the Urim to a far later date. The explanation given by Ewald, that the inquiry was always by some definite question, and that the answer was found by means of the lot, obviates this difficulty.<sup>1</sup> The Urim and Thummim, which mean "clearness and correctness," or as in our passage the Urim alone, may have been pebbles of different colours, the one representing an affirmative, the other a negative reply. But inquiry appears to have been made by these means after certain rites, and with forms which the priest alone could use. It is evident that absolute sincerity on his part, and unswerving loyalty to Jehovah, were an important element in the whole administration of affairs. A priest who became dissatisfied with the leader might easily frustrate his plans. On the other hand, a leader dissatisfied with the responses would be tempted to suspect and perhaps set aside the priest. There can be no doubt that here a serious possibility of divided counsels entered into the history of Israel, and we are reminded of many

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<sup>1</sup> "Antiquities of Israel:" "The Priesthood."

after events. Yet the circumstances were such that the whole power could not be committed to one man. With whatever element of danger, the new order had to begin.

Moses laid his hands on Joshua and gave him his charge. As one who knew his own infirmities, he could warn the new chief of the temptations he would have to resist, the patience he would have to exercise. It was not necessary to inform Joshua of the duties of his office. With these he had become familiar. But the need for calm and sober judgment required to be impressed upon him. It was here he was defective, and here that his "honour" and the maintenance of his authority would have to be secured. Deuteronomy mentions only the exhortation Moses gave to be strong and of a good courage, and the assurance that Jehovah would go before Joshua, would neither fail him nor forsake him. But though much is recorded, much also remains untold. An education of forty years had prepared Joshua for the hour of his investiture. Yet the words of the chief he was so soon to lose must have had no small part in preparing him for the burden and duty which he was now called by Jehovah to sustain as leader of Israel.

## XXIII

### *OFFERINGS AND VOWS*

#### NUMBERS xxviii.-xxx

THE legislation of chapters xxviii.-xxx. appears to belong to a time of developed ritual and organised society. Parallel passages in Exodus and Leviticus treating of the feasts and offerings are by no means so full in their details, nor do they even mention some of the sacrifices here made statutory. The observances of New Moon are enjoined in the Book of Numbers alone. In chapter xv. they are simply noticed; here the order is fixed. The purpose of chapters xxviii., xxix. is especially to prescribe the number of animals that are to be offered throughout the year at a central altar, and the quantities of other oblations which are to accompany them. But the rotation of feasts is also given in a more connected way than elsewhere; we have, in fact, a legislative description of Israel's Sacred Year. Daily, weekly, monthly, and at the two great festal seasons, Jehovah is to be acknowledged by the people as the Redeemer of life, the Giver of wealth and blessedness. Of their cattle and sheep, and the produce of the land, they are to bring continual oblations, which are to be their memorial before Him. By their homage and by their gladness, by afflicting themselves and by praising God, they shall realise their calling as His people.

The section regarding vows (ch. xxx.) completes the legislation on that subject, supplementing Lev. xxvii. and Numb. vi. It is especially interesting for the light it throws on the nature of family life, the position of women and the limitations of their freedom. The link between the law of offerings and the law of vows is hard to find ; but we can easily understand the need for rules concerning women's vows. The peace of families might often be disturbed by lavish promises which a husband or a father might find it impossible or inconvenient to fulfil.

## I. THE SACRED YEAR

### NUMBERS xxviii.-xxix

Throughout the year, each day, each sabbath, and each month is to be consecrated by oblations of varying value, forming a routine of sacrifice. First the Day, bringing duty and privilege, is to have its morning burnt offering of a yearling lamb, by which the Divine blessing is invoked on the labour and life of the whole people. A meal offering of flour and oil and a drink offering of "strong drink"—that is, not of water or milk, but wine—are to accompany the sacrifice. Again in the evening, as a token of gratitude for the mercies of the day, similar oblations are to be presented. Of this offering the note is made : "It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord."

In these sacrifices the whole of time, measured out by the alternation of light and darkness, was acknowledged to be God's ; through the priesthood the nation declared His right to each day, confessed obligation to Him for the gift of it. The burnt offering implied complete

renunciation of what was represented. No part of the animal was kept for use, either by the worshipper or the priest. The smoke ascending to heaven dissipated the entire substance of the oblation, signifying that the whole use or enjoyment of it was consecrated to God. In the way of impressing the idea of obligation to Jehovah for the gifts of time and life the daily sacrifices were valuable; yet they were suggestive rather than sufficient. The Israelites throughout the land knew that these oblations were made at the altar, and those who were pious might at the times appointed offer each his own thanksgivings to God. But the individual expression of gratitude was left to the religious sense, and that must often have failed. At a distance from the sanctuary, where the ascending smoke could not be seen, men might forget; or again, knowing that the priests would not forget, they might imagine their own part to be done when offering was made for the whole people. The duty was, however, represented and kept before the minds of all.

In the Psalms and elsewhere we find traces of a worship which had its source in the daily sacrifice. The author of Psalm cxli., for example, addresses Jehovah:

“Give ear unto my voice when I cry unto Thee.  
Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee;  
The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

Less clearly in the fifth, the fifty-ninth, and the eighty-eighth psalms, the morning prayer appears to be connected with the morning sacrifice:

“O Lord, in the morning shalt Thou hear my voice;  
In the morning will I order my prayer unto Thee,  
and will keep watch” (Psalm v. 3).

The pious Hebrew might naturally choose the morn-

ing and the evening as his times of special approach to the throne of Divine grace, as every believer still feels it his duty and privilege to begin and close the day with prayer. The appropriateness of dawn and sunset might determine both the hour of sacrifice and the hour of private worship. Yet the ordinance of the daily oblations set an example to those who would otherwise have been careless in expressing gratitude. And earnestly religious persons learned to find more frequent opportunities. Daniel in Babylon is seen at the window open towards Jerusalem, kneeling upon his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks to God. The author of Psalm cxix. says :

“Seven times a day do I praise Thee,  
Because of Thy righteous judgments.”

The grateful remembrance of God and confession of His right to the whole of life were thus made a rule with which no other engagements were allowed to interfere. It is by facts like these the power of religion over the Hebrews in their best time is explained.

We pass now to the Sabbath and the sacrifices by which it was distinguished. Here the number seven which recurs so frequently in the statutes of the sacred year appears for the first time. Connection has been found between the ordinances of Israel and of Chaldea in the observance of the seventh day as well as at many other points. According to Mr. Sayce, the origin of the Sabbath went back to pre-Semitic days, and the very name was of Babylonian origin. “In the cuneiform tablets the *sabbatu* is described as a ‘day of rest for the soul.’ . . . The Sabbath was also known, at all events in Accadian times, as a *dies nefastus*, a

day on which certain work was forbidden to be done ; and an old list of Babylonian festivals and fast-days tells us that on the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of each month the Sabbath rest had to be observed. The king himself, it is stated, ' must not eat flesh that has been cooked over the coals or in the smoke, he must not change the garments of his body, white robes he must not wear, sacrifices he may not offer, in a chariot he must not ride.' " The soothsayer was forbidden on that day " to mutter in a secret place." In this observance of a seventh day of rest, specially sacred, for the good of the soul, ancient Accadians and Babylonians prepared the way for the Sabbath of the Mosaic law.

But while the days of the Chaldean week were devoted each to a separate divinity, and the seventh day had its meaning in relation to polytheism, the whole of time, every day alike, and the Sabbaths with greater strictness than the others, were, in Israel's law, consecrated to Jehovah. This difference also deserves to be noticed, that, while the Chaldean seventh days were counted from each new moon, in the Hebrew year there was no such astronomical date for reckoning them. Throughout the year, as with us, each seventh day was a day of rest. While we find traces of old religious custom and observance that mingled with those of Judaism and cannot but recognise the highly humane, almost spiritual character those old institutions often had, the superiority of the religion of the One Living and True God clearly proves itself to us. Moses, and those who followed him, felt no need of rejecting an idea they met with in the ancient beliefs of Chaldea, for they had the Divine light and wisdom by which the earthly and evil could be

separated from the kernel of good. And may we not say that it was well to maintain the continuity of observance so far as thoughts and customs of the far past could be woven into the worship of Jehovah's flock? Neither was Israel nor is any people to pretend to entire separation from the past. No act of choice or process of development can effect it. Nor would the severance, if it were made, be for the good of men. Beyond the errors and absurdities of human belief, beyond the perversions of truth due to sin, there lie historical and constitutional origins. The Sabbaths, the sacrifices, and the prayers of ancient Chaldea had their source in demands of God and needs of the human soul, which not only entered into Judaism, but survive still proving themselves inseparable from our thought and life.

The special oblations to be presented on the Sabbath were added to those of the other days of the week. Two lambs of the first year in the morning and two in the evening were to be offered with their appropriate meal and drink offerings. It may be noted that in Ezekiel where the Sabbath ordinances are detailed the sacrifices are more numerous. After declaring that the eastern gate of the inner court of the temple, which is to be shut on the six working days, shall be opened on the Sabbath and in the day of the new moon, the prophet goes on to say that the prince, as representing the people, shall offer unto the Lord in the Sabbath day six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish. In the legislation of Numbers, however, the higher consecration of the Sabbath as compared with the other days of the week did not require so great a difference as Ezekiel saw it needful to make. And, indeed, the law of Sabbath observance assumes

in Ezekiel an importance on various grounds which passes beyond the high distinction given it in the Pentateuch. Again and again in chapter xx. the prophet declares that one of the great sins of which the Israelites were guilty in the wilderness was that of polluting the Sabbath which God had given to be a sign between Himself and them. The keeping holy of the seventh day had become one of the chief safeguards of religion, and for this reason Ezekiel was moved to prescribe additional sacrifices for that day.

We find as we go on that the week of seven days, ended by the recurring day of rest, is an element in the regulations for all the great feasts. Unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days. Seven weeks were then to be counted to the day of the firstfruits and the feast of weeks. The feast of tabernacles, again, ran for seven days and ended on the eighth with a solemn assembly. The whole ritual was in this way made to emphasise the division of time based on the fourth commandment.

The New Moon ritual consecrating the months was more elaborate. On the day when the new moon was first seen, or should by computation be seen, besides the continual burnt offering two young bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year, with meal and drink offerings, were to be presented. These animals were to be wholly offered by fire. In addition, a sin offering was to be made, a kid of the goats. Why this guilt sacrifice was introduced at the new moon service is not clear. Keil explains that "in consideration of the sins which had been committed in the course of the past month, and had remained without expiation," the sin offering was needed. But this might be said of

the week in its degree, as well as of the month. It is certain that the opening of each month was kept in other ways than the legislation of the Pentateuch seems to require. In Numbers it is prescribed that the silver trumpets shall be blown over the new moon sacrifices for a memorial before God, and this must have given the observances a festival air. Then we learn from 1 Sam. xx. that when Saul was king a family feast was observed in his house on the first day of the month, and that this day also, in some particular month, was generally chosen by a family for the yearly sacrifice to which all were expected to gather (1 Sam. xx. 5, 6). These facts and the festal opening of Psalm lxxxii., in which the timbrel, harp, and psaltery, and joyful singing in praise of God, are associated with the new moon trumpet, imply that for some reason the occasion was held to be important. Amos (viii. 5) implies further that on the day of new moon trade was suspended; and in the time of Elisha it seems to have been common for those who wished to consult a prophet to choose either the Sabbath or the day of new moon for enquiring of him (2 Kings iv. 23). There can be little doubt that the day was one of religious activity and joy, and possibly the offering of the kid for expiation was intended to counteract the freedom the more thoughtless might permit themselves.

There are good reasons for believing that in pre-Mosaic times the day of new moon was celebrated by the Israelites and all kindred peoples, as it is still among certain heathen races. Originally a nature festival, it was consecrated to Jehovah by the legislation before us, and gradually became of account as the occasion of domestic gatherings and rejoicings. But its religious significance lay chiefly in the dedication to

God of the month that had begun and expiation of guilt contracted during that which had closed.

We come now to the great annual festivals. These were arranged in two groups, which may be classed as vernal and autumnal, the one group belonging to the first and third months, the other to the seventh. They divided the year into two portions, the intervals between them being the time of great heat and the time of rain and storm. The month Abib, with which the year began, corresponded generally to our April; but its opening, depending on the new moon, might be earlier or later. One of the ceremonies of the festival season of this month was the presentation, on the sixteenth day, of the first sheaf of harvest; and seven weeks afterwards, at Pentecost, cakes made from the first dough were offered. The explanation of what may appear to be autumnal offerings in spring is to be found in the early ripening of corn throughout Palestine. The cereals were all reaped during the interval between Passover and Pentecost. The autumnal festival celebrated the gathering in of the vintage and fruits.

The Passover, the first great feast, a sacrament rather, is merely mentioned in this portion of Numbers. It was chiefly a domestic celebration—not priestly—and had a most impressive significance, of which the eating of the lamb with bitter herbs was the symbol. The day after it, the “feast of unleavened bread” began. For a whole week leaven was to be abjured. On the first day of the feast there was to be a holy convocation, and no servile work was to be done. The closing day likewise was to be one of holy convocation. On each of the seven days the offerings were to be two young bullocks, one ram, and seven yearling he-lambs,

with their meal and drink offerings, and for sin one he-goat to make atonement.

The week of this festival, commencing with the paschal sacrament, was made to bear peculiarly on the national life, first by the command that all leaven should be rigidly kept out of the houses. As the ceremonial law assumed more importance with the growth of Pharisaism, this cleansing was sought quite fanatically. Any crumb of common bread was reckoned an accursed thing which might deprive the observance of the feast of its good effect. But even in the time of less scrupulous legalism the effort to extirpate leaven from the houses had its singular effect on the people. It was one of the many causes which made Jewish religion intense. Then the daily sacrificial routine, and especially the holy convocations of the first and seventh days, were profoundly solemnising. We may picture thus the ceremonies and worship of these great days of the feast. The people, gathered from all parts of the land, crowded the outer court of the sanctuary. The priests and Levites stood ready around the altar. With solemn chanting the animals were brought from some place behind the temple where they had been carefully examined so that no blemish might impair the sacrifice. Then they were slain one by one, and prepared, the fire on the great altar blazing more and more brightly in readiness for the holocaust, while the blood flowed away in a red stream, staining the hands and garments of those who officiated. First the two bullocks, then the ram, then the lambs were one after another placed on the flames, each with incense and part of the meal offering. The sin offering followed. Some of the blood of the he-goat was taken by the priest and sprinkled on the inner altar, on the veil of

the Holy of Holies, and on the horns of the great altar, around which the rest was poured. The fat of the animal, including certain of the internal parts, was thrown on the fire; and this portion of the observances ended with the pouring out of the last drink offering before the Lord. Then a chorus of praise was lifted up, the people throwing themselves on the ground and praying in a low, earnest monotone.

To this followed in the later times singing of chants and psalms, led by the chorus of Levites, addresses to the people, and shorter or longer prayers to which the worshippers responded. The officiating priest, standing beside the great altar in view of all, now pronounced the appointed blessing on the people. But his task was still not complete. He went into the sanctuary, and, having by his entrance and safe return from the holy place shown that the sacrifice had been accepted, he spoke to the assembly a few words of simple and sublime import. Finally, with repeated blessing, he gave the dismissal. On one or both of these occasions the form of benediction used was that which we have found preserved in the sixth chapter of this book.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that celebrations like these, into which, as time went on, the mass of worshippers entered with increased fervour, gave the feast of unleavened bread an extraordinary importance in the national life. The young Hebrew looked forward to it with the keenest expectancy, and was not disappointed. So long as faith remained, and especially in crises of the history of Israel, the earnestness that was developed carried every soul along. And now that the Israelites bewail the loss of temple and country, reckoning themselves a

<sup>1</sup> See Ewald's "Antiquities," p. 131, Solly's translation.

martyred people, this feast and the more solemn day of atonement nerve them to endurance and reassure them of their hope. They are separate still. They are Jehovah's people still. The covenant remains. The Messiah will come and bring them new life and power. So they vehemently cling to the past and dream of a future that shall never be.

"The day of the firstfruits" was, according to Lev. xxiii. 15, the fiftieth day from the morrow after the passover sabbath. The special harvest offering of this "feast of weeks" is thus enjoined: "Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth parts of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, for firstfruits unto the Lord" (Lev. xxiii. 17). According to Leviticus one bullock, two rams, and seven lambs; according to Numbers two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs, were to be sacrificed as whole offerings; the difference being apparently that of varying usage at an earlier and later time. The sin offering of the he-goat followed the burnt offerings. The day of the feast was one of holy convocation; and it has peculiar interest for us as the day on which the pentecostal effusion of the Spirit came on the gathering of Christians in the upper room at Jerusalem. The joyous character of this festival was signified by the use of leaven in the cakes or loaves that were presented as firstfruits. The people rejoiced in the blessing of another harvest, the fulfilment once more by Jehovah of His promise to supply the needs of His flock. It will be seen that in every case the sin offering prescribed is a single he-goat. This particular sacrifice was distinguished from the whole offerings, the thank offerings, and the peace

offerings, which were not limited in number. "It must stand," says Ewald, "in perfect isolation, as though in the midst of sad solitude and desolation, with nothing similar or comparable by its side." Why a he-goat was invariably ordered for this expiatory sacrifice it is difficult to say. And the question is not made more easy by the peculiar rite of the great day of atonement, when besides the goat of the sin offering for Jehovah another was devoted to "Azazel." Perhaps the choice of this animal implied its fitness in some way to represent transgression, wilfulness, and rebellion. The he-goat, more wild and rough than any other of the flock, seemed to belong to the desert and to the spirit of evil.

From the festivals of spring we now pass to those of autumn, the first of which coincided with the New Moon of the seventh month. This was to be a day of holy convocation, on which no servile work should be done, and it was marked by a special blowing of trumpets over the sacrifices. From other passages it would appear that the trumpets were used on the occasion of every new moon; and there must have been a longer and more elaborate service of festival music to distinguish the seventh. The offerings prescribed for it were numerous. Those enjoined for the opening of the other months were two bullocks, one ram, seven he-lambs and the he-goat of the sin offering. To these were now added one bullock, one ram, and seven he-lambs. Altogether, including the daily sacrifices which were never omitted, twenty-two animals were offered; and with each sacrifice, except the he-goat, fine flour mingled with oil and a drink offering of wine had to be presented.

There seems no reason to doubt that the seventh month was opened in this impressive way because of the great festivals ordained to be held in the course of it. The labour of the year was practically over, and more than any other the month was given up to festivity associated with religion. It was the seventh or sabbath month, forming the "exalted summit of the year, for which all preceding festivals prepared the way, and after which everything quietly came down to the ordinary course of life." The trumpets blown in joyful peals over the sacrifices, the offering of which must have gone on for many hours, inspired the assembly with gladness, and signified the gratitude and hope of the nation.

But the joy of the seventh month thus begun did not go on without interruption. The tenth day was one of special solemnity and serious thought. It was the great day of confession, for on it, in the holy convocation, the people were to "afflict their souls." The transgressions and failures of the year were to be acknowledged with sorrow. From the evening of the ninth day to the evening of the tenth there was to be a rigid fast—the one fast which the law ordained. Before the full gladness of Jehovah's favour can be realised by Israel all those sins of neglect and forgetfulness which have been accumulating for twelve months must be confessed, bewailed, and taken away. There are those who have become unclean without being aware of their defilement; those who have unwittingly broken the Sabbath law; those who have for some reason been unable to keep the passover, or who have kept it imperfectly; others again have failed to render tithes of all the produce of their land according to the law; and priests and Levites called to a high consecra-

tion have come short of their duty. With such defects and sins of error the nation is to charge itself, each individual acknowledging his own faults. Unless this is done a shadow must lie on the life of the people; they cannot enjoy the light of the countenance of God.

For this day the whole offerings are, one young bullock, one ram, seven he-lambs; and there is this peculiarity, that, besides a he-goat for a sin offering, there is to be provided another he-goat, "for atonement." Maimonides says that the second he-goat is not that "for Azazel," but the fellow of it, the one on which the lot had fallen "for Jehovah." Leviticus again informs us that Aaron was to sacrifice a bullock as a sin offering for himself and his house. And it was the blood of this bullock and of the second he-goat he was to take and sprinkle on the ark and before the mercy-seat. Further, it is prescribed that the bodies of these animals are to be carried forth without the camp and wholly burned—as if the sin clinging to them had made them unfit for use in any way.

The great atonement thus made, the reaction of joy set in. Nothing in Jewish worship exceeded the solemnity of the fast, and in contrast with that the gladness of the forgiven multitude. Another crisis was past, another year of Jehovah's favour had begun. Those who had been prostrate in sorrow and fear rose up to sing their hallelujahs. "The deep seriousness of the Day of Atonement," says Delitzsch, "was transformed on the evening of the same day into light-hearted merriment. The observance in the temple was accomplished in a significant drama which was fascinating from beginning to end. When the high priest came forth from the Most Holy Place, after the performance of his functions there, this was for the

people a consolatory, gladsome sight, for which poetry can find no adequate words: 'Like the peace-proclaiming arch in painted clouds; like the morning star, when he arises from the eastern twilight; like the sun, when opening his bud, he unfolds in roseate hue.' When the solemnity was over, the high priest was escorted with a guard of honour to his dwelling in the city, where a banquet awaited his more immediate friends." The young people repaired to the vineyards, the maidens arrayed in simple white, and the day was closed with song and dancing.<sup>1</sup>

This description reminds us of the mingling of elements in the old Scottish fast-days, closing as they did with a simple entertainment in the manse.

The feast of tabernacles continued the gladness of the ransomed people. It began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, with a holy convocation and a holocaust of no fewer than twenty-nine animals, in addition to the daily sacrifice, and a he-goat for a sin offering. The number of bullocks, which was thirteen on this opening day of the feast, was reduced by one each day till on the seventh day seven bullocks were sacrificed. But two rams and fourteen he-lambs were offered each day of the feast, and the he-goat for expiation, besides the continual burnt offering. The celebration ended, so far as sacrifices were concerned, on the eighth day with a special burnt offering of one bullock, one ram, and seven he-lambs, returning thus to the number appointed for New Moon.

It will be noticed that on the closing day there was to be a "solemn assembly." It was "the great day of the feast" (John vii. 37). The people who during the

<sup>1</sup> *Expositor*, 3rd Series, vol. iv., p. 88.

week had lived in the booths or arbours which they had made, now dismantled them and went on pilgrimage to the sanctuary. The opening of the festival came to be of a striking kind. "One could see," says Professor Franz Delitzsch, "even before the dawn of the first day of the feast, if this was not a Sabbath, a joyous throng pouring forth from the Jaffa Gate at Jerusalem. The verdure of the orchards, refreshed with the first showers of the early rain, is hailed by the people with shouts of joy as they scatter on either side of the bridge which crosses the brook fringed with tall poplar-osiers, some in order with their own hands to pluck branches for the festal display, others to look at the men who have been honoured with the commission to fetch from Kolonia the festal leafy adornment of the altar. They seek out right long and goodly branches of these poplar-osiers, and cut them off, and then the reunited host returns in procession, with exultant shouts and singing and jesting, to Jerusalem, as far as the Temple hill, where the great branches of poplar-osier are received by the priests and set upright around the sides of the altar, so that they bend over it with their tips. Priestly trumpet-clang resounded during this decoration of the altar with foliage, and they went on that feast day once, on the seventh day seven times, around the altar with willow branches, or the festive posy entwined of a palm branch and branches of myrtles and willows, amidst the usual festive shouts of Hosanna; exclaiming after the completed encircling, 'Beauty becomes thee, O Altar! Beauty becomes thee, O Altar!'" So, in later times, the festival began and was sustained, each worshipper carrying boughs and fruit of the citron and other trees. But the eighth day brought all this to a close. The huts were taken down,

the worshippers sought the house of God for prayer and thanksgiving. The reading of the Law which had been going on day by day concluded; and the sin offering fitly ended the season of joy with expiation of the guilt of the people in their holy things.

The series of sacrifices appointed for days and weeks and months and years required a large number of animals and no small liberality. They did not, however, represent more than a small proportion of the offerings which were brought to the central sanctuary. Besides, there were those connected with vows, the free-will offerings, meal offerings, drink offerings, and peace offerings (xxix. 39). And taking all together it will be seen that the pastoral wealth of the people was largely claimed. The explanation lies partly in this, that among the Israelites, as among all races, "the things sacrificed were of the same kind as those the worshippers desired to obtain from God." The sin offering, however, had quite a different significance. In this the sprinkling of the warm blood, representing the life blood of the worshipper, carried thought into a range of sacred mystery in which the awful claim of God on men was darkly realised. Here sacrifice became a sacrament binding the worshippers by the most solemn symbol imaginable—a vital symbol—to fidelity in the service of Jehovah. Their faith and devotion expressed in the sacrifice secured for them the Divine grace on which their well-being depended, the blood-bought pardon that redeemed the soul. Among the Israelites alone was expiation by blood made fully significant as the centre of the whole system of worship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ewald's "Antiquities," p. 40.

## 2. THE LAW OF VOWS

## NUMBERS xxx

The general command regarding vows is that whosoever binds himself by one, or takes an oath in regard to any promise, must at all hazards keep his word. A man is allowed to judge for himself in vowing and undertaking by oath, but he is to have the consequences in view, and especially keep in mind that God is his witness. The matter scarcely admitted of any other legislation, and neither here nor elsewhere is any attempt made to lay penalties on those who broke their vows. To use the Divine Name in an oath which was afterwards falsified brought a man under the condemnation of the third commandment, a spiritual doom. But the authorities could not give it effect. The transgressor was left to the judgment of God.

With regard to vows and oaths the sophistry of the Jews and their rabbis led them so far astray that our Lord had to lay down new rules for the guidance of His followers. No doubt cases arose in which it was exceedingly difficult to decide. One might vow with good intention and find himself utterly unable to keep his promise, or might find that to keep it would involve unforeseen injury to others. But apart from circumstances of this sort there came to be such a network of half-legalised evasions, and so many unseemly discussions, that the purpose of the law was destroyed. Absolution from vows was claimed as a prerogative by some rabbis; against this, others protested. One would say that if a man vowed by Jerusalem or by the Law he had said nothing; but if he vowed by what is written in the Law, his words stood. The "wise men" declared four kinds of vows not binding—incentive

vows, as when a buyer vows that he will not give more than a certain price in order to induce the seller to take less ; meaningless vows ; thoughtless and compulsory vows. In such ways the practice was reduced to ignominy. It even came to this, that if a man wished to neutralise all the vows he might make in the course of a year he had only to say at the beginning of it, on the eve of the Day of Atonement, " Let every vow which I shall make be of none effect," and he would be absolved. This immoral tangle was cut through by the clear judgment of Christ : " Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths : but I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God ; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet ; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay : and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one." In ordinary conversation and dealings Christ will have no vows and oaths. Let men promise and perform, declare and stand to their word. He lifts even ordinary life to a higher plane.

With regard to women's vows, four cases are made the subject of enactment. First, there is the case of a young woman living in her father's house, under his authority. If she vow unto the Lord, and bind herself by a bond in the hearing of her father and he do not forbid, her vow shall stand. It may involve expense to the father, or put him and the family to inconvenience, but by silence he has allowed himself to be bound. On the other hand, if he interpose and forbid the vow, the daughter is released. The second case is

that of a woman who at the time of marriage is under a vow; and this is decided in the same way. Her betrothed husband's silence, if he hears the promise, sanctions it; his refusal to allow it gives discharge. The third instance is that of a widow or a divorced woman, who must perform all she has solemnly engaged to do. The last case is that of the married woman in her husband's house, concerning whom it is decreed: "Every vow and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void. . . . If he shall make them null and void after he hath heard them, then he shall bear her iniquity."

These regulations establish the headship of the father and the husband in regard to matters which belong to religion. And the significance of them lies in this, that no intrusion of the priest is permitted. If the "Priests' Code" had been intended to set up a hierocracy, these vows would have given the opportunity of introducing priestly influence into family life. The provisions appear to be designed for the very purpose of disallowing this. It was seen that in the ardour of religious zeal women were disposed to make large promises, dedicating their means, their children, or perhaps their own lives to special service in connection with the sanctuary. But the father or husband was the family head and the judge. No countenance whatever is given to any official interference.

It would have been well if the wisdom of this law had ruled the Church, preventing ecclesiastical dominance in family affairs. The promises, the threats of a domineering Church have in many cases introduced discord between daughters and parents, wives and husbands. The amenability of women to religious

motives has been taken advantage of, always indeed with a plausible reason,—the desire to save them from the world,—but far too often, really, for political-ecclesiastical ends, or even from the base motive of revenge. Ecclesiastics have found the opportunity of enriching the Church or themselves, or, under cover of confession, have become aware of secrets that placed families at their mercy. No practice followed under the shield of religion and in its name deserves stronger reprobation. The Church should, by every means in its power, purify and uphold family life. To undermine the unity of families by laying obligations on women, or obtaining promises apart from the knowledge of those to whom they are bound in the closest relationship, is an abuse of privilege. And the whole custom of auricular confession comes under the charge. It may occasionally or frequently be used with good intention, and lonely women without trusted advisers among their kindred may see no other resource in times of peculiar difficulty and trial. But the submission that forms part of it is debasing, and the secrecy gives priesthood a power that should belong to no body of men in dealing with the souls of their fellow-creatures, and fellow-sinners. At the very best, confession to a priest is a weak expedient.

## XXIV

### *WAR AND SETTLEMENT*

#### I. THE WAR WITH MIDIAN

##### NUMBERS xxxi

THE command to vex and smite the Midianites (xxv. 16) has already been considered. Israel had not the spiritual power which would have justified any attempt to convert that people. Degrading idolatry was to be held in abhorrence, and those who clung to it suppressed. Now the time comes for an exterminating war. While hordes of Bedawin occupy the hills and the neighbouring desert, there can be no security either for morals, property, or life. Balaam is among them plotting against Israel; and his restless energy, we may suppose, precipitates the conflict. Moses conveys the command of God that the attack on Midian shall be immediately made, and himself directs the campaign.

The details of the enterprise are given somewhat fully. A thousand fighting men are called from each tribe. The religious purpose of the war is signified by the presence in the host of Phinehas, whose zeal has given him a name among the warriors. He is allowed to carry with him the "vessels of the sanctuary"; and the silver trumpets are to be sounded on the march and in the attack. The Midianitish clan apparently gives way at once before the Hebrews, and either makes no stand or is totally defeated in a single battle.

All the men are put to the sword, including Balaam and five chiefs, whose names are preserved. The women and children are taken; the whole of the cattle and goods become the prey of the victors; the cities and encampments are burned with fire. On the return of the army with the large band of captives, Moses is greatly displeased. He demands of the officers why the women have been spared,—the very women who caused the children of Israel to trespass against the Lord. Then he orders all above a certain age, and the male children, to be put to death. The young girls alone are to be kept alive.

The purification of those who have been engaged in the war is next commanded. For seven days the army must remain outside the camp. Those who have touched any dead body and all the captives are to be ceremonially cleansed on the third and seventh days. Every article of raiment, everything made of skins and goats' hair, and all woollen articles, are to be purified by means of the water of expiation. Whatever is made of metal is to be passed through the fire.

Details of the quantity and division of the prey, and the voluntary oblations made as an "atonement for their souls" by the officers and soldiers out of their booty, occupy the rest of the chapter. The numbers of oxen, sheep, and asses are great—six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep, seventy-two thousand beeves, sixty-one thousand asses. No mention is made of horses or camels. The girls saved alive are thirty-two thousand. The army takes one half, and those who remained in the camp receive the other. But of the soldiers' portion, one in five hundred both of the persons and of the animals is given to the priests, and of the people's portion one in fifty to the Levites. The

jewels of gold, ankle-chains, bracelets, signet-rings, earrings and armlets offered by the men of war as their "atonement," not one of them having fallen in the battle, amount in weight to sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels, the value of which may be estimated at some thirty thousand of our pounds. The gold is brought into the tent of meeting for a memorial before the Lord.

Now here we have to deal with an accumulation of statements, every one of which raises some question or other. The war of national and moral antipathy is itself easily understood. But the slaughter of so many in battle and so many others in cold blood, the statement that not a single Israelite fell, the number and kinds of the animals captured, the order given by Moses to put all the women to death, the quantity of gold taken, of which the offering appears only to have been a part—all of these points have been criticised in a more or less incredulous spirit. In apology it has been said, with regard to the slaughter of the women, that when brought as captives by the soldiers they could not be received into the camp, and there was only this way of dealing with them, unless indeed they had been sent back to their ruined encampments, where they would have slowly died. Again, it has been explained that the Midianites were so debased and enfeebled as to have no power to withstand the onset of the Hebrews. The droves of oxen, sheep, and asses are held to be not greater than a wealthy nomadic clan, numbering perhaps two hundred thousand, would be likely to own; and the quantity of gold is likewise accounted for by the well-known fact that among Orientals the wealth represented by precious metals is fashioned into ornaments for the women.

In detail the difficulties may thus be partly overcome ; yet the whole account remains so singular, both in its spirit and incidents, that Wellhausen has roundly declared it to be fictitious, and others have had no resource but to fall back, even for the slaughter of the women, on the Divine command. It is true there were other peoples, the Moabites, for instance, as idolatrous, and almost as degraded. But a terror of Jehovah's name had to be created for the moral good of the whole region, and the Midianites, it is said, who had so grossly assailed the purity of Israel, were fitly selected for Divine chastisement. The opinion that the whole account is an invention of the "Priests' Code" may be at once dismissed. The ideas of national purity that prevailed after the exile and are insisted upon in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah would not have countenanced the dedication of any spared from the slaughter, even young girls, as a tribute to Jehovah. The attack and the issue of it were, no doubt, recorded in the ancient documents of which the compilers of the Book of Numbers made use. And the fact must be held to stand, that there was a grim slaughter relentlessly carried out at the command of Moses in accordance with the moral and theocratic ideas that ruled his mind.

But it remains doubtful whether the numbers can be trusted, even although they appear to be in the substance of the narrative. The disproportion is enormous between the twelve thousand Israelites sent against Midian and the number of men who, if we accept the figures given, must have fallen without striking one effective blow for their lives. Of these there would have been some forty thousand at least. Assuming that somehow the numbers are exaggerated, we find the story a good deal cleared. It was entirely

in harmony with the spirit of the age that a war *à outrance* should have been commanded in the circumstances. If, then, an adequate force of Hebrews marched against the Midianites and took them at unawares, perhaps by night, or when they were engaged in some idolatrous orgy, their defeat and slaughter would be comparatively easy. The Hebrews with Phinehas among them were, we may believe, filled with patriotic and religious ardour, assured that they were commissioned to execute Divine justice and must not shrink from any work that lay in their way, however dreadful. Does the thing they did still seem incredible? Perhaps the recollection of what took place after the Indian Mutiny, when Great Britain was in the same temper, may throw light upon the question. The soldiers then, bent on punishing the cruelty and lust of the rebels, partly in patriotism, partly in revenge, set mercy altogether aside. If we had the whole history of the war with Midian, instead of the mere outlines preserved in Numbers, we might find that, apart from figures, the statements are by no means over-coloured. Moses had the entire responsibility of ordering the women to be put to death. When he saw the train of female captives, some of them possibly using their arts of blandishment not without success, he might well be afraid that the very end for which the war had been undertaken was to be frustrated. He was a man who did not scruple to shed blood when the law of God and the purity of morals and religion seemed to be endangered. He knew Jehovah to be gracious—gracious to those who loved Him and kept His commandments. But was He not also a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hated Him? It was

this God Moses sought to serve when in the heat of his indignation, and not without reason, he gave the terrible order.

The appropriation of some of the captive girls to the priests and Levites as "Jehovah's tribute," the offering by the soldiers of part of their booty as an "atonement" for their souls, the presence of Phinehas with the "vessels of the sanctuary," and the sacred trumpets in the ranks—these manifestly belong to the time to which the history refers. And it may be said in closing that circumstances might be well known to Moses on account of which the attack had to be made promptly and the dispersion of the Midianites had to be complete. We cannot tell what Balaam may have been plotting; but we may be pretty sure there was nothing too base for him to scheme and the Midianites to carry into effect. They knew themselves to be under suspicion, perhaps in danger. With what craft and vehemence the Bedawin can act we are well aware. Life even yet is of no account among them. Another day, perhaps, and the ark might have been carried off or Moses put to death in his tent. But the nature of the wrong done to Israel is a sufficient explanation of the war. And we can also see that the Hebrews themselves had a lesson in moral severity when their soldiers went forth to the massacre and returned red with blood. They learned that the sin of Midian was abominable in the sight of God and should be abominable in theirs. They were taught, whether they received the teaching or not, that they were to be enemies for ever of those who practised idolatry so vile. A deep gulf was made between them and all who sympathised with the worship and customs of the tribe they destroyed.

And the whole circumstances, remote as they are from our own time, may bring home even to Christians the duty of moral decision and relentless war against the vices and lusts with which too many are inclined to make terms. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the "wiles of error," the "lusts of deceit," against "fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like,"—the works of the flesh. These Midianites are with us, would draw our hearts away from religion and destroy our souls. Not only are we to assail the grosser forms of sin and exterminate them, but we are with equal severity to strike down the fair-seeming vices that come with blandishment and insidious appeal. This is our holy war. The old form of it required the suppression or extermination of those identified with vice, men and women, all in whom the impurity was rooted. Young girls alone could be spared, whose character might still be shaped by a higher morality. Even yet, to a certain extent, that way of dealing with evil has to be followed. We imprison felons and put murderers to death; but the new power that has come with Christianity enables us to deal with many transgressors as capable of reformation and a new life. And this power is far as yet from being fully developed.

It is the fault of our age to be on one side too lenient, on another wanting in patience, charity, and hope. Excuses are found for sin on the ground that it is useless to fight against nature, that we must not be hypocritical nor puritanical. Temptations that come with mincing gait, cajolery and smiles, are allowed to disport themselves untouched. Why, it is asked, should

life be made sombre? A stern religion that would banish gaiety is declared to be no friend of the race. Under cover of art—pictorial, dramatic, literary—the customs of Midian are not only admitted but allowed to have authority. And religion even is invoked. Are not all things pure to the pure? Should not life be as free and joyous as the Maker clearly intends in giving us the capacity for those gratifications to which art of every kind ministers? Is not full freedom indispensable to the highest religion? Ought not genius, in every department, to have complete liberty in guiding and developing the race?

Without hypocrisy, without banishing the sunshine of life or denying the freedom which is necessary to progress and vigour, we are to be jealous for morality, severe against all that threatens it. And here our age is impatient of direction. The tendency is to a civilisation without morality, that is, a new barbarism. The strenuous mind of the old theocratic leaders is required anew, with a difference. Life and thought have so far advanced under Christianity that liberty is good in things which once had to be sternly reprobated; but only the same guidance will carry us higher. To those who lead in arts and literature the appeal has to be made in the name of God and men to regard the fitness of things. The old ideas of Puritanism are not to be the standard? True. Neither are the tastes of Greece nor the manners of Pompeii. Every artist must, it appears, be his own censor. Let each, then, use his right under a sense of responsibility to the God who would have all to be pure and free. There are pictures exhibited, and poems sent out from the press, and novels published, which, for all the skill and charm that are in them, ought to have been cast into

the fire. In private life, too, the Midianitish talk, the jest, the anecdote, the innuendo, all but indecent, the hint, the laugh that breaks down the barriers of integrity and sobriety, show the license of a barbarism which is bent on conquest. Every Christian is called to wage against these immoralities an exterminating war.

On the other hand, charity and patience are needed. It is difficult to forbear with those who seem to find their pleasure in what is evil, more difficult to continue the efforts necessary to win them to religion, purity, and honour. We feel it a hard task to track our own unholy desires to their retreats and slay them there. Proteus-like they elude us; when we think they have been destroyed, a passing word or thought revives them. And if in the task of our own purification we need long patience, it is not wonderful that even more should be required in the attempt to set others free from their besetting sins. Much of our philanthropy, again, is useless because we try to cover too large a field. Few are engaged in comparison with the enormous region over which effort has to extend, and we treat the hurt slightly, with too much haste. Then we grow despondent. Impatience, hopelessness, should never be known among those who undertake the Divine work of saving men and women from their sins. But to cure this, new ideas on the whole subject of Christian endeavour and new methods of work are required. The evil forces, a host arrayed against true life, must be followed into the desert places where they lurk, and there, with the sword of the Spirit, which is the bright strong word of God, attacked and slain. When Christians are brave and loving enough, when they have patience enough, the gospel of purity will begin to have its power.

## 2. SETTLEMENT

NUMBERS xxxii

The request of the men of Reuben and Gad that they should be allowed to settle on the eastern side of Jordan in the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead was at first refused by Moses with warm displeasure. They appeared to wish exemption from further military duty, if indeed they had not almost formed the intention of parting altogether with the rest of the tribes. Moses asked of them, "Shall your brethren go to the war and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?" He recalled the spies and the evil report they brought, by which a former generation had been disheartened and made to murmur against the Lord. The forty years of wandering had intervened since that error—a long period of suffering and punishment. And now with this request the men of Reuben and Gad were playing the same dangerous part. "Behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the Lord toward Israel."

It is somewhat surprising to find the proposal met in this way. But Moses had doubtless good cause for his condemnation of the two tribes. For some time, we can believe, the notion had been entertained, and already the cattle were driven northwards and scattered over the pastures of Gilead. The people felt that the confraternity which had survived the test of the wilderness journey was now about to break up. And as the two clans that proposed to settle in Eastern

Palestine were strong and could send a large number of warriors into the field, there was reason to fear that the want of them would make the conquest of the great tribes beyond Jordan too heavy a task.

The circumstances were of a kind resembling those of a Church when the enjoyment of privilege and of the gains of the past is chosen by many of its members, and the rest, discouraged by this moral unbrotherliness, have to maintain the aggressive work which ought to be shared by all. The force of unity lost, the Christian energy of large numbers lying unemployed, the rest overburdened, Churches often come far short of the success they might attain. When Reubenites and Gadites devote themselves to building houses, cultivating fields, and rearing cattle, neglecting altogether the command of God to conquer the territory still in the hands of His enemies, the spirit of religion cannot but decay. The selfishness of worldly Christians reacts on those who are not worldly, so that they feel its subtle influence, even although they scorn to yield. And when there is some great task to be done which requires the personal service and contributions of all, withdrawal of the less zealous may in this way make victory impossible. True, we have on the other side the case of Gideon and his rejection of the great bulk of his army, that he might take the field with a few who were brave and ready. Numbers of half-hearted people do not help an enterprise. Still, the duties of the Church of Christ are so great that all are required for them. It is no apology to say that men are apathetic, and therefore useless. They ought to be eager for the Divine war.

It was not at all wonderful that the men of Reuben and Gad proposed to settle on the east of Jordan. The

soil of that region, extending from the Jabbok Valley northwards, and including the whole district watered by the Yarmuk and its tributaries, was exceedingly fertile, with fine forests of oak, and stretches of meadow and arable land. What could be seen of Judæa from the heights of Moab appeared poor and barren in comparison with that green and fertile country. There was abundance of room there, not only for the two tribes, but for more ; and besides the half of Manasseh which finally joined Reuben and Gad, other clans may have begun to think that they might rest content without venturing across Jordan. But Moses had good reasons for resisting as far as possible this desire. There was no natural boundary on the east of Gilead and Bashan. Moab, in a similar situation, was exposed to the attacks and perhaps corrupted by the influence of the Midianites. If Israel had taken up its abode in this region which joined on to the desert, it too would have become half a desert people. The Jordan came, as no doubt Moses foresaw, to be the real boundary of the nation which maintained the faith of Jehovah and carried on His purposes.

In danger of losing all because they had been too selfish, the men of Reuben and Gad made a new proposal. They would go with the rest to the conquest of Canaan ; yea, they would form the van of the army. If Moses would only allow them to provide sheep-folds for their flocks and cities for their families, they would take the field and never think of returning till the other tribes had all found settlement. The offer was one which Moses saw fit to accept ; but with a caution to the Reubenites. If they fulfilled the promise, he said, they should be guiltless before the Lord ; but if they did not, their sin would be written against them. Fore-

seeing the result of a division between the east and west which any such faithless conduct would certainly cause, he added the warning, "Be sure your sin will find you out." The time would come when, if they refused to do their part in helping the rest, they should find themselves, in some day of extreme peril, without the sympathy of their brethren, the prey of enemies who came from the east and north.

Earthly comfort and the means of material prosperity can never be enjoyed without spiritual disadvantage, or at least the risk of spiritual loss. The whole region of ease and wealth lies towards the desert in which the adversaries of the soul have their lurking-places, from which they come stealthily or even boldly in open day to make their assaults. A man who has large means is exposed to the envy of others; his life may be embittered by their designs upon him; his nature may be seriously injured by the flattery of those who have no power but only the base cunning to which narrow self-love may descend. These, however, are not the assailants that are most to be dreaded. Rather should the man who is rich fear the danger to his religion and his soul which draws near in other ways. The wealthy who have no religion court his friendship and propose to him schemes for increasing his wealth. Alliances are urged upon him which stir and partly gratify his ambition. He is pointed to honours that can only be had through abandoning the great ideas of life by which he should be ruled. He is served obsequiously, and is tempted to think that the world goes very well because he enjoys all he desires, or is in the way to obtain the fulfilment of his highest earthly hopes. The curse of egotism hangs over him, and to escape it he needs a double portion of

the spirit of humility. Yet how is that to come to him ?

It is well for a man when, before enjoying the good things of this life in abundance, he has taken the field with those who have to fight a hard battle, and has done his share of common work. But even that is not enough to guard him against pride and self-sufficiency for the whole term of his existence. Better is it when by his own choice the hardness is retained in his experience, when he never discharges himself from the duty of fighting side by side with others, that he may help them to their inheritance. That and that alone will save his life. He is called as a soldier of God to maintain the holy war for human rights, for the social well-being and spiritual good of mankind. Every rich man should be a friend of the people, a reformer, taking the part of the multitude against his own tendency and the tendency of his class to exclusiveness and self-indulgence. The warning given by Moses to Reuben and Gad in accepting their proposals should linger with those who are rich and in high station. If they fail to do their duty to the general mass of their fellow-men, if they leave the rest to fight, at disadvantage, for their human inheritance, they sin against God's law, which calls for brotherhood, and that sin will surely find them out. In the end no sin is more sure to come home in judgment. And it is not by some miserable gifts to religious objects or some patronage of philanthropic schemes the prosperous can discharge the great debt laid upon them. In whatever way the inequalities of life, the disabilities of privilege and wealth, hinder the realisation of brotherhood, there lie opportunity and need for men's personal effort. Would this imply sacrifice of what are called rights, of perhaps no small

amount of substance? That is precisely the saving of a rich man's life. To that Christ pointed the rich young ruler who came to Him seeking salvation—from that the inquirer turned away.

And how does the sin of those who neglect such high duties find them out? Perhaps in the loss of the possessions they have selfishly guarded, and their reduction to the level of those whom they kept at arm's-length and treated as inferiors or as enemies. Perhaps in the harshness of temper and bitterness of spirit the proud, friendless rich man may find growing upon him in old age, the horrible feeling that he has not one brother where he should have had thousands, no one to care—except selfishly—whether he lives or dies. To come to that, so far as a man is concerned with his fellow-men, is to be indeed lost. But these retributions may be artfully escaped. What then? Is not One to be reckoned with who is the Guardian of the human family and gives men power and wealth only as His stewards, to be used in His service? The future life does not obliterate society, but it destroys the class separations, the factitious distinctions, that exist now. It brings a man face to face with the fact that he is but a man, like others, responsible to God. Is not the result indicated by our Lord when He says to exclusive Pharisaical men, "They shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom—ye yourselves cast forth without"? Brotherhood here, not in name, but in deed and truth, means brotherhood above. Denial of it here means unfitness for the society of heaven.

We learn from ver. 19 that the Reubenites and Gadites confidently affirmed, even when they made their

request to Moses, that their inheritance had fallen to them on the east side of Jordan. It may be asked how they knew, since the division was not yet made. And the answer appears to be that they had made up their minds on the subject. Without waiting for the lot, they seem to have said, This is nobody's land now that the Amorites and Midianites are dispossessed. We will have it. And there was no sufficient reason for refusing them their choice when they accepted the conditions. At the same time, these tribes did not act fairly and honourably. And the result was that, although they gained the fat land and the good pastures, they lost the close fellowship with the other tribes which was of greater value. Reuben, the premier tribe, could no longer keep its position. It was by-and-by succeeded by Judah. Neither Reuben nor Gad made any great figure in the subsequent history. The half-tribe of Manasseh, which was settled, not on its own request, but by authority, in the northern part of Gilead towards the Argob, had greater distinction. Gad has some notice. We read of eleven valiant men of this tribe who swam the Jordan at its highest to join David in his trouble. "But no person, no incident is recorded to place Reuben before us in any distincter form than as a member of the community (if community it can be called) of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The very towns of his inheritance—Heshbon, Aroer, Kiriathaim, Dibon, Baal-meon, Sibmah, Jazer—are familiar to us as Moabite, not as Israelite, towns." The Reubenites, in fact, under the influence of their wild neighbours, gradually lost touch with their brethren and fell away from the religion of Jehovah.

It is a parable of the degeneration of life.—Earthly

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choice rules and heavenly faith is hazarded for the sake of a temporal advantage. Men have their will because they insist upon it. They do not consult the prophet, but make terms with him, that they may gain their end. But as they place themselves, so they have to live, not on the soil of the promised land, no integral part of Israel.

## XXV

### *THE WAY AND THE LOT*

NUMBERS xxxiii., xxxiv

I. **T**HE itinerary of xxxiii. 1-49 is one of the passages definitely ascribed to Moses. It opens with the departure from Rameses in Egypt on the morrow after the passover, when the children of Israel "went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians." The exodus is made singularly impressive in this narrative by the addition that it took place "while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, which the Lord had smitten among them." The Divine salvation of Israel begins when the dark shadow of loss and judgment rests on their oppressors. The gods of Egypt are discredited by the triumph of Jehovah's people. They can neither save their own worshippers nor prevent the servants of another from obtaining liberty.

From Rameses, the place of departure, to Abelsittim, in the plains of Moab, forty-two stations in all are given at which the Israelites pitched. Of these about twenty-four are named either in Exodus, in other parts of the Book of Numbers, or in Deuteronomy. Some eighteen, therefore, are mentioned in this passage and nowhere else. Of the whole number, comparatively few have as yet been identified. The Egyptian local-

ities, at least Rameses and Succoth, are known. With the exit from Egypt, at the crossing of the Red Sea difficulty begins. Our passage says that the Israelites went three days' journey into the wilderness of Etham; Exodus calls it the wilderness of Shur. Then Marah and Elim bring the travellers, according to chap. xxxiii., to the Red Sea, the *Yâm Suph*. Ordinarily, this is supposed to be the Gulf of Suez, alongside which the route would have lain from the day it was crossed. There are, however, the best reasons for believing that this "Red Sea" is the eastern gulf, the Elanitic, as it must be in xiv. 25, where, after the evil report of the spies, the Divine command is given: "To-morrow turn ye, and get you into the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea." From this identification of the *Yâm Suph* many things follow. And one is the rejection of the ordinary opinion regarding the position of Sinai. The mountain of the law-giving is always described as situated in Midian. Now, Midian is beyond Elath, on the eastern side of the *Yâm Suph*, not in the peninsula between the Gulfs of Suez and Akabah. Elim and Elath, or Eloth, appear to be names for the same place, at the head of the Gulf of Akabah. We have therefore to look for Sinai either among the southern hills of Seir or those lying more southward still, towards the desert. In Deborah's song (Judg. v. 4, 5) occur the following verses:—

"Lord, when Thou wentest out of Seir,  
When Thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,  
The earth trembled, the heavens also dropped,  
Yea, the clouds dropped water;  
The mountains flowed down at the presence of the Lord,  
Even yon Sinai at the presence of the Lord, the God of  
Israel."

In the same direction the "Prayer of Habbakuk" points (iii. 3, 7):

"God came from Teman,  
And the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
His glory covered the heavens,  
And the earth was full of His light. . . .  
I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction,  
The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble."

The tradition which places Sinai in the south of the peninsula between the two gulfs "is of later origin than the lifetime of St. Paul, and can claim no higher authority than the interested fancies of ignorant cœnobites. It throws into confusion both the geography and the history of the Pentateuch, and contradicts the definite statements of the Old Testament." So the most recent inquiry.

If Mount Sinai was somewhere to the south of Edom, the journey thence to Kadesh by way of Kibroth-hattaavah and Hazeroth, localities mentioned both in Numb. xi. and xxxiii., may have had other stations; and these may be named in ver. 19 of our passage and onward. But identification of the places is exceedingly doubtful till we come to Ezion-geber, in the Arabah, and Mount Hor. Deut. x. places the scene of Aaron's death at Mosera, which seems to be the same as Moseroth, and is there given along with other stations named in the itinerary—Bene-jaakan, Gudgodah (= Hor-haggidgad), Jotbathah. And this seems to prove that these localities were in or near the Arabah, Moseroth being in the region of Mount Hor. But where Kadesh is to be found between Rithmah and Moseroth, and under what name, it is impossible to say. Keil argues for Rithmah itself. Palmer reckons twenty stations to the first arrival at Kadesh. His

map, however, shows a Mount Sheraif, which may be the same as Shepher, not far from Gadis, which he identifies with Kadesh. For the rest we are left in great ignorance, relieved only by this, that at the most there are but eighteen stations given, more probably thirteen, for the whole thirty-seven years between the first arrival at Kadesh and the death of Aaron at Mount Hor; and five or six of these were on the Arabah. During the whole of that long period there were only a few removals of the tabernacle, and those apparently within a limited area near Kadesh.

A list of names with only three historical notes appears a singular memorial of the forty years. Time was, no doubt, when the places named were all well known, and any Israelite desiring to satisfy himself as to the route by which his forefathers went could make it out by help of this passage. To us the interest of the subject is partly the same as that which might have been found by a Hebrew, say, of the time of Hezekiah, for whom the verification of the wilderness journey might be a help to faith. But the impossibility of identifying the localities shows that there are matters in the history of Israel which are of no particular importance now. There is more danger in seeking to gratify mere curiosity, than profit in any possible discoveries. Why should not the mountain of the law-giving be hid in the shadows as well as the grave in which Moses was laid? Why should not the places at which Israel encamped be to us mere names, since, if we could identify them, it might only be to add fresh difficulties instead of clearing away those that exist? The Israelites who entered Canaan had not seen all the way by which Jehovah led His people. When they crossed the Jordan, present duty was to engage.

them, not the mere names that belonged to the past. They were to forget the things behind, and stretch forward to the things which were before. And duty is the same still. Our backward glance, especially on the actual path from one spot of earth to another by which men have gone in trial and anticipation, must not hinder the efforts called for by the circumstances of our own time. The way of the desert, especially, may well lie half obliterated in the distance, since we know the spiritual fruit of the dealings of God with Israel, and can bear it with us as we follow our own road.

The ideas of change and urgency are in our passage. The wilderness journey was taken by a people on whom Divine influences had laid hold, who of themselves would have remained content in Egypt, but were not suffered, because God had some greater thing in store for them. The urgency throughout was His. And so is that which we ourselves feel hurrying us from change to change, from place to place. We may not be in the wilderness, but in a spot of shelter and comfort; and it may be no house of bondage, but a vantage-ground for generous effort. Even when we are thus happily settled, as we imagine, the call comes, and we must strike our tents. At other times our own anxiety anticipates the command. But we know that always, whether we pass into sterner conditions of life or escape to more pleasant circumstances, the times and changes that happen to us are of God's appointing, that His providence urges us toward a goal. And this means that our reaching the goal must be by His way, although properly we endeavour to find it for ourselves.

The number of the stations at which Israel encamped in the course of forty years can scarcely be taken as representing the number of changes from dwelling to

dwelling any pilgrim through this world shall have to make. But if we think of halting-places and movements of thought, we shall have a fruitful parallel. From the twentieth to the sixtieth year—may we not say?—is the time of journeying that takes the mind from its first freedom to comparative rest. Not far on the Divine law-giving impresses itself on the conscience; and hence a direct road may appear to lead into the peace of obedience. But the stations successively reached, Kibroth-hattaavah, Hazeroth, Rithmah, and the rest, represent each a peculiar difficulty encountered, a barrier to our steady progress towards the settled mind. St. Paul indicates one he found when he says: "I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Another halt is imposed when it is found that the law appears to forbid what is according to nature; still another when obedience requires separation from those who have been valued friends and pleasant companions. These hindrances left behind as the soul, still confiding and hopeful, is urged on towards the goal, a great trial like that of Kadesh follows. We are not far from the frontier of promise; and anticipations are formed of many delights for heart and life. Is not obedience to bring felicity, an easy salvation from doubt and fear? But it becomes plain that there are enemies to faith and peace beyond the border as well as in the region already crossed. Complete conformity to the Divine will has not been achieved. Will it ever be achieved? We begin to doubt the result of law-keeping. There is perhaps a backward look to Sinai, implying a question whether God spoke there, or beyond Sinai, to the old traditional way of life. And so another term of difficult inquiry begins.

In this way many find themselves held for a long period of middle life. Their minds move from one point to another without seeming to make any progress. But neither does rest come. It is seen that partial obedience, a measure of nearness to the perfection once dreamed of, will not suffice. Then arises the question whether obedience can ever save. There is return almost to Sinai itself, at least to a place from which its peak is seen and the mind is confirmed as to the inexorability of law. So the urgency of the Divine will is felt, and the way is fixed. If the soul would make its own way into peace, it is driven back. For, perhaps, it would have the difficulty solved by taking the way of a Church, accepting a creed—as Israel would have passed through the territory of Edom. This also is forbidden. Trusted helpers fall by the way, as Aaron died at Hor, and there is sorrowful delay. But movement is enforced; and, finally, it is by a road that reveals Sinai and the law in quite another aspect, showing vital faith, not mere obedience, to be the means of salvation, our progress is made. Round the borders of Edom, not by trust in creed or Church, but by confidence in God Himself, the soul must advance. Then strength comes. Point after point is reached and passed. Self-righteousness, pride, and Pharisaism—Amorites of the mountain land—are overcome. At length through the faith of Christ peace is found, the peace that is possible on this side the river.

It is our high privilege to be urged and led on thus by Him who knows the way we should take, who tries us that we may come forth purified as gold. Without Divine pressure we should content ourselves in the desert and never see the real good of life. So many

lose themselves because they will not admit that to be of the truth is necessary to salvation. There is a way of thinking, or rather refusing to think, of spiritual verities which keeps the soul unaware of the purpose God would carry into effect, or indifferent to it. The mind refuses its duty; and in the midway of life the spiritual goal fades from view. To guard against this taking place in the case of any one is the office of the Gospel ministry. If evangelical preaching does not keep thought awake and attentive to Divine inspirations, if it does not speak to those who are in every stage of perplexity, at every possible camping-ground, it fails of its high purpose.

2. Commandment is given that when the Israelites pass over Jordan they shall use effectual means for establishing themselves as the people of Jehovah in Canaan. They are, for one thing, to drive out before them all the inhabitants of the land. Nothing is here said of putting them all to the sword; only they are not to be left even in partial occupation. The plan of Israel's settlement in its new territory requires that it shall be subject to no alien influence, and shall have the field entirely to itself for the development of customs, civilisation, and religion. And in this there is nothing either impossible or, as the ideas of the time went, strange and cruel. We do not need to take refuge in the command of God and defend it by saying that He had absolute right over the lives of the Canaanites. The tides of war and population were continually flowing and receding. When the Israelites reached Canaan, they had the same right as others to occupy it, provided they could make their right good at the point of the sword. Yet for their own special consciousness the

command given by Moses in Jehovah's name was most important. It was only as His people they were to advance, and as His people they were to dwell separate in Canaan.

To drive out all the inhabitants of the land was, however, a difficult task ; and even Moses might not intend the order to be literally obeyed. We have seen that he did not require the destruction of the Midianites to be absolute. In the wars of conquest in Canaan cases of a similar kind would necessarily arise. When a tribe was driven out of its cities many would be left behind, some of whom would conceal themselves and gradually venture from their hiding-places. The command was general, and could scarcely be supposed to require the putting to death of all children. And again, as we know, there were fortresses which for a long time defied attempts to reduce them. The Israelites were not so faithful to God that Moses could expect their success to be insured by supernatural aid. It is the constant purpose they are to have in view, to sweep the land clear of those presently in occupation. As they establish themselves, this will be carried out ; and if they fail, allowing any of the tribes to remain, these will be as pricks in their eyes and as thorns in their sides.

The will of God that Israel, called to special duty in the world, was to keep itself separate, is here strongly emphasised. It was the only way by which faith could be preserved and made fruitful. For the Canaanites, already civilised and in many of the arts superior to the Hebrews, had gross polytheistic beliefs imbedded in their customs, and a somewhat elaborate cultus which was observed throughout the whole land. "Figured stones," which by their shape or incised emblems

conveyed religious ideas ; molten images, probably of bronze, like those found at Tel el Hesya, which were for household use, or of a larger size for tribal adoration ; " high places " crowned by altars and sacrificial stones, were specially to be destroyed. The tendency to polytheism required to be carefully guarded against, for the gods of Canaan represented the powers of nature, and their rites celebrated the fruitfulness of earth under the lordship of Baal or Bel, and the mysterious processes of life associated with the influence of Astarte, the moon. The divinities of Egypt also appear to have had their worshippers ; and, indeed, the mixed population of the land had drawn from every neighbouring region symbols, rites, and practices supposed to propitiate the unseen powers on whose favour human life must depend. Israel could prosper only by rejecting and extirpating this idolatry. Allowed to survive in any degree, it would be the cause of physical suffering and spiritual decay.

The command thus ascribed to Moses was again one which he must have known the Israelites would find difficult to carry out, even if they were cordially disposed to obey it. The sacred places of a country like Canaan tend to retain their reputation even when the rites fall into disuse ; and however expeditiously the work of sweeping away the original inhabitants might be done, there was no small danger that knowledge of the cult as well as veneration for the high places would be learned by the Hebrews. The command was made clear and uncompromising so that every Israelite might know his duty ; but the difficulty and the peril remained. And as we know from the Book of Judges and subsequent history, the law, especially in regard to the demolition of high places,

became practically a dead letter. Jehovah was worshipped at the ancient places of sacrifice; and so far were even pious Israelites of the next few centuries from thinking they did wrong in using those old altars, that Samuel fell in with the custom. It was true in regard to this commandment as it is with regard to many others,—the high mark of duty is presented, but few aim at it. Expediency rules, the possible is made to suffice instead of the ideal. There is reason to believe, not only that the images and stone symbols of Canaan were venerated, but that Jehovah Himself was worshipped by many of the Hebrews under the form of some animal. And the Canaanites became to those who fraternised with them as pricks in their eyes. Spiritual vision failed; faith fell back on the coarse emblems used by the old inhabitants of the land. Then the vigour of the tribes decayed and they were judged and punished.

3. The boundaries of the land in which the Israelites were to dwell are laid down in ch. xxxiv.; but, as elsewhere, there is difficulty in following the geography and identifying the old names. The south quarter is to be "from the wilderness of Zin along by the side of Edom"—that is to say, it is to include the region of Zin near Kadesh and extend to the mountains of Seir. The "ascent of Akrabbim" is apparently the Ghor rising southwards from the Dead Sea. The line then runs along the Arabah for some distance, say fifty miles, across by the south of the Azazimeh hills and of Kadesh Barnea towards the stream called the river or brook of Egypt, which it followed to its debouchment in the Mediterranean. The western boundary was the Mediterranean or Great Sea for a distance of perhaps

one hundred and sixty miles. The northern boundary is exceedingly obscure. They were to keep in view a "mount Hor" as a landmark; but no two geographers can be said to agree where it was. The "entering in of Hamath" is also a locality greatly disputed. Most likely it was some well-known part of the road leading along the Leontes valley to that of the Orontes. If we take the mount Hor here indicated to be Hermon, a line running west and striking the Mediterranean somewhere north of Tyre would be a natural boundary, and would correspond fairly with the actual partition and occupation of the country. It is certain, however, that both the Philistines and Phœnicians, especially the latter, were so strongly established in the southern and northern parts of the seaboard that any attempt to dispossess them was soon discovered to be futile. And even in the limited central range from Kedesh Naphtali to Beersheba the settlement was only effected gradually.

The Canaan of the Divine promise marked out, yet never fully possessed, is a symbol of the region of this life which those who believe in God have assigned to them, but never entirely enjoy. There are boundaries within which there is abundant room for the development of the life of faith. It is not, as the world reckons, a district of great resources. As Canaan had neither gold nor silver, neither coal nor iron mines, as its seaboard was not well supplied with harbours, nor its rivers and lakes of great use for inland navigation, so we may say the life open to the Christian has its limitations and disabilities. It does not invite those who seek pleasure, wealth, or dazzling exploits. Within it, discipline is to be found rather than enjoyment of earthly good. The "milk and honey" of this

land are spiritual symbols, Divine sacraments. There is room for the development of life in every branch of study and culture, but in subordination to the glory of God, and for the testimony that should be borne to His majesty and truth.

Many of us affect to despise so narrow a range of thought and endeavour, and persist in believing that something more than discipline may be looked for in this world. Is there not a proper kingdom of humanity better than any kingdom of God? May not the race of men, apart from any service paid to an Unseen God, attain dignity of its own, power, gladness, magnificence? It is supposed that by rejecting all the limitations of religion and refusing the outlook to another life the united labour of men will make this life free and this earth a paradise. But it remains true that men must limit their hopes with regard to their own future here as individuals and the future of the race. We must accept the boundaries God has fixed, on one side the swift Jordan, on the other the Great Sea. There are seemingly rich fields beyond, wide regions that invite the tastes and senses, but these are no part of the soul's inheritance; to explore and reduce them would bring no real gain.

The range that lies open to us as servants of God, and affords ample space for the discipline of life, is often not used and therefore not enjoyed. When people will not accept the inevitable fixed limits within which their time and vigour can be occupied to the best advantage, when they look covetously to districts of experience not meant for them, as Israel did at certain periods of her history, their life is spoiled. Discontent begins, envy follows. Where in seeking and reaching moral gains, purity, courage, love, there would have

been a continual sense of adequate result and encouraging prospect, there is now no gain, no pleasure. The appointed lot is despised, and all it can yield held in contempt. How many there are who, with a full river of Divine bounty on one side their life, and the great ocean of the Divine faithfulness ebbing and flowing on the other, with the pastures and olive-groves of the Word of God to nourish their soul, with access to His city and sanctuary, and an outlook from summits like Tabor and Hermon to a transfigured life in the new heavens and earth, speak nevertheless with scorn and bitterness of their heritage! They might be reaching "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," but they remain graceless and discontented to the end. Israel, understanding its destiny and using its opportunities aright, might well say—and so may every one who knows the truth as it is in Jesus Christ—"the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." But this gladness of heart has its root in believing content. The restricted land is full of God's promise: "Thou maintainest my lot." The security of Jehovah's word encompasses the man of faith.

## XXVI

### *THE CITIES OF REFUGE*

NUMBERS xxxv., xxxvi

I. **T**HE INHERITANCE OF THE LEVITES. The order relating to the Levitical cities may be said to describe an ideal settlement. We have, at all events, no evidence that the command was ever fully carried out. It was to the effect that in forty-eight cities, scattered throughout the whole of the tribes in proportion to their population, dwellings were to be allotted to the Levites, who were also to have the suburbs of those cities; that is to say, the fields lying immediately about them, "for their cattle, and for their substance, and for all their beasts." It is assumed that closely surrounding each of the cities there shall be pasturage, and that a regular or fairly regular boundary can be made at the distance of one thousand cubits from the city. Singularly, nothing whatever is said as to the duties of the Levites thus distributed throughout the land on both sides Jordan, from Kedesh Naphtali in the north, to Debir in the south, according to Josh. xxi. It is not said that they were to perform any ecclesiastical functions or instruct the people in the Divine Law. Yet something of the kind must have been intended, since many of them were at a great and inconvenient distance from Shiloh and other places at which the ark was stationed.

According to this statute, there is, for one thing, to be no seclusion of the Levites from the rest of the people. If clergy and laity, as we say, are distinguished, the distinction is made as small as possible. From the terms of the present order (xxxv. 2, ff.) it might appear that the towns given to the Levites were to be occupied by them exclusively. In parallel passages, however, it is clear that the Levites dwelt along with others in the cities; and in this way, as well as by engaging in pastoral work, they were kept closely in touch with the men of the tribes. The land allotted to them was not sufficient for farms; but the tithes and offerings were to a large extent for their support. And the arrangement thus sketched is held with some reason to be an ideal for every order of men called to similar duty. The Levites, indeed, were not at first spiritual. Neither the nature of their work at the sanctuary, nor the conditions of their life, implied any special consecration of heart. But the general tone of a religious ministry advances; and even in David's time there were Levites who served God in no mere routine, but with earnest mind, with a measure of inspiration. The ordinance here is in behalf of a consecrated order devoted to the service of God.

The suburbs, or pasture lands about the cities, are measured a thousand cubits broad, and are to be two thousand cubits along each of the four boundaries. If the figures given are correct it would seem that, although the wall of the city is spoken of, the measurement must really have begun in the centre of the city; otherwise there could never have been a square of land, cities not taking that form; nor could a boundary of two thousand cubits on each aspect, north, south, east, and west, be made out. The cities must often have been small, a

cluster of poor huts built of clay or rude brick, with a wall of similar material. We need imagine no stately dwellings or fine pleasure grounds when we read here of the provision for the Levites. Within the wall they had their bare, mean cottages; outside, there might be a breadth of perhaps four hundred yards of poor enough ground which they could claim. But as the tithes were not always paid, so the dwellings and the pasturage may not always have been allotted. There is not much reason to wonder that in a short time after the settlement in Canaan the Levites, finding no special work at the sanctuary, and obtaining little support from the offerings, gradually became part of the tribes in which they happened to have their abode. Hence we read in Judges (xvii. 7) of "a young man out of Bethlehem-judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite."

The main purpose of the present statute, so far as it refers to the dwellings of the Levites, would appear to have been economic, not religious. It was that all the tribes might have their share of maintaining the servants of the sanctuary. But it seems likely that a class half priestly would, in lack of other duty, attach itself to the high places, and set up a worship not contemplated by the law. And if this is to be regarded as a misfortune, the choice of the Levitical cities is in some cases difficult to account for. Kedesh in Naphtali had been a famous holy place of the Canaanites; so probably were others, as Gibeon, Shechem, Gath-rimmon. The special symbol of Jehovah was the ark; and where the ark was the principal national rites were always performed. But in a time of pioneer work and constant alarms the central sanctuary could not always be visited, and the Levites appear to have lent themselves to worship of a local kind.

An ecclesiastical order needs great faithfulness if it is not to become irreligious through poverty, or proud and domineering through assumption of power with God. To live poorly as those Levites were expected to live, without the opportunity of earthly gain, while often the share of national support which was due fell to a very low and wholly inadequate amount, would try the fidelity of the best of them. No large claim need be made in behalf of men specially engaged in the work of the Christian Church ; and great wealth seems inappropriate to those who represent Christ. But what is their due should at least be paid cheerfully, and the more so if they give earnest minds to the service of God and man. With all faults that have at various periods of the Church's history stained the character of the clergy, they have maintained a testimony on behalf of the higher life, and the sacredness of duty to God. A materialistic age will make light of that service, and point to ecclesiastical pride and covetousness as more than counterbalancing any good that is done. But a broad and fair survey of the course of events will show that the witness-bearing of a special class to religious ideas has kept alive that reverence on which morality depends. True, the ideal of a theocracy would dispense with an order set apart to teach the law of God and to enforce His claims on men. But for the times that now are, even in the most Christian country, the witness-bearing of a gospel ministry is absolutely needful. And we may take the statute before us as anticipating a general necessity, that necessity which the apostles of our Lord met when they ordained presbyters in every Church, and gave them commission to feed the flock of God.

2. THE CITIES OF REFUGE. Among the forty-eight cities that provide dwellings for the Levites, six are to be cities of refuge, "that the man-slayer which killeth any person unwittingly may flee thither." Three of these cities are to be on the east and three on the west side of Jordan. According to other enactments they are to be distributed so as to be reached quite easily from all parts of the country. They were sanctuaries for any one fleeing from the "avenger of blood"; but the protection found in them was not by any means absolute. Only if there appeared to be good cause for admitting a fugitive was he afforded refuge even for a time, and his trial followed as soon as possible. The laws of protection and judgment are here laid down not fully, though with some detail.

We notice first that the statutes regarding the man-slayer are frankly based on the primitive practice of blood revenge. It was the duty of the nearest male relation of one who had been slain to seek the blood of the man who slew him. The duty was held to be one which he owed to his brother, to the community, and to God; and the principle of retribution in such cases was embodied in the saying, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The goël, or redeemer, whose part it was to recover for a family land that had been alienated, or a member of the family who had fallen into slavery, had it also laid on him to seek justice on behalf of the family when one belonging to it had been killed. The evils of this method of punishing crime are very evident. All the heat of personal affection for the man put to death, the keen desire to maintain the honour of family or clan, and the bitter hatred of the tribe to which the homicide belonged, made the pursuit of the criminal

swift and the stroke fierce and unrelenting. A goël put on a false track might easily strike to the ground an innocent person; and he would feel himself bound to incur all risks in avenging his kinsman. Often whole tribes of Arabs are involved in the blood feud beginning in a single stroke, and wherever the custom prevails there is the gravest danger of wide and sanguinary strife. The enactments of our passage are intended to counteract in part these abuses and dangers.

We may wonder that the Hebrew law, enlightened on many points, did not wholly abolish the practice of blood revenge. Justice is not the private affair of any man, even the nearest kinsman of one who has been injured. We have learned that the administration of law, especially in cases of murder or supposed murder, is best taken out of the hands of a private avenger, whose aim is to strike as soon and as effectually as possible. It remains of course for those whose friend has died by violence to institute inquiries and do their utmost to bring the criminal to justice. But even when a man's guilt seems clear his trial is before an impartial judge by whom all relevant facts are elicited. In Hebrew law there was no complete provision for such an administration of justice. The ancient custom could not be easily set aside, for one thing; the passionate oriental nature would cling to it. And for another, there was no organisation for repressing disorder and dealing with crime. A certain risk had to be run, in order that the sanctity of human life might be clearly kept before a people too ready to strike as well as to curse. But if the man-slayer was able to reach a city of refuge he had his trial. The old custom was checked by the right of the fugitive to claim sanctuary and to have his case investigated.

As for the sanctuary cities, there may also have been some imperfect custom which anticipated them. In Egypt there certainly was; and the Canaanites, who had learned not a little from Egypt, may have had sacred places that afforded protection to the fugitive. But the Mosaic law prevented abuse of the means of evading justice. He who had killed another was a criminal before God. The blood of the brother he had slain defiled the land and cried to Heaven. No sanctuary must protect a man who had with homicidal purpose struck another. There was to be neither priestly protection, nor sanctuary, nor ransom for him. The Divine principle of justice took up the cause.

In vv. 16 ff. there are examples of cases which are adjudged to be murder. To smite one with an instrument of iron, or with a stone grasped in the hand presumably large enough to kill, or with a weapon of wood, a heavy club or bar, is adjudged to be deliberate homicide. Then if hatred can be proved, and one known to have cherished enmity towards another is shown to have thrust him down, or hurled at him, lying in wait, or to have smitten him with the hand, such a one is to be allowed no sanctuary. On the other hand, the cases of inadvertent homicide are defined: "if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or hurled upon him anything without lying in wait, or with any stone, whereby a man may die, seeing him not." These, of course, are simply instances, not exhaustive categories.

It is not here stated, but in Josh. xx. 4 the statute runs that the man-slayer who fled to a sanctuary city was to state his cause before the elders, no doubt at the gate. Their preliminary decision had to be given in his favour before he could be admitted. But the

real trial was by the "congregation," Numb. xxxv. 24, some assembly representing the tribe within whose territory the crime has been committed, or more likely a gathering of headmen of the whole nation. Further, at ver. 30 it is enacted that the charge of the avenger of blood against any one must be substantiated by two witnesses at least. These provisions form the basis of a sound judicial method. The rights of refuge and of revenge stand opposed to each other, and between the two a large and authoritative court gives judgment. It will be observed, moreover, that the judiciary was not ecclesiastical. Where power was to be exercised in the name of God, the priests were not to wield it, but the people. The form of government is far nearer a democracy than a hierocracy.

A singular point in the law is the term during which the unwitting man-slayer who had been acquitted by the court of justice must remain in sanctuary. He is in danger of being put to death by the avenger of blood until the acting high priest dies. Till that event he must keep within the border of his city of refuge. And here the idea seems to be that the official memory of the crime which had ceremonially defiled the land rested with the high priest. He was supposed to keep in mind, on God's behalf, the bloodshed which even though unintentional was still polluting. His death accordingly obliterated the recollection that kept the man-slayer under peril of the goël's revenge. The high priest had no power to acquit or condemn a criminal, nor to enforce against him the punishment of his fault. But he was the guardian of the sacredness of the land in the midst of which Jehovah dwelt.

With regard to the symbolical meaning of the cities

of refuge, it is needful to exercise great care at every point. The man-slayer, for instance, fleeing from the avenger of blood, is not a type of the sinner fleeing for his life from the justice of God. If guilty of murder, a man could find no safety even in the city of refuge. It was only if he was not guilty of premeditated crime that he found sanctuary. The refuge cities, however, represented Divine justice as in contrast to the justice or rather the vengeance of man—that Divine justice which Christ came to reveal, giving Himself for us upon the cross. Human righteousness errs sometimes by excess, sometimes by defect. Certain offences it would never condemn, others it would passionately and remorselessly punish. The sanctuary cities show a higher idea of justice. But all men are guilty before God. And there is mercy with Him not only for the unwitting transgressor, but for the man who has to confess deliberate sin, the forfeiture of his life to Divine law.

The singular opinion has been expressed that the death of the high priest was expiatory. This is said to be "unmistakably evident" from the addition of the clause, "who has been anointed with the holy oil" (ver. 25). The argument is that as the high priest's life and work "acquired a representative signification through this anointing with the Holy Ghost, his death might also be regarded as a death for the sins of the people by virtue of the Holy Ghost imparted to him, through which the unintentional man-slayer received the benefits of the propitiation for his sins before God, so that he could return cleansed to his native town without further exposure to the vengeance of the avenger of blood." And thus, it is said, "The death of the earthly high priest became a type of that of

the heavenly One, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, that we might be redeemed from our transgressions." But although many of the Rabbins and fathers held this view as to the expiatory nature of the high priest's death, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture or reason to support it. All the expiation, moreover, which the Mosaic law provided for was ceremonial. If the death of the high priest was efficacious only so far as his functions were, then there could be no atonement or appearance of atonement for moral guilt, even that of culpable homicide for instance. The death of the high priest was therefore in no sense a type of the death of Christ, the whole meaning of which lies in relation to moral, not ceremonial, offences.

While it cannot be said that "light is thrown by the provisions regarding cities of refuge on the atonement of Christ"—for that would be the morning star shedding light on the sun—still there are some points of illustration; and one of these may be noted. As the protection of the sanctuary city extended only to the boundaries or precincts belonging to it, so the defence the sinner has in Christ can be enjoyed only so far as life is brought within the range of the influence and commands of Christ. He who would be safe must be a Christian. It is not mere profession of faith—"Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name?"—but hearty obedience to the laws of duty coming from Christ that gives safety. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?"—and the elect are those who yield the fruit of the Spirit, who are lovers of God and their fellow-men, who show their faith by their works. It is a misrepresentation of the whole teaching of Scripture to declare that salvation can be had, apart from life and

practice, in some mystical relation with Christ which is hardly even to be stated in words.

3. TRIBAL INHERITANCE. Already we have heard the appeal of the daughters of Zelophehad to be allowed an inheritance as representing their father. Now a question which has arisen regarding them must be solved. The five women have not cared to undertake the work of the upland farm allotted to them, somewhere about the head waters of the Yarmuk. They have, in fact, as heiresses been somewhat in request among the young men of different tribes; and they are almost on the point of giving their hands to husbands of their choice. But the chiefs of the family of Manasseh to which they belong find a danger here. The young women may perhaps choose men of Gad, or men of Judah. Then their land, which is part of the land of Manasseh, will go over to the tribes of the husbands. There will be a few acres of Judah or of Gad in the north of Manasseh's land. And if other young women throughout the tribes, who happen to be heiresses, marry according to their own liking, by-and-by the tribe territories will be all confused. Is this to be allowed? If not, how is the evil to be prevented?

The national centre and general unity of Israel could not in the early period be expected to suffice. Without tribal coherence and a sense of corporate life in each family the Israelites would be lost among the people of the land. Especially would this tend to take place on the eastern side of Jordan and in the far north. Now the clan unity went with the land. It was as those dwelling in a certain district the descendants of one progenitor realised their brotherhood. Hence there was good reason for the appeal of the Manassites and

the legislation that followed. Women who succeeded to land were to marry within the families of their fathers. Men were apparently not forbidden to marry women of another tribe if they were not heiresses. But the possession of land by women carried with it a responsibility and deprived them of a certain part of freedom. Every daughter who had an inheritance was to be wife to one of her near kin; so should no inheritance remove from one family to another; the tribes should cleave every one to his own inheritance.

The exigencies of the early settlement appear to have required this law; and it was maintained as far as possible, so that he who lived in a certain region might know himself not only a Reubenite or a Benjamite as the case might be, but a son of Hanoch of the Reubenites, or a son of Ard among the Benjamites. But we may doubt whether the unity of the nation was not delayed by the means used to keep the land for each tribe and each tribe on its own land. The arrangement was perhaps inevitable; yet it certainly belonged to a primitive social order. The homogeneity of the people would have been helped and the tribes held more closely together by interchange of land. In every law made at an early stage of a people's development there is involved something unsuitable to after periods. And perhaps one error made by the Israelites was to cling too long and too closely to tribal descent and make too much of genealogy. The enactment regarding the marriage of heiresses within their own families was an old one, bearing the authority of Moses. There came a time when it should have been revoked and everything done that was possible to weld the tribes together. But the old customs held; and what was the result? The tribes east of Jordan, as

well as Dan and Asher, were well-nigh lost to the Confederacy at an early date. Subsequently a division began between the northern and southern peoples. We cannot doubt that partly for want of family alliances between Judah and Ephraim, and subordination of tribal to national sentiment, there came the separation into two kingdoms.

For the tribe idea and the other of making inheritance of land a governing matter, the Israelites would seem to have paid dearly. And there is danger still in the attempt to make a nation cohere on any mere territorial basis. It is the spirit, the fidelity to a common purpose, and the pervasive enthusiasm that give real unity. If these are wanting, or if the general aim is low and material, the security of families in the soil may be exceedingly mischievous. At the same time the old feeling is proved to have a deep root in fact. Territorial solidarity is indispensable to a nation; and the exclusion of a people from large portions of its land is an evil intolerable. Christianity has not done its work where the Church, the teacher of righteousness, is unconcerned for this great matter. How can religion flourish where brotherhood fails? And how can brotherhood survive in a nation when the right of occupying the soil is practically denied? First among the economic questions which claim Christian settlement is that of land tenure, land right. Christianity carries forward the principles of the Mosaic law into higher ranges, where justice is not less, but more—where brotherhood has a nobler purpose, a finer motive.

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