

# Exodus Devotional Commentary 2

## Exodus Commentary Devotional Comments on Exodus 15-25 F. B. Meyer

Part 1

Part 3

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**Main Resource Page- Exodus Commentaries, Sermons**

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**Disclaimer/caveat:** One should be aware that F B Meyer was a major leader in the so-called Keswick movement, which many associate with the "Let Go, Let God" approach to sanctification, a teaching with which I do not agree. Meyer's works are offered (and linked) on this site because he offers (in my opinion) much excellent, practical teaching. In the final analysis, as with any works written by men, the discerning reader should examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good and abstain from every form of evil, by examining the Scriptures daily with a Berean-like mindset (Acts 17:11).

Here is an article from the recommended resource Gotquestions.org which is an orthodox, conservative, fair and balanced source of Biblically based answers...

**Question: "What is the Keswick movement, and is it biblical?"**

**Answer:** The Keswick movement, also called the Higher Life movement, is a theological movement that originated in England in the early 19th century. It was heavily influenced by the teachings of [John Wesley](#), John William Fletcher, and Adam Clarke. Since 1875 promoters have organized the annual Keswick Convention. Various Christian leaders have been involved in the Keswick Convention through the years, including missionaries [Hudson Taylor](#) and Amy Carmichael, devotional writer Oswald Chambers, and evangelist [Billy Graham](#).

Essentially, Keswick theology teaches that the Christian life consists of two primary crises (or major turning points): [justification](#) and sanctification, both of which happen at different times in the life of the believer. After salvation one must have another encounter with the Spirit; otherwise, he or she will not progress into holiness or the "deeper" things of God. This second encounter with the Spirit, in Keswick terminology, is called "[entire sanctification](#)," "the [second blessing](#)," or "the second touch." This emphasis on a second, post-salvation experience corresponds with the Pentecostal idea of the "baptism" of the Spirit. Some Keswick teachers would even say that [sinless perfection](#) is possible after one receives the "second blessing." (**EDITORIAL COMMENT: BUT READ 1 John 1:8 WHICH CLEARLY REFUTES SUCH TEACHING**)

Although it is true that both [justification](#) (i.e., getting saved) and sanctification (i.e., becoming more like Christ) are vital aspects of the Christian life, overemphasizing the distinction between them tends to produce two different "classes" of Christian—those who are not being sanctified and those who are being sanctified. Moreover, according to Keswick theology, we can decide which camp we belong in, and the initiation of sanctification is something that depends on us after we are saved.

The tendency for theological error resulting from overemphasizing one side of a debate versus another has been demonstrated time and time again throughout church history. For example, the well-known debate between Calvinists and Arminians is frequently seen (somewhat inaccurately) as a "conflict" between God's sovereignty and man's autonomous free will. Many on both sides of this debate have a tendency to overemphasize one side of this "conflict" to the exclusion of the other. Those who emphasize God's sovereignty tend to minimize human volition, while those who emphasize man's ability to choose end up burdening themselves and others with the charge to behave perfectly before the Lord. In reality, both God's sovereignty and man's volition must be held in tension with one another, because both are taught in Scripture.

In the same way, Keswick theologians take a very real and biblical distinction between justification and sanctification and press it too far. Scripture tells us that all those who are saved (justified) are also being sanctified. God promises to finish the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6).

“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification” (Romans 6:22, NASB). We are freed from sin by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, but our freedom must lead to holiness (sanctification), not further sin. Rather, Paul tells us that we are “to consider [ourselves] to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11, NASB). The picture that we see painted in these verses is that it is impossible for the believer to persist in sin, once he or she has truly entered into a relationship with Christ.

Keswick theology says that one could be a genuine Christian and still say something like, “I have been justified, but I am not being sanctified, because I don’t see the need to be right now. I’m a Christian, surely; I’m just not as dedicated as others might be.” Of course, Scripture tells us that such an attitude is really evidence that the person speaking is not a believer (1 John 2:3–4). As a result, Keswick theology may give false assurance of salvation to those who refuse to submit to the Word of God but still want to think of themselves as truly saved.

Sanctification is a long, gradual, and sometimes tortuous process, and it is something that all believers will experience, not just those who have a “second touch” of the Spirit.

The Keswick movement has some commendable points—an emphasis on the lordship of Christ and personal holiness, discipleship, and a promotion of missionary activity. And some historic evangelistic efforts have begun at Keswick Conventions. However, Keswick theology’s insistence on a “second blessing,” its hierarchy of “sanctified” Christians vs. those who are “only justified,” and its bent toward the unbiblical doctrine of entire sanctification are causes of concern. ([Keswick Movement - Is it Biblical? - Gotquestions](#))

#### See Also:

- [Is there a second blessing subsequent to salvation?](#)
- [What is entire sanctification?](#)
- [Is sinless perfection possible in this life?](#)

#### Related Resources:

Dr. Andrew David Naselli who earned a Ph.D. in theology from Bob Jones University (2006), an M.A. in Bible from Bob Jones University (2003), and a B.A. in Bible from Baptist College of Ministry (2002). His 2006 dissertation is entitled, “Keswick Theology: A Historical and Theological Survey and Analysis of the Doctrine of Sanctification in the Early Keswick Movement, 1875-1920,” and its thesis is that Keswick theology’s view of sanctification is theologically erroneous. He and his wife, Jenni, live in Deerfield, IL and maintain [AndyNaselli.com](#).

[Keswick Movement and Theology – Justin Taylor - see especially the PowerPoint presentation](#)

- A Historical and Theological Survey of the Early Keswick Movement – [mp3](#)
- A Theological Analysis of the Early Keswick Movement – Part 1 – [mp3](#)
- A Theological Analysis of the Early Keswick Movement – Part 2 (with Q & A) – [mp3](#)
- [80 Slide Power Point Presentation](#)
- [Summary Notes - 5 pages](#) -

Naselli notes “Four commendable characteristics (of Keswick Theology): 1. affirms fundamental Protestant orthodoxy 2. exalts Christ and faith rather than self-dependence 3. warmly devotional 4. legacy of Christian service” (EDITORIAL COMMENT - I would add that it generally promotes dependence on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit rather than dependence on self, which is an emphasis that is thoroughly Biblical and tragically downplayed in the modern Christian church. Note we are not advocating, not promoting “Let go, let God” approach which is thoroughly unbiblical. Our approach would be a balance of God’s Supernatural Provision by the Spirit and Man’s Responsibility to Respond to the Spirit’s supernatural energizing work. And so a more accurate “slogan” would be something like “Let God and Let’s Go” emphasizing the mysterious interaction of God’s part and Man’s part. This is the approach to progressive sanctification which is advocated and promoted on [preceptaustin.org](#).

## Exodus 15:23-26 THE WELLS OF BITTERNESS

A Wilderness Episode. In the same chapter that records Israel’s triumphant ode we have the story of their experience at the Bitter

Wells. Of course it is only a coincidence, and yet how true to human life! We sing our songs of triumph one day, and within three days we have touched the bottom of disappointment and despair.

Three Days into the Wilderness. "Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur."

Character of the Wilderness. We must repeat what has been said already that the word wilderness does not imply a waste of sand, but a broad open expanse, which affords pasture enough for a nomad tribe wandering with their flocks. Waste and desolate so far as human habitations are concerned, the traveller will only encounter a few Bedouins. But everywhere the earth is clothed with a thin vegetation, scorched in summer drought, but brightening up, as at the kiss of the Creator, into fair and beautiful pastures, at the rainy season and in the neighbourhood of a spring.

It is quite true that it was no Eden, and the soil yielded no such profusion of vegetable life as made the valley of the Nile a riband of green. But it was at least the land of freedom, besides being the vestibule of the Land of Promise. Moreover, it was the school for the necessary discipline of the sons of God.

The First Day's March. We can almost picture the march of the first day. When they had sung their great song of Liberty, they saw the majestic cloud gathering itself up and moving slowly forward and the vast host began its march, with one last look on the faces of their dead masters. At the first sense of freedom, the greatness of their deliverance, the consciousness of God's guiding presence sustained and cheered them. On their right lay the deep waters of the Red Sea, on their left the mountains which support the great inland central plateau of the desert. It is quite likely that Moses and the leaders, with the armed men, would keep together, whilst the remainder of the great host of two million souls would spread themselves far and near, moving slowly, the women and children and aged perched on asses, whilst the able-bodied would talk together of the achievements of the past night, or break into snatches of their ode of victory.

The Second Day. The second day, judging from the reports of travellers, must have tried them greatly. They turned away from the sea into a labyrinth of mountains. The way lay over a white limestone plain, the dust of which had become caked into a hard surface, hot to the feet and dazzling to the eye. Treeless, waterless, shadowless! After Marah, we are told that there is hardly a single day's march that does not bring the traveller to some green oasis, or some tiny thread of watercourse; but there was nothing of this sort in that dusty waste. At last the evening drew its shadows over the blazing sky, the stars shone brilliantly above them, the night breeze refreshed them; they still had water in their water-skins, which they had filled at the Wells of Moses, and had provision enough for their hunger, so they slept and hoped for better things on the morrow.

The Third Day. But the third day was as monotonous and tiresome as the preceding. All the morning and afternoon they toiled on, not without many hard expressions and harder thoughts of Moses, whose noble service they were inclined to forget in the toilsomeness of the way. Benefactors must not count on gratitude. The mob broke the windows of Apsley House, the residence of the Duke of Wellington, though he had won Waterloo for them.

Disenchanted and Grumbling. This again is human life. The young lad who leaves school at sixteen or seventeen congratulates himself that he is free of restraint and lessons and the sense of inferiority. He is to go to business, to be apprenticed, or articled, to prepare for medicine or the bar. He sings his song of emancipation; but within three weeks or months he finds that the way of the new life blisters his feet and hems him in with restraint and compulsion. So rough is the wilderness that he is half-inclined to wish himself back at school.

Our Wilderness Experiences. A young man who has won the confidence of his employer, is one day suddenly commissioned to start within a few days for Shanghai or Tokio, as superintendent or manager of the business there. He is filled with a perfect ecstasy of joy. Here is his chance. At first the sense of freedom, the voyage, the interest of novel surroundings, lift him into a new world; but as he becomes familiar with the severe difficulties of the situation--the cunning native, the trying climate, the letters from the firm whose demands he cannot satisfy--he looks wistfully back to the evenings when the desk was closed till the morrow, and he went forth with absolutely no care upon his soul. All through life we have the wilderness experience.

In the Christian Life. Is it not so in Christian life? We have known what it was to pass through a memorable experience of the love and power of Christ. From the vantage-ground of a Transfiguration mountain we have seen the open door of Paradise. We have learned how to pray: have acquired the secret of victory; have become energised by the Holy Spirit. Emotion has risen to flood-tide. It has seemed as though we could never fail Christ again. Henceforth we should have hinds' feet, and walk on our high places. But after a while we become aware that the light is dying off the landscape. There is hardly enough left to guide our steps. The roughness of the path hurts our feet, its difficulty appals us. We have to live in our will. We are led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. We have such revelations of our own evil heart that we are tempted to despair. We cry out with the prophet, as we learn to know ourselves, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" and with the apostle, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" All this is the way of the wilderness.

Marah. The Wells of Bitterness. Towards the afternoon of the third day, on the sky-line there appeared a sign of verdure, which

inspired new hope. It was like the white sail of a ship to the castaway on a lonely island in mid-ocean, or the flag of a relieving squadron to a beleaguered fortress. The inspiration of hope flashed in every eye, and quickened every step. Men said to one another, "Moses was right after all." Women told their children that Jehovah had been mindful of them. The very beasts seemed to forget their languor and their loads. They pressed to the wells, and cast themselves down beside them for long refreshing draughts. "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?"

The "Marahs" of Ordinary Life. They were disheartened and disappointed. For three days when no wells were in sight they had kept up bravely. But when a well appeared to be within reach, but proved a failure, they were maddened with the sudden set-back to their hopes. A man may brace himself to live without human love; but when it comes almost within his reach, and then eludes him; he becomes broken with perpetual heartache, that darkens every subsequent day. Another may be perfectly content with a modest income and his pretty home, till he learns that he is the possible heir of an immense fortune. Only at the last moment is he suddenly deprived of his expectations, by the appearance of another heir, more closely akin to the testator. But from that moment the old zest in his more meagre lot is gone.

Or yet again, we may in our journey have reached the pools that promised us satisfaction, only to find them brackish. That marriage, that friendship, that new home, that partnership, that fresh avenue of pleasure, which promised so well turns out to be absolutely disappointing. Who has not muttered "Marah" over some desert well which he strained every nerve to reach, but when reached, it disappointed him!

Wordsworth tells us of the disheartenment and disappointment which befell him after the French Revolution. He had counted on the great issues of that stormy time. He had hoped for the birth of brotherhood and freedom. He thought that the race would slough off its evil past and rise to the dignity of man. But when instead of all these the tumbrel carried its daily contingent to the guillotine, and the streets of Paris for months ran blood, he says:

"I lost All feeling of conviction, and in fine Sick, wearied out with contrarities, Yielded up moral questions in despair."

Are you there to-day? Are you at Marah to-day? At least suspend your judgment. Don't murmur against Moses, and don't judge God. This is no time for a well-balanced verdict upon the way that you are being brought. Strike out if you will, but don't sum up. Remember, also, that others are probably suffering as heavily as you are, and more so. You are only one and by yourself, that man has a wife and children. Is his lot not worse than yours? In the theatre of ancient Greece, the actors depicted the great sorrows of their greatest heroes, and those who saw them, feeling that their heaviest griefs were inferior, returned to their homes to bear them nobly. The best thing to do, when you are despondent and sad, is to go forth and brighten the lot of some one else.

The Tree not a Special Creation. The Tree. And Moses "cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." We are not to suppose from these words that a tree had been created for this purpose. The answer to Moses' prayer came not in creating but showing the tree.

Travellers tell us that several trees are used by the Arabs for this very purpose. There is especially the bark of a certain tree, which has power to precipitate the mineral particles which embitter the waters, so that they become sweet and clear. It is a beautiful provision of Nature, an illustration of that wonderful law of compensation which is always cropping up from the divine foundations of the world.

The Antidote always near at Hand. In Nature the antidote grows near the poison, the dock-leaf beside the nettle. No need to travel far for healing. And for every sorrow to which we are subject there is a swift and sufficient cure. The tree grows near the Marah pool. For every sin there is a ready salvation. The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart. There is no need to ascend into the heavens, or descend into the depths. The Lord is always at hand, a very present help in time of trouble.

The Purpose of Miracles. But we need to be shown! "The Lord showed him the tree." When Hagar, in the dire need of her dying child, cast him under a shrub, and went and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot, God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, from which she filled her empty bottle-skin with water. It had been there all the while, but she was too blinded with grief to behold it. We need, similarly, to receive not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. All around us there are deliverances waiting for our appropriations and comfort. Cry to God; in the cry there is relief, and in answer to it He will show thee the balm in Gilead, the healing for thy wound, the fountain for thy thirst. This is probably the design of miracles, to point the way, and reveal what we had been otherwise too stupid to discern.

But surely to us the tree is that on which Jesus died. In evident allusion to the ancient word, "Cursed is he that hangeth on a tree," the apostle says, "His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree." (1Pe 2:24) How little did the tree of which the Cross was made realise the high honour for which it was intended as it grew in some deep forest-glade! But probably before His birth our Lord had seen it planted, and had watered it with His rain and nurtured it with His sun. This is the tree which, cast into the fountains of the

world's bitterness, makes them sweet.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,  
By the Cross are sanctified;  
Peace is there that knows no measure,  
Joys that through all time abide.

Christ the Tree that sweetens all Bitterness. Look to the Cross, disappointed soul. Did not Jesus suffer more than ever thou hast done? Look unto Him, the Author and Finisher of Faith, who instead of the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame. Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest thou be wearied and faint in thy mind. Besides, the Cross stands for self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-giving. Learn so to renounce and give thyself, that the hard lessons acquired in the school of sorrow may pass into action, and so into the experience of others. In addition, the Cross was the way to the Father's bosom. When the cup had been drained to the dregs, and the perfect obedience finished, the Father bade the Crucified sit with Him by His side.

Joy in the Looking Forward. In the light of that heaven of bliss, how small become the aches and pains of Time! Be of good cheer, then! If you have shared His griefs, you shall share His joys. If you have been crucified you shall reign. The sorrows of the present are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Your Marah shall never be named or brought to mind, when you find yourself beside the river of water of life that proceeds out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb. There you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not light on you, nor any heat; for the Lamb Who is in the midst of the Throne shall feed you, and shall lead you to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.

It is remarkable that at Marah God took to Himself a new name. "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

God gives Himself a New Name at Marah. We do not find Him giving Himself a new name at Elim, but at Marah. The happy experiences of life fail to reveal all the new truth and blessing that await us in God. It was after the pursuit of Chedorlaomer and the kings, and when there was fear of reprisals, that Jehovah's word came to His servant, saying, "I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward." It was in the agony of the conflict with Amalek that Israel knew Jehovah as Jehovah-Nissi--i.e. The Lord my banner.

Come to the Lord for Healing. It was as though He said: The tree has healed the waters, but its virtue was in Me. God has implanted healing properties in drugs and balsams and waters, that we might look through them all to Himself. Whether in physical, mental, or spiritual maladies, let us climb past the channel to the source, away from the ritual, the ministry, even the Cross, to Him who forgives all our iniquities, heals all our diseases, redeems life from the daily destructions that threaten it, and crowns us with loving kindness and tender mercy.

Let us come to our Lord for healing, with whatever disease we have in this complex nature of ours. When once the spirit receives the inbreathing of His perfect health, it spreads to the soul, and even the body experiences quickening through His Spirit that dwelleth in us.

The Arrival at Elim. After Marah, Elim. "And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees: and they encamped there by the waters."

They say that Elim must have been the Wady Ghurundel, where a considerable spring wells out at the foot of a sandstone rock, forming a pool of clear water, around which quite a considerable amount of vegetation clusters. This forms a welcome contrast to the wilderness. We can easily realise the satisfaction with which the weary host flung themselves on the grass, beneath the shadow of the palm-trees, and drank refreshing draughts to the full.

The Elims follow the Marahs. There are many Elims in life's pilgrimage. The Home, the Weekly Rest-Day, the House of God, the quiet beauty of the countryside, the interspace of rest that comes to most of us amid the stress of our life-work. And those hours of fellowship with our Saviour, when we are fed on the hidden manna, and drink of the spiritual rock, and are healed by the leaves of the tree of life---these again are green oases. But remember the Elims follow the Marahs, because Christ's soldiers must be taught that life is stern and real, and that the intervals of rest are not the goal, but the harbour on Hill Difficulty, where we stay for a brief interval, ere we again brace ourselves for the climb.

## Exodus 16:1 THE FOOD FROM HEAVEN

The Rest at Elim. Elim with its twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees had been a welcome resting-place after the three days' journey into the wilderness; but it could be nothing more. That small pool of clear water, with its grassy margin, its tamarisk and

dwarf palm trees and other shrubs, which is still pointed out as the Elim, must have been very attractive to thirsty lips and weary feet, but it could not be for long the abiding-place of the heirs of promise.

Our Elims. It has been truly said that God does not multiply our Elims, for He cannot trust us there. He gems the earth with them, to teach us that it is not all blasted, and that we are not a cursed race in a cursed world. He sets them before our eyes as witnesses that there are worlds where there is no bitterness in the fountains of life. He causes us to lie down in them, only that we may be better able to tread in the paths of righteousness in which He leads us. He suffers us not to linger there, but summons us forth, that privation and toil may brace our moral muscles, and make us fit to join the pilgrim race. Rest in Elim, but never ungird. Drink, but like Gideon's men, who lapped in haste. Slumber if you will, but let your lamps be trimmed and your staff ready to your hand, that at the first movement of the cloud by night or day you may start again on the wilderness-march.

In the Wilderness of Sin. On leaving Elim, the way lay at first through a labyrinth of rich sandstone, like the outer avenues of some great temple; and indeed they were on the outskirts of a Temple not made with hands, where they were to meet God. There is much wonderful scenery between Elim and the wilderness of Sin, notably at that spot alluded to in the itinerary recorded in Numbers. (Num 33:10, etc.) "They removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red Sea." It was there, as Dean Stanley reminds us, that they had their final glimpse of Egypt on the farther shores of the bright sea that formed the base of the view.

The Threatened Famine. "And they removed from the Red Sea, and pitched in the wilderness of Sin." It was a toilsome journey, in part along the strand, and then through scorching valleys; but the general distress was greatly augmented by the failure of their stores of food. Famine threatened the host. Moses and Aaron were assailed with angry murmurs; and regrets were freely expressed that they had not remained in the slavery of Egypt, where at least they had flesh-pots and bread to the full. It was under such circumstances that the Lord said to Moses, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you."

### **THE MIRACLE OF THE MANNA. (The Manna.)**

It was a distinct act of God. He spread the table for them in the wilderness, which they had deemed to be impossible. They had spoken against Him, saying, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Ps 78:19) But He did more, He gave them to partake of the corn of heaven, and man did eat angels' food. He thus gave evidence of His inexhaustible resources, and showed Himself willing and able to supply all their physical need, whilst they learned His great lessons.

What was Manna? Many theories have been advanced to account for this great miracle. Some have ascribed it to the honey dew which falls in the desert, and refreshes the exhausted traveller; others to the tree-manna which exudes from the tamarisk tree; others again have made much of an edible lichen which grows in the desert; but none of these hypotheses meet the conditions of the case. For instance, how can these theories account for the abundance of the manna, its cessation on the seventh day, its perennial provision for forty years, or its sufficiency as the staple of human life? We are quite prepared to admit that there was a substratum of Nature beneath the miracle, as there was in the gift of quails, in the feeding of the five thousand, and in all the miracles; but in the last resort there can be no doubt that it was the act of God, calling into operation, as He invariably does, some far-reaching natural laws and processes.

The Feeding an Act of Grace. But it was a supreme act of Grace. It is an astonishing fact that there was not, on God's part, a single severe word in reproof of the people's murmurings, far less any punishment. At a later period, when they had been longer under His training, they were severely punished when they gave way to a similar outburst of complaint. (Num 21:6; 1Co 10:10) "Some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer, but in this preliminary stage of their education God made allowances for them, large and merciful in extent. Both here and at Rephidim, when they tempted and proved Him, He did not chide, but bore with them as a father with his querulous child. Surely He knew their frame, and remembered they were but dust. He put the gentlest construction on their wild speeches, on their forgetfulness of the great benefits they had received, on their ingratitude, on their accusations and reproaches to His servants, on their exaggerated estimate of Egypt, on their distrust and unbelief of Himself. In the touching words of the Psalmist: "He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." (Ps 78:39) He wrought for His Holy Name's sake.

As well as a Test. The daily gift was intended as a test. "The people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My Law, or no."

The gift of manna during forty years, many of which were stained by sinful murmuring and disobedience, was a perpetual exhibition of God's patience, long-suffering, and fidelity to His promise. But the rules prescribed for the gathering of the manna were a prolonged test of their obedience. They were also trained to dependence, and self-control, and care for one another, as they stooped daily over the desert-floor.

And a Divine Revelation. The gift of manna was connected with a Divine Theophany. "And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the Lord: for He hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of

Jehovah appeared in the cloud."

Aaron took the initiative, probably because Moses was withdrawn in the secret chamber of prayer. But how remarkable that revelation of God's glory appears, when we compare it with the theophany that closes the Book of Job, or the look that our Lord cast on Peter as He left the council-chamber! There are times in all religious experiences, when the thought that God is, that God is near, that God can, that God will, and that God does, is enough to silence every murmur and hush every fear. God is here in this wilderness with me, and I dare not renounce hope or utter a word of complaint.

The Abundance of Quails. He did more than supply the necessary support of life. "He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations." (Ps 78:27-28)

Quails still pass over the Sinaitic Peninsula in vast migratory flocks on their way from the interior of Africa. They can easily be secured, because, exhausted with their journey, they fly near the ground, on which they often fall through sheer weariness. Tristram tells us that in Algeria also he has found the ground covered with them over many acres, and they were so fatigued that they scarcely moved until almost trodden upon. The miracle, therefore, lay in the timeliness of their advent. God always uses existing Nature as His basis, modifying and altering as slightly as possible, augmenting the quantity, but not exerting more supernatural power than needful, or departing further from the established course of Nature than required. How suggestive it is that He did not confine Himself to the gift of the necessary manna, but added the luxury of quails! We are reminded of the preparation by our Lord of fish as well as bread at that memorable morning meal beside the calm waters of the lake.

God responsible for His Followers. This God is ours to-day. When He is directly responsible for our circumstances, we shall find him faithful. Is not this a particular instance of that great law? If the people had gone wantonly and wilfully into the desert, there would have been no obligation on God to supply their need. But God had led them there. His moving cloud was directing every step. Even Moses was not responsible for the route. Obviously, then, He could not leave them to starve in the wilderness. When once we have started forth at His command, and have gone on His providentially- indicated way, we may say it reverently that God cannot refrain from assisting us, save at the loss of His dearest attributes. It is quite true that we have to obey His laws. We must go out and gather: we must observe the laws of rest: we must not gather more than we need: we must care for our families and homes. But these observances do not touch the primal and gracious faithfulness of the Father of lights, in whom is no variability, neither shadow cast by turning.

But Obedience Necessary. Trust Him absolutely. After all, every meal comes from above. Our Father in Heaven gives us our daily bread. Every day we are sitting at His table. Though our bread comes through the sweat of our brow, we only gather what He has provided. Come to His table every morning, and sit there till He spread it. He may keep thee waiting for a little, but watch and wait. "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

### **THE MYSTICAL APPLICATION OF THE MIRACLE. (The Cry of Humanity.)**

We learn from John 6. that the manna was a type of the Son of Man, and that He was "the true bread from heaven." If this be so, we must infer that the whole race .for which He stands must be stricken with hopeless hunger. The cry of the prodigal in the far country, which may have been Alexandria, Ephesus, or Rome, is the cry of humanity,—"I perish with hunger." The insatiable passion, for pleasure and money, the restlessness of modern life, with its incessant cry for something new, the weary look on so many faces in the fine carriages of the parks or the crowds in the streets, tell the same tale of those who would fain appease the cravings of their appetite with husks fit for swine, but still are perishing with hunger. Is not this a fact in the heart-life of every individual, who is thoughtful and experienced enough to diagnose his true condition? And it is because of this hunger, as an indispensable element in the life of man, that we have absolute confidence in a great future for the religious life of mankind.

Indifference to Religion only Temporary. We have been told lately that the whole of our civilisation is slipping away from the religion out of which it sprang. Men are forsaking the churches where their fathers worshipped, are ceasing to pray, are shutting out God from all their thoughts. We have not yet gone the length of the French Revolutionists, who sought to blot out the name of God from literature, and to alter every name of day and street that referred to ancient religious observances. Practically, however, tens of thousands are doing what amounts to the same thing. But this is only a temporary phase. Ultimately our race will be tired of the husks, tired of spending money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not. Again these places of worship will be filled with teeming crowds.

"Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away." (Isa 49:17-19)

Man Really Hungers for God. But let us be quite sure as to what it is that men hunger for. It is not for mere formularies, even though

these may express truths. It is not for theories concerning inspiration or eternal punishment. It is not for this or that ecclesiastical system. No; the heart of man, made for God, hungers for God. It will accept a false religion rather than none, But a modicum of the knowledge of God. But with how certain an appetite of avidity will the heart of man accept the Gospel of Christ, when it is freed from adventitious circumstances, and presented in all its native beauty, not only to the mind, but to the heart!

Truth/done not Enough. Beyond this, however, it must be said that Truth alone is not enough to satisfy the heart of humanity. We crave the concrete. We desire that the Absolute should clothe itself in tangible flesh and blood. And has not this natural yearning been met abundantly in Christ, Who is Himself the Truth?

True Religion Known by its Fruits. This is the ultimate evidence of the Divine origin of Christianity. "The bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." Show us that which is capable of giving life unto the world. Not to an individual here or there, or to this or that community, but to the world. Show us a religion which gives life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins; and that does this irrespective of national and racial distinctions; and you have produced a religion which must have come down from heaven.

The effect of all our fellowship with Christ should be "more life and fuller." We do not need the emotional or intellectual, but the building up of spiritual force, so that we shall be strong to suffer or to wait, strong to do or dare, strong to minister to the sorrows and sins of men. These fruits are the inevitable criterion of right feeding. Where they are absent, nothing will convince us that you are feeding on Christ; whereas if you feed on Him there will be no "impossible" in your vocabulary, no "peradventure" in your outlook.

### **LET US TAKE A PARTICULAR INSTANCE OF THE FEEDING OF THE HUNGER OF THE HEART. (Jesus Satisfied the Apostles.)**

The Apostles furnish a precise illustration of the way in which Jesus satisfies the soul. As young men they hungered for the Bread of God. For this they left their native haunts beside the Lake of Galilee, and came down the Jordan valley to the spot where John was baptising. He had caught a glimpse of the coming Christ, which he passed on in burning speech. But this failed to satisfy those eager souls, and when the Lord was manifested they turned to Him, and fed on His every word. His words were found, and they did eat them, and they became the joy and rejoicing of their hearts all through those happy months of fellowship.

A Keener Spiritual Hunger. But as they knew Him better they became hungry with a more refined appetite, hardly knowing what they wanted. Therefore they plied Him with questions: Whither goest Thou? Show us the Father! How wilt Thou manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world? All these were suggestive of a deeper and more passionate hunger than would be satisfied by a physical presence, however beloved and fair. And this also was met when He tarried with them, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Though they had known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth they knew Him so no more. They had become joined to the Lord by a spiritual affinity, and ate of the spiritual manna, and drank of the spiritual Rock.

But even that was not enough. When they beheld Him return to the Father, leaving them alone in the midst of the world, and when a full realisation of the need of the world broke on them, they began to hunger after a flesh fashion. Their soul followed hard after Him. They longed to be endued with His power, to go forth to continue and consummate His work," and to win the world for His sceptre.

Hunger and Thirst in Heaven. It is said that in heaven they neither hunger nor thirst. Every longing heart shall be satisfied. And yet even there the Beatitude must hold good, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Oh blessed hunger! Always perfectly met and satisfied, and yet always breaking out with new appetite and desire for things not seen as yet!

### **THERE IS A PARTICULAR AND PERSONAL APPLICATION OF ALL THIS FOR US ALL. (An Application to Ourselves.)**

Has not God humbled us, and suffered us to hunger, and fed us with manna, that He might make us know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God? Are you feeding on that Bread? You have been laying up for yourselves treasures which moth and rust corrupt: you have been building big barns, and saying to your soul, Soul, thou hast much goods stored up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry. But how vain it all is! "Labour not," saith the Master, "for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." (Jn 6:27)

The Manna an Emblem. Was the manna needful for the body? Even more urgently is Christ needed for the soul. Alas, that our spiritual health is so impaired that we have lost our appetite!

Was the manna given freely for all the camp of Israel? Even so is Christ given for all. He is the bread of life for the world. Every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have eternal life.

Was the manna so accessible that the people had only to stretch forth the hand to take it? The word of eternal life is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart. There is no need, therefore, to climb into heaven or descend into the depth.

Was the manna white in colour, and sweet to the taste? A mastermind in our days has made his hero, a well-disposed heathen, see in Christ, even before he could believe in Him, "the White Christ."

Did the manna distil noiselessly in the night? So Christ cometh not with observation--not in the wind, the fire, the earthquake, but when other voices are hushed.

Our Own Part. Was it needful to gather the manna? So Christ calls Himself bread, to bring this point out strongly, not only what He is, but what we must do with Him. He must be received, fed upon, inwardly appropriated. As the mouth receives, and the digestive organs assimilate and transform our food into vital force, so we must feed spiritually upon our Lord, until He be formed in us.

Except ye eat and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you. But if you come to Him you shall never hunger; if you believe in Him you shall never thirst. Take thy fill, then, eat the fat and drink the sweet. The Body of the Lord Jesus, given for thee, shall preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting Life. Take then and eat, to thy great comfort, strength, and encouragement!

## Exodus 17:1-15 REPHIDIM

The Approach to Sinai. On leaving the seashore the march had turned eastwards towards the great mass of mountains known generally as Sinai. The route is described as inexpressibly grand. On each side of the narrow passes rise peaks and precipices of every form and colour. Grey, red, brown, green, chalk-white, and raven-black are the hues of those entrance-gates of the most august temple of the world. Here, from before Abram left Haran, the Egyptian Government had worked mines of copper and turquoise by convict labour. It is not improbable that there were many Hebrews amongst these wretched beings, and if so, the host may have been led by this route in order to have the opportunity of freeing them from a slavery, compared with which I should suppose and hope that there is nothing in the world of to-day so bad.

The Israelites Disappointed and Thirsty. Up to this point the sufferings of the pilgrim-host, though trying, had not been insupportable; but on leaving Dophkah (Num 33:12) and entering the Wady Feiran, the whole camp, man and beast, became severely pressed. The oases which had varied the monotony of the desert failed them; the granite walls on either hand reflected an intolerable glare and heat, and the failure of the supply of water threatened to drive the whole camp to frenzy. At Marah the water had been unpalatable; here there was no water at all. The brook which at times waters the valley was dry, as it often becomes still; and perhaps the presence of vegetation along the empty water-course made the disappointment more tantalising. The word Rephidim signifies "resting-places," and everyone had been buoyed up during the stiff experiences of the last two days with the happy expectations which that name suggested. Obviously, therefore, the contrast between hope and reality was the more exasperating.

"And the people thirsted there for water." Hunger is bad enough to bear, but it affects only one organ of the body, whereas thirst sets the whole being on fire. It mounts to the brain and burns like fever in the blood. The little children were drooping like flowers; the cattle were on the verge of exhaustion, and lay panting on the ground. The scouts searched everywhere for water in vain, and came back with but one report, that there was no water anywhere to be found.

### THE TEMPTING OF MASSAH. (Discontent and Rebellion.)

At first the people chode, or strove, with Moses, wilfully ignoring the fact that their route was determined by the cloud; then their murmurings became so threatening that Moses really feared for his life; and finally they began to question whether the Lord were among them or not. "They tempted the Lord," i.e. they doubted Him, questioned His love and care, impeached His righteousness, and finally suggested that He had deserted them, and all because He did not act in the way they expected. Ignoring the lessons of the plagues, the marvels of the Exodus, the triumphal passage of the Red Sea, they actually questioned whether God were with them at all. In the Gospels the same spirit was always challenging Christ for signs. Not content with His spotless holiness, His words and deeds, His fulfilment of ancient prediction, they were always asking for the outward and sensible evidence of God's presence and power.

Modern Questionings. In our own time the same demand is made, the same challenge repeated. Men are not satisfied with the moral evidences of the Being and providence of God, they point to the physical evils around, the hunger and thirst, the poverty and misery, the pollution and self-will of our times, crying--If there be a God, why does He permit these things? Why does He allow suffering and sorrow? Why does He not interpose? And then, when the heavens are still silent, they infer that there is no God, that the sky is an empty eye-socket, and that there is nothing better than to eat and drink, because death is an eternal sleep.

Our Rephidim. Has not something of that spirit infected our own peace? We have served Him from our youth, have even kept His Glory and Kingdom before our eyes, have denied ourselves for His sake, have had many an answer to prayer, have reckoned that there was a very special alliance and friendship between Him and us. Then suddenly we have been brought to our Rephidim, in

which there has been no drop of water. We have come into some bitter situation of personal or relative suffering, we have cried out for help, but the heavens have seemed as brass, and we have been inclined to doubt whether our religious life has not been one long deception.

When Faith is Relaxed. Does God care for me? Does He hear prayer? Is He with me, as I thought? Instead of saying, God is with me, He is steering the boat, He is leading the pilgrimage, He is adequate for this emergency. He has borne me on eagles' wings from Egypt, and cannot desert me now--we say, Is He among us or not? It becomes then a debatable question, Aye or Nay; and when once faith has relaxed its unswerving affirmation, we are on an ocean without chart or compass, or trying to cross a quaking quagmire.

Life's Difficult Hours. Life is full of these difficult hours, when we are tempted to forget all the past, and question everything that we had once most steadfastly believed. Instead of doing that, we ought to fall back on all that God had been to us, and insist that He is still all that He was. The incident which confronts us may be difficult, but it shall not rob us of our faith. We will still trust, and not be afraid.

His love in time past forbids me to think,  
He'll leave me at last, in trouble to sink,  
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,  
Confirms His good pleasure,  
To help me right through.

Gathering Wealth for Experience. Suppose you are descending a mountain after a long day in its heights, and are following a stream which has been increasing with every hundred yards. Finally you emerge from the woods, and begin to pass the farms which, one below another, climb down to the valley. To you as you pass them in their snug enclosures of green vegetation, they seem to be utterly and absolutely distinct. But they are not. The stream runs through them, and more; the rains are always washing down the alluvial soil of the upper to the under. Melting snows, spring rains, the very attritus of the ground, makes each of them richer and richer still, and the bees flying from one to another mix their products. So it is with life. Some men pass from one experience to another, as though there was no connection between them; but others are always gathering wealth and richness from the earlier experiences to help them in the later. They say, "God was with me in my boyhood, He will not desert me in my age: He was with me in six troubles, and will not leave me in the seventh: He that spared not His own Son, will in His own good time and way, with Him freely give all else." Such never say, Is God? but God is. They that come to God believe that God is. Such is the new order of them that diligently seek Him.

## **STILL THE QUESTION RETURNS ON US, WHY DID GOD ALLOW HIS PEOPLE TO SUFFER?**

### **(The Purpose of Suffering.)**

Without doubt, one reason is that suggested afterwards, He wished to reveal them to themselves, that they might know the evil of their hearts. "Know therefore," was the incontestable reproof of their leader in after days, "that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people. Remember, forget thou not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou wentest forth out of the land of Egypt. (Dt 9:6-7)

Intentional Discipline. This stern discipline was also intended to make them rely on God, rather than on Moses or circumstances. He suffered them to thirst, that He might make them know that man doth not live by rains and rivers only, but by God's provision, however it may come. Take, for instance, the child of some rich inheritance, whose estates, stocks, shares, and bank-balance, are a fourfold wall against the intrusion of want. For that child, the Providence which gives our daily bread is a nonentity. It is when all these have passed out of his life, and he is compelled to hang hour after hour on the care of God, with no obvious means of support, that he offers the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer with absolute sincerity.

Inhabitants of the Sinaitic Region. But there was a deeper reason than these. At the time of the Exodus the Sinaitic peninsula was mainly peopled by two tribes of Bedouin. The Kenites, chiefly pastoral and inoffensive, claimed descent from Abraham, and were closely connected with Israel through Moses' marriage with the daughter of one of their chiefs.

The Amalekites. The Amalekites were one of the great nations of antiquity. Balaam said, "Amalek was the first of the nations." (Num 24:20) Their traditions assert that their earliest home was the neighbourhood of the Persian Gulf, from which they were driven always southwards by the advancing power of Assyria. At this time they covered the country with their extensive flocks.

They did not challenge the hosts of Israel on their emergence from the Red Sea, either because they understood their destination to be Canaan, the route to which would soon take them out of their territories, or because they had left the seaboard for the mountain pastures, clothed at that period in their most attractive and abundant dress. But when Israel, as we have seen, marched southwards, their progress was eyed with the utmost jealousy and suspicion. It was extremely distasteful to the Amalekite chiefs to learn that

these aliens were enjoying the abundant pastures and palm-groves of an oasis like Elim. Probably a council of war was held, at which it was unanimously agreed that measures must be concerted for the arrest and turning back of the march.

**Cutting Off the Stragglers.** After the manner of the East, messengers had been sent out far and wide, to summon all the available forces of the peninsula to the conflict: and until they were assembled, orders were issued that light-armed troops, on swift camels, should hang on the rear of the Israelite host, cutting off its stragglers, pillaging its baggage, and doing as much damage as possible.

"Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God." (Dt 25:17-18)

**Preparing for the First Battle.** As God looked down on the land through which the people were slowly making their way He beheld these gathering hosts. He saw them mustering from the rock-dwellings of Petra, from the rich pasture-lands of Kadesh, from the rolling downs in which the mighty Lebanon range sinks into the sand-wastes of the desert. It may be that at the very hour when this murmuring outbreak occurred these marshalled hosts were within an hour's march of the camp of Israel. He knew it all, and suffered them to thirst, that on the background of their pain He might work a supreme miracle of power, which would be their fortress and stronghold in the day of Amalek's attack.

The composure with which Moses prepared to resist Amalek; the absolute confidence with which Israel fell in with his measures of resistance; and the courage with which these undisciplined troops fought their first fight, would be absolutely inexplicable, unless we had the record of the slaking of their thirst by the smiting of the Rock.

**Moses Composed.** Consider the composure of Moses. Hitherto in his difficulties he has cried unto the Lord, not of course in despair, but as urgently needing Divine help. Here, however, he does not hesitate a moment, but bids Joshua select the most promising of the armed men for the fight, and announces that he will stand on an adjoining hill with the rod of God in his hand.

**The Ground of His Courage.** He betrayed no sign of discomposure! Why? Because yonder across the valley was the Rock which like a cistern had yielded streams of water; because he had seen God standing there before him on the Rock; and because at that moment he could hear the gurgle of the streams as they poured down those water-courses, as though from the melting snows of Lebanon. Could he doubt that the Lord of Hosts was with them, and that the God of Jacob was their refuge? Though an host should encamp against him, his heart would not fear; though war should rise against him, in this he would be confident!

**The Miracle that Banished Mistrust.** Consider the confidence of the people in his leadership. Suppose that Amalek had come out against them in an earlier part of the march, and before these miracles of power had been wrought, through the instrumentality of Moses and his wonderful rod, might there not have been a good deal of questioning, whether it was well to leave him in uncontrolled command? There might have been an attempt to substitute a council of war, and to wrest from his aged hands the direction of the battle. But after what they had witnessed of his fellowship with Jehovah and of Jehovah's answer to his appeal, they had neither the will nor the opportunity to dispute his authority. He had deserved well of them: he stood right with God: his rod was the symbol of victory. Had it not smitten the flinty rock, so that the rock had been turned into a pool of water and the flint into a spring? (Ps 114:8.) They too saw that stream, and heard the music of those waters, and even their murmurings were silenced and their mistrust banished.

**The Courage of the Hebrew Warriors.** Consider also the courage of these chosen warriors. Yesterday they were complaining that Moses had brought them into the wilderness; now they are actually adventuring their lives against a highly equipped and disciplined foe. They were strong in a confidence of which Amalek could form no conjecture. These ancient masters of the peninsula had said among themselves, "We shall easily prevail over this rabble of escaped slaves.

They have no water, do not understand the country, and possess few arms. They are harried, discouraged, and will easily fall our prey." Little did they know that God's people were nourished from secret springs, not of water alone, but of courage and faith. All these traits were directly due and traceable to the anguish out of which Israel had been so recently delivered by the Almighty.

But is that not the key to much of the experience that falls to our lot? Does not God lead us into sore straits, and deliver us, that we may be prepared for greater troubles which He sees ahead? He smites rocks of granite, to touch which blisters our hands, and makes even these yield supplies, that when presently we descry the troops of Amalek drawn up to dispute and arrest our progress, we may be of good courage, and know that the Lord will fight for and deliver us.

#### **THE LESSON OF THE UPLIFTED ROD. (The Uplifted Rod of Prayer.)**

We are told that "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword"; but the edge of the sword would have been unavailing, had it not been for that uplifted rod.

At the opening of the battle, the great leader was seen by the troops ascending a spur of rock, well within view, first standing and then sitting, with the rod of God in his hand. Hour after hour, he remained there with the rod uplifted; and as the afternoon advanced

in that long hard-fought day, it was noticed that on either side a venerable man upbore his wearied arms. "Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other, until the going down of the sun."

Prayer is Labour. That attitude has always been interpreted as significant of intercessory prayer. There are many among us who cannot go down into the battle, but can sit on their chair or lie on their couch and pray. Prayer is labour! We are told of Epaphras, when far from his people, that he laboured in prayer for the Colossian Church. Without doubt, prayer of the right kind means strenuous and exhausting labour. It is the most exhausting exercise that the soul can possibly sustain. But prayer makes all the difference in our fight against principalities and powers. When the arms of the Church are uplifted, her troops prevail, and when let down, they are defeated. Amalek could not connect the two, but Israel connected them. The outside world cannot understand why, just now, the Church is losing her hold on the masses, and so few additional adherents swell her ranks; but we know--her arms are sunken to the ground. If only they were uplifted, the legions of the Cross would advance with their ancient prowess, and victory would attend their arms. Why do you fail in your Christian life? Because you have ceased to pray! Why does that young Christian prevail? Ah, in the first place, he prays for himself; but also, there are those in distant places, mothers, sisters, grandparents, who would think that they sinned, if they ceased to pray for him, and they will not fail to lift up their hands for him until the going down of the sun of their lives!

A Symbol of God's Presence. But though that is all true, it is not all the truth. There is no word about prayer in the narrative, and sitting is not precisely the attitude of prayer. Were not that uplifted hand and rod rather the symbols of the presence and help of God? Moses not only prayed that God would help them, but affirmed that He was helping, that He was in the field, that Amalek was being driven before the Lord and before His host. Faith, says Coleridge, is an affirmation and act, that makes eternal Truth be fact.

Jehovah-Nissi. This interpretation is confirmed by the subsequent action of Moses in building an altar, and calling it Jehovah-Nissi, "the Lord is my Banner." When we speak of a banner, we think of a flag, the piece of drapery which is attached to the banner-pole. But the ancients had only a pole with a bright metal ornament at the top. Moses' rod, then, was a banner in the Oriental use of the term. But a banner for what? For the host of Israel? No, but for that other host, the host of God's unseen embattled warriors that were riding to the fray. It was at that moment that Joshua must have received the first inkling of the great truth, which broke on him on the plains of Jericho, when the Angel of the Covenant said, "I am come as captain of another, a third host, of the Lord's host."

The Key of Victory. This is the key of victory. You may be peevish and petulant to-day, because you look only to Moses, i.e. to human strength and help; but directly you look beyond Moses to God, you become strong and glad, and in that very spot of Rephidim, the name of which you had changed into Meribah and Massah, you shall gain the victory of your life.

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make, What heavy burdens from our bosoms take, What parched grounds refresh as with a shower! We kneel, and all around us seems to lower; We rise, and all the distant and the near, Stands forth in sunny outline, bravo and clear;

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### **THERE IS A MYSTICAL SIDE TO ALL THIS.**

(1) Israel represents the Church in her warfare against the religions of darkness, the wicked spirits that rule in the Heavenlies. She, with her Lord, is engaged in putting down all rule, authority, and power till God is all in all. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers."

(2) (Symbolism of the Smitten Rock.) The Smitten Rock is surely our Lord Jesus, smitten for us. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1Co 10:4) He was smitten for our offences, bruised for our iniquities! One of the soldiers pierced His side, and there came out blood and water! "Rock of Ages, cleft for me!"

(3) The Church must drink of that Rock-water, flowing clear as the Holy Spirit of Pentecost; so only will she be able to cope with her spiritual foes. Drink, ye thirsty souls, drink, yea, drink abundantly and deeply, for Amalek will be upon you to-morrow; but he will have no power at all against those who have cleansed themselves in the healing streams of the blood and have learned to drink of the living water.

Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save me from its wrath and power.

## **Exodus 18:1-27 THE ECONOMY OF FORCE**

Jethro's Suggestion. There is a noteworthy parallel between the circumstances narrated in this chapter and those of which we are informed in Act 6:1-15. Here the Hebrew people, emerging from centuries of slavery and oppression, which had almost obliterated the spirit of nationality, suddenly assumes a highly organised condition. Out of Jethro's suggestion sprang an organisation which laid the foundations of the national polity, and has existed with more or less permanence amid all the other changes that have swept over that remarkable race. In Acts via similar movement was necessitated by the immense increase of converts.

"In these days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews ...

And the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve Tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." (Act 6:1-3)

In each case the increased organisation was a sign of vitality, and led to the immediate strengthening and increase of the entire movement. It is a great forward step in evolution, when the bony case which had been exterior, as in the crab, becomes interior, as in the mammal. Life always tends towards increased complexity in organisation.

Jethro's Arrival. There is little to detain us in the circumstances which led up to this great step of advance. Whether Jethro was the father-in-law or brother-in-law of Moses is still undecided by the experts, and does not greatly concern us. The Hebrew word may mean either. He had given shelter to Zipporah and her two sons until he heard of the Exodus; and then crossed the peninsula from the extreme east to the Mount of God, somewhere in the near neighbourhood of Horeb. First, he desired to renew the friendly relations which had subsisted during the forty years of companionship in pastoral and tribal interests; and secondly, he desired to restore the wife and boys whom he had received as a sacred trust.

His Meeting with Moses. The meeting was thoroughly Oriental. On the announcement of his approach, Moses went out to meet him, knelt down and touched the ground with his forehead, then kissing his relative's hand, he rose and kissed him on both cheeks. Each asked the other of his welfare with the minuteness and prolixity still characteristic of the sons of the desert, with whom time is a less precious commodity than with ourselves. The greetings of husband and wife, of father and children, would probably be reserved for the privacy of the tent.

As Moses told of the marvellous dealings of God with Israel, not only in delivering them from Pharaoh, but during all the travail of their journey, Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which Jehovah had shown, and burst out into an ascription of adoration and praise.

Declaration of the Supremacy of God. Perhaps, up to that hour, like the generality of the heathen, he had believed in a plurality of gods, and regarded the God of Israel as only one among many equals. But under the marvellous recital given by Moses, he renounced that creed, and declared his belief that Jehovah was supreme over all gods. How much might be done, if only religious men to-day would recount their experiences! Many a wavering scale would be turned in favour of true religion, if only you would begin to tell of God's dealings with your own life. "Go home to thy friends," said our Lord, to the man from whom He had cast a legion of demons, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."

Orders of Religious Life. It is remarkable that Jethro appears to have acted as priest in the sacrifice which followed. We have already been told that the sheikh was also the priest of Midian. (Exo 3:1) Like Melchizedek he was the priest of the Most High God. The fact of Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel participating in the sacred feast which followed shows that they recognised orders of religious life and priestly administration outside the limits of their own race: and this confirms us in the view, which surely needs no arguing, and which Malachi so dearly teaches: For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, God's name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered in His name, and a pure offering. (Mal 1:11)

A Striking Spectacle. The spectacle he witnessed on the following day was remarkable. From morning till evening he beheld Moses sitting in the midst of a great throng of people, slowly ploughing his way through an immense number of causes, which were submitted to his adjudication. Even if we pare down the numbers of the Exodus to half, or a quarter, of a million of people, it is easy to see what an overwhelming task lay on the Lawgiver, who was called upon in his single person to combine the legislative and judicial functions.

The Hebrew Character. The difficulty lay, not only in the quantity but the quality of the people. The Hebrew character has always been stiff-necked and intractable. But, in addition, they had just emerged from generations of slavery, with all its debasing and demoralising effects. There were as yet no Decalogue nor code of laws. The very effect of their recent emancipation was to induce the idea that they were free to do as they chose. The first experiences of the French Revolution were bewildering and disappointing to all thoughtful souls. How Wordsworth laments it! It seemed as if all hope of Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood was to be drowned in a deluge of sensuality and bloodshed. So with Israel, they were no longer under the despotic rule of Pharaoh and his myrmidons. Their knowledge of Jehovah was extremely vague. There was no general standard of appeal. The very rebound from centuries of oppression was in the direction of self-assertion and lawlessness. In addition the recent rout of Amalek may have left in the possession of the victors an immense amount of costly property, as in the experience of Gideon afterwards. (Jdg 8:25, etc.) Disputes about the proper division of these may have greatly added to the weight of that day's business.

Weight of Responsibility Too Great. In any case, at the end of the day, Moses was absolutely worn out, and even then the people were not satisfied. There was therefore justice in Jethro's remark: "Wasting thou wilt waste away, both thou and this people that is with thee."

Jethro's Plan Adopted by Moses. Jethro therefore suggested a division of labour, founded on the system still in vogue among the Arabs. Causes were in the first instance to be judged by rulers of tens,--which recalls our own tithing,--from which there was an appeal to the rulers of fifties, from them to the rulers of hundreds, and finally to the rulers of thousands. Difficult causes, which the rulers of thousands felt themselves incompetent to decide, were reserved for the judgment of Moses. After referring this to God, as was his wont, Moses adopted this good advice, and by this arrangement the whole nation profited immensely.

Its Advantages. The advantages were obvious. Moses was henceforth able to concentrate himself on the higher branches of his great calling. He was for the people God-ward, as mediator, looking into the bosom of God, where, as Hooker says, "Law hath her seat." He had also time to bring the difficult causes to God. Then, turning to the people, he taught them the statutes and the laws,

and showed them the way wherein they should walk and the work they should do.

Calling Out Latent Talent. Next, it immediately developed a large number of men whose very existence had, up to that moment, been hardly realised. In every community there is an untold wealth of latent talent; to every man grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. The King gives each of his servants the charge of talents, and none is absolutely destitute. It must have been rather surprising, however, to Moses to discover that there was a complete equipment for all the offices that had to be filled. "He chose able men out of all Israel." These men might have developed into critics and schemers; but from the moment that they were entrusted with responsibility, they became staunch and useful allies. Not only were their talents saved from wastage and developed in useful directions, but the men themselves were redeemed and purified, their noblest qualities were evoked, and their characters saved from that prostitution of the best which always becomes the worst.

Advantage to the Congregation. The congregation also profited greatly by the swiftness with which disputes and quarrels were dealt with. Nothing is more hurtful to the individual or community than to leave a sore open. The longer a controversy lasts, the worse the tangle becomes, the more hot words are spoken, the more bystanders become involved. "Agree," said our Lord, "with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him."

There are three directions in which we may apply this subject: Church Administration; Christian Service; and Missionary Organisation.

### **I. CHURCH ADMINISTRATION. (A Lesson for the Churches.)**

It is a mistake for any one person, be he minister or layman, to monopolise many offices. Some ministers insist on keeping every department of Church life and Church work under control; some Sunday-school superintendents have apparently never learnt to educate their teachers to maintain the order of the school, or the children to feel that they may fill useful offices; and some Church officials, in their true desire to serve the Church, prefer to undertake more duties than they can perform satisfactorily, instead of setting to work to create or develop the younger men and women about them.

Mr. Moody's Shrewd Saying. Mr. Moody said shrewdly: It is better to set a hundred men to work, than do the work of a hundred men. You do a service to a man when you evoke his latent faculty. It is no kindness to others or service to God to do more than your share in the sacred duties of Church life. For the hand to do the work of the foot, or the eye intrude into the province of the ear, is to introduce anarchy and discord into body and soul. We are told that when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man he took him unto himself? (1Sa 14:52) This is the law of Church consolidation and expansion.

The Men We Want. We must have in every Christian community our Moses, Aaron, and Hur, men who give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, men who are to God-ward, men who can inquire of God, who can teach statutes and laws, who can show the way in which we should walk, and the work we should do.

In every Christian community we must have men of affairs, whose character is admirably summed up in Jethro's words, Men of ability! Jethro evidently expected that there would be one man in ten who would commend himself as exceptionally able, and though to-day's standard of ability is higher than ever, the estimate is not too sanguine. They must be men of piety! "Such as fear God!" He who fears God will regard man; the unjust judge did neither. The Apostles asked for "seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Men of truth! There can be no real piety without truthfulness, so that this qualification is in fact included in the last, and yet there is a semblance of piety which is not over-scrupulous as to veracity. This, however, is a bastard growth. Men of uncorruptible honour! In the East it is rare to find the office of judge exercised without a strong susceptibility to bribes. Like the sons of Samuel, the judges turn aside after lucre, take bribes, and pervert judgment. At whatever cost, let our nation preserve the great traditions which have always attached to our bench and legal profession! In all walks of life unbiased impartiality is of priceless worth to the community which is thus endowed.

The Rank and File. We must also in every Church have our warriors, who can encounter Amalek; our workers, whose deft fingers can build our Tabernacle; our financiers, who will see that no part of the Church-finance suffers; our singers; our aged men and women, who can sustain the duties of perpetual intercession; our boys and girls, inspiring us with their boundless hope and inexhaustible activity; our sufferers, who teach us tenderness and patience. Some must open the doors, some light the lamps, some lead the service of song, some preach, and others teach. There is no one who is not his neighbour's superior in some respect. There is no one from whom his neighbour may not learn something. It was necessary for Jethro to cross the desert to give Moses the conception of this organisation, which, one would suppose, ought to have occurred to him during his own ponderings over his failure to discharge his enormous tasks. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; or again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." (1Co 12:21)

Christ's Awards. Some day we shall stand before our Lord, Who at His own judgment-seat--which must be distinguished from the judgment of the Great White Throne--will allot our rewards. At such time He will pursue a far different method than that adopted amongst even the best of us. We applaud the man who reaps the results, but He will equally congratulate those who ploughed and

sowed to produce them. We allot the crown and palm to the pastor or evangelist whose fervent appeals win the largest number of accessions to the Church, but Christ will not forget the verger and the charwoman, the treasurer and the secretary, the organ-blower, and those who bring refreshment to the harvest-field. The players on instruments shall be there as well as the singers, and he that sowed shall rejoice with him who reaped. To each the reward will be apportioned, not according to the apparent results, but to the faithfulness with which each fulfilled his humble task. The smallest wheel in a big machine is able by its precision to promote, or its inexactitude to impair, the entire movement, just as a dispute among a few girls or in one class of operatives may throw out of employment hundreds of thousands, and affect a whole district. It is necessary, therefore, in adjudicating the rewards, that none be overlooked who have contributed, however slightly, to the general result.

## **II. THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES IN THE SPREADING OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.**

### **(Personal Witness Necessary.)**

There is too strong a tendency in most congregations to leave the work of saving the lost to a salaried class. The plan of sending substitutes may have its advantages for heathen lands, but it cannot become universal, without serious loss to individual believers, as to the Church and the World. Your personal witness for Christ is an imperative obligation. You cannot evade it by any excuse as to your temperament) your nervousness, or your circumstances. The King makes no exceptions. His command is decisive. If we belong to His Church, we are bound to proclaim His love and death to every creature within our reach. You must speak of Him to your brother, your neighbour, and your fellow-citizen, saying, Know the Lord. He that heareth must say, Come. In this respect the converts on the mission fields set us a notable example, as we gather from the reports handed in to the recent Edinburgh Missionary Conference.

Testimonies of Missionaries. Bishop Tucker of Uganda wrote: The work of winning the souls of the people of this country to Christ is really being done by the natives themselves, under the supervision of the foreign missionaries. Dr. John Ross stated that of the 20,000 Church members in Manchuria, less than 100 had been led to Christ solely by the missionaries, and the remainder, 19,900, by the devoted labours of these newly-converted souls. Dr. Moffett of Korea has stated that the Korean Christians for the last ten years have been bringing in the converts faster than the missionaries have been able to provide instruction for them.

It is quite common, says Dr. Mott, in Korea, in Manchuria, and in other parts of China, for Christians to pledge themselves to give a certain number of days to the work of public preaching, as well as to speaking to individuals one by one, subscribing their time, just as we in the homelands subscribe our money. At one meeting, one Church member promised to devote to work of this kind, during the following year, one hundred and eighty days; and in reporting at the annual meeting a year later, he apologised because he had been able to give only one hundred and sixty-nine days.

A Personal Call. In view of these facts, shall we not, each one, from to-day, dedicate ourselves to Christ for this service? Is it impossible to promise our Lord, that if He will open the door of opportunity, and give us a tongue and wisdom, which cannot be gainsaid, that we are willing to speak to some one daily on His claims? We shall not then have to assume any yoke of mere legalism, nor shall we force the matter on unwilling ears, but, as the opportunity offers, we shall look for the uprising impulse and the needed message. It is not what we do for Him, but what He does by us, that really tells.

Wherever in the world I am,  
In whatsoever estate,  
I have a fellowship of hearts,  
To keep and cultivate.  
And a work of lowly love to do  
For Him on Whom I wait.

How to Find a Good Investment. It is the duty of the Chief Shepherd to call out His servants, who shall bear with Him the burden of the cure of souls; but it is His pleasure also to show each one in His Church the way in which he should walk, and the work which he should do. If you are in doubt as to the use that you should make of your one talent, at least bring it to the bankers, i.e. to the leaders of the Christian congregation with which you are connected, and they will show you how to invest it, that the Lord at His coming may receive it back with interest.

## **III. THE SAME PRINCIPLE MAY BE APPLIED TO MISSIONARY ORGANISATION. (The Work for Modern Apostles.)**

It is heart-rending to find how much of the precious time of missionaries is occupied in keeping accounts, attending to the repair of mission premises, and adjudicating matters which could as easily as not be dealt with by a godly layman. Every group of missionaries ought to have one competent business man attached to them, who could relieve them of these details.

It is clear, also, that missionaries, as the years go on, will have to avail themselves increasingly of the services of native converts. During my journey through India I came on one remarkable and godly man, whose service consisted in gathering around him a

number of young men, with whom he ate and slept and lived, with the one object of reproducing himself in them, and sending them forth to tell out the Gospel. The Apostolic Peters of our time must concentrate themselves on the Corneliuses and the Priscillas on Apollos.

Alexander Duff, the pioneer missionary statesman, said that when the set time arrives, the real reformers of Hindustan will be well-qualified Hindus. Mackay said the same of Uganda, and Dr. Nevins of China.

The Layman's Missionary Movement. But without doubt all these questions, and similar ones, will be solved through the Layman's Missionary Movement, which is quite the most remarkable development of our time. It was inaugurated in New York in 1905, and has spread with amazing rapidity. Its aim is to interest laymen in the subject of Missions, and to lead them to recognise and accept responsibility to promote the cause of Missions, primarily in connection with their own Churches.

In Toronto, taking the five principal Christian Communions, we are told that in two years the contributions to foreign missions have practically doubled; £35,000 have become £70,000. But better, the movement has developed the lay leadership of the Church. Literally, and I can corroborate Dr. Mutt's testimony on this point, thousands of laymen throughout the United States and Canada, who formerly had no interest in the subject, are now making speeches on Missions, leading Mission-study Circles, guiding missionary organisations, and conducting financial canvasses.

This is the far-away result of the spirit that animated Jethro in his advice to Moses, at the conclusion of which "he went his way into his own land."

A Desirable Epitaph. It is a pathetic conclusion to the chapter, but it is the epitaph which we may all desire to have recorded at the close of life. That we came for a few short days or years into the wilderness: that we had the grace to reverence and rejoice in all of good that we heard and saw: that we spoke words which lingered long after we were gone: that we relieved Moses from wasting away, initiated salutary reforms, and called out scores and hundreds of noble men, spoiling for want of work: and that we went our way back into our own country, in the Land o' the Leak

## **Exodus 19:1-25 THE PREPARATION FOR THE GIVING OF THE LAW**

Was the Earth Made for Man? To read the descriptions given by modern travellers of the scenery of the Sinaitic Peninsula, and especially of the heart of it, alluded to in this chapter, and to compare them with the events that took place there, creates the impression that it was prepared for this very purpose.

In the ages of Creation, the Divine Hand set itself to construct the localities which were to be specially associated with man's moral and spiritual development. Palestine, like a nest in the recesses of the hills, yet hard by the highway of the nations; Jerusalem, upraised on its rocky plateau, amid the hills--"the joy of the whole earth"; the seven hills on which Rome sat, as mistress of the world through so many centuries,--these are illustrations of the work of the Divine Artificer, Who built our earth as the platform on which scenes were to transpire that were to affect the powers and principalities in heavenly places.

God's Preparatory Actions. If the moulding hand of God's purpose is manifest in these historic sites, may we not still more conclude that the action of glaciers, the rush of torrents, the deposits on the floor of oceans through uncounted aeons, the volcanic throes that rent and tore the surface of the earth and built up rocks of every hue, must have supplied the titanic implements employed by the Creator, Who was also the Judge of men, and desired to prepare a Tribune from which to announce His Law, and a Sanctuary in which to teach His people to worship?

Arrival at Er Raheh and Sinai. Leaving Rephidim, the pilgrim-host, led by the cloud, travelled slowly along the Wady-es-Sheykh, which still forms the great highway of the desert, running due east and west, from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Suez, until they came on the plain Er Raheh, which means "the palm of the hand." It lies outspread from north to south two miles long and half-a-mile wide, nearly flat, and dotted over with tiny shrubs. On either side are mountains far higher than the loftiest mountain in Britain, composed of black and yellow granite, and at the end, blocking the southern extremity of the plain, rises the sheer precipice of Sinai, 1,200 to 1,500 feet in height--the Mount of God.

God's Pulpit. The peculiarity about this huge cliff is that it resembles, as nearly as possible, a colossal pulpit. It springs perpendicularly from the level of the plain, and might easily be touched, as though it were a wall, and in front are some slight alluvial mounds, on which the artificial railing was probably placed. From this pulpit on which the cloud brooded, the Almighty spake, in words that linger still upon the trembling air. Clouds and darkness were round about Him, and justice and righteousness were the habitation of His throne.

An Ideally Chosen Spot. No spot on earth, it has been affirmed, combines in a more remarkable manner the conditions of

commanding height and of a plain in which the sights and sounds described here could reach the assemblage of two million souls. "That such a plain should exist at all in such a place," says Dean Stanley, "is so remarkable a coincidence with the sacred narrative as to furnish a strong internal argument, not merely of this being the actual scene of the giving of the law, but of it having been described by an eye-witness. All the surroundings suit the narrative. The awful and lengthened approach, as to some natural sanctuary, the long retiring sweep of the plain enabling the people to remove and stand afar off, the cliff rising like a huge altar, and visible against the sky in lonely grandeur from end to end of the whole plain." Those who, in Switzerland, have heard the shepherds and mountaineers speaking to each other across the valleys, quite a mile in width, will have no difficulty in understanding that even a human voice might be heard down that plain in the dry and quiet air.

The Camp. That part of the Peninsula abounds in water-springs, which are never dry; and though the heights are bare and wild, there are innumerable valleys of exceptional richness, and there must have been therefore an abundance of provision for the people and their cattle. Here the host encamped, little realising the long sojourn that was before them, and the world-wide, time-long importance of the events in which they were to take part. So far in the history of the world nothing has happened, with the single exception of Bethlehem and Calvary, so august, so momentous, so sublime as the giving of the Law of God Himself at Sinai.

THE OBJECTS FOR WHICH ISRAEL WAS BROUGHT INTO THIS VAST NATURAL TEMPLE WERE MANIFOLD.

(1) God desired to assure them of their unique relationship to Himself. (God's Purpose about to be Explained.)

They had already seen what He had done for them. He had given Ethiopia and Egypt for them, had borne them on eagles' wings, had fed them with manna, had smitten the flinty rocks for them, had delivered them from Amalek, and now He desired to assure them that, as the children of Abraham His Friend, they were peculiarly dear to Him. They were to be a peculiar treasure among all peoples, a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

Do you look wistfully back on the privileges which were thus proposed for the chosen people? Remember that they were called with an earthly calling, whilst we with a heavenly. The Grace of God hath appeared, and our Saviour Jesus Christ hath given Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works. (Tit 2:14) And so Peter said to the sojourners of the dispersion and to us, Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the praises of Him Who has called you out of a blacker darkness than that of Egypt to a gladder inheritance than of Canaan. (1Pe 2:9)

(2) God desired to enter into Covenant with them. (The Third Covenant.)

Scripture tells us of two Covenants that had already been made with man--the first with Noah, the second with Abraham. A third was now to be enacted, in fulfilment of pledges made four hundred and thirty years before.

A covenant is an understanding, a working basis, an agreement between the two covenanting parties, so that for each side may be stated their mutual rights and obligations. Does it seem, at the outset, altogether incredible that God, Whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, should condescend to enter into a compact with sinful man? It may seem so, if you degrade humanity and account men as worms or atoms. But if you realise, apart from sin, the greatness of man, his moral worth, his likeness to God, his creative powers, his patience, his hope, his love, then it will seem less wonderful that God should subordinate all else for the education of a being who is capable of eternal fellowship with Himself, and who is doubly bound to Him, first by original creation and then by the blood of the Cross. How shall He not with Christ freely give us all things?

The Covenant with the Israelites. Still, God's covenant is with them that fear Him. Our Lord became the great Shepherd, because He sealed with His blood the new covenant which is opened and extended to each soul of man who will avail himself of its privileges and step out on its provisions. But how different is our covenant from theirs! That rested on the obedience of the people, an obedience which egregiously failed on that very spot; whereas ours rests on the obedience of Him in Whom we stand.

And with Us. That consisted in doing, but ours in believing, which leads to doing. That for its reward had blessings largely temporal, whilst ours presents for our acceptance those which are incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading.

(3) God desired to lay down the fundamental principles of His Government. (Israel Governed by a Theocracy.)

Israel was to be governed, not by a democracy, the rule of the people; nor by an aristocracy, the rule of the few; but by a theocracy, the rule of God; and here their Divine King announces the principles on which He is about to govern His people. No human sovereign could have been more careful for his people's welfare, or at more pains to lay down the beneficent requirements of his reign.

A Method of Grace. The Divine method is full of grace. First, God reveals Himself as the God of their fathers, then reminds them of all the goodness and mercy which He had shown, and finally challenges their faith and love. Had He commenced by uttering the Ten Words of the Law, or the precepts and statutes which follow, He might have aroused criticism and resistance. This is always the first

effect of the Law. But there was nothing of this. No mutter of thunder, no blast of trumpet, no flash of the lightning's flashing sword. Nothing was attempted to frighten or compel the people's obedience. In His most winsome aspect their fathers' God reminds them of the mighty past, tells them of the relationship which He designs for them, and finally challenges their loyalty. It was only afterwards, when the people had declared that they would do as He had spoken, that the trumpet rung out its thrilling blast, and the requirements of God's holy law were enumerated.

What the Giving of the Law Did. But the giving of the Law had an aspect to the whole world. The Divine law is engraven on the moral nature of man. The work of the law, says Paul, is written in men's hearts, their consciences bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts excusing or accusing them. (Rom 2:15) Else how could God judge the world? There must be one standard of appeal, one common denominator, one code of morality, not only set up in high heaven, but duplicated in each human breast. Otherwise it would not be possible to bring in all the world guilty before God. But it was necessary that these convictions of righteousness should be set forth authoritatively, in clear-cut and single majesty. Sir Walter Scott, in his *Old Mortality*, has depicted the peregrinations of a son of the Covenanting race, as he travelled throughout Scotland, removing the moss and lichens that had obliterated the inscriptions on the tombs of the mighty dead. This is precisely what the giving of the Law did. It would have had, comparatively speaking, small effect, if it had now been promulgated for the first time, as a new code of Morals. It is because God's code so precisely reflected and echoed man's deepest convictions, that the Decalogue, and the statutes which follow, have commanded universal respect.

The Law but Repeating Dictates of Conscience. It is wrong to steal, or murder, or covet, not primarily because these sins are forbidden by the Decalogue. They are forbidden by the Decalogue, because they were previously forbidden by conscience; and they are forbidden by conscience because they are forbidden by the nature of things; and the nature of things is God. It is right to love God with all our being, and our neighbours as ourselves, not because the Mosaic code says so, but because conscience says so; and conscience says so, because in the nature of things it is so, and because God is so. Thus Sinai is a pulpit whence God has addressed mankind.

(4) God desired also to impress on them the great truths which they were also to communicate to mankind. (Why the Jews were Singled Out.)

He remembered that all the earth was His. Had He not made it, and put man upon it? Were not all souls His? Was He not responsible for them, as a shepherd for His flock? He could not rid Himself of the heavy burden which Creatorship had imposed. He had made, and therefore He must bear. When He said, "You shall be a peculiar treasure to Me," it was not that He proposed to monopolise that treasure for Himself, but that He might enrich the whole world by their words and songs, their character and gifts. When He said, "Ye shall be a kingdom," it was not that they were to be merely a great realm ruled by Him, but that they were to go forth to reign in the earth. All were to help Him as kings and priests, calling back mankind to His Supremacy and ennobling them by their purity and prayers. If Israel were God's firstborn, then all the children were also His, and Israel were specially privileged that all the world might be brought into the close intimacy and high honour of the family of God.

Why God Appeared as a Formless Cloud. Consider how much light these thoughts cast on the Theophany of Sinai. All mankind at this time was deeply infected with idolatry. God as the Divine Spirit was seeking that men should appreciate His monotheism, and worship Him in spirit and in truth. If He had adopted any outward form, they would have seized upon it at once, reproduced it, and placed it in their shrines as an object of veneration. It was necessary that they should be thoroughly convinced of His Presence, and yet that there should be no outward form. Therefore, though Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended there, yet as Moses said afterwards they saw "no similitude." (Dt 4:11-12)

A Sublime Creed. How rich a revelation was this, and what a momentous effect it has had on all subsequent history! The Hebrew, the Christian, and the Moslem are to this hour existing to perpetuate this sublime Creed. The Lord our God is one God: a Spirit Who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth: and they repudiate all worship of images whatsoever, as likely to deteriorate the spirituality of the soul's fellowship with the Eternal.

Covenant and Mediator. It should be noticed also that the Covenant was promulgated through a Mediator. Paul says: "It was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator." (Gal 3:19) Three times apparently Moses went and came. As soon as the camp had been pitched, we were told that "Moses went up unto God." It was as though there had been some previous appointment that he should do this, and he was met by the voice of God telling him of the preciousness of Israel to Himself, and pleading for obedience--"If obeying, ye obey."

Moses' Three Interviews with God on Sinai. A second time he returns to God to bear the answer of the people: and a second time he was bidden to go down and bid the people prepare to meet their God when He came down. One of the results of that coming was to be that the people should hear Jehovah speaking to him, and so believe him for ever. He went down to sanctify the people, to bid them wash their clothes, and put bounds and barriers around the mount, that none might touch it.

Yet once more, on the third day, when the smoke of Sinai ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly, because the Lord had come down, the Lord called His servant to the top of the mount, and said to him again, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish, and let the priests also sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them."

People Forbidden to Approach Sinai. It was absolutely necessary for mankind to learn the nature of holiness, and the awful contrast between God and humanity, between the Holy God and His sinful creatures. How could this lesson be impressed by mere words? They would convey no distinct or permanent impression. So God chose out of the human family one nation, which was separated and cleansed, so far as outward rites went. But even this people were deemed absolutely unfit to approach Him. Barriers must be erected, to keep them at a distance, which only one of their number might pass, and he their leader and saint. But even he exceedingly feared and quaked. No animal was to stay there under penalty of death, because the animal creation is closely related to man. If a man were to touch that mount, he would meet death; but no hand must touch him, he must be stoned or shot through. If even the priests broke through the barriers, they might be stricken with death. No lesson could have been more impressively taught: and it is for all time. Who would not fear Thee, Great God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? surely Holiness becometh Thy house. How shall we be thankful enough for Jesus Christ, in whom the Holiness of God shines so transcendently! and yet He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and is acquainted with our temptations and griefs. He lays His hands upon us both. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1Ti 2:5)

Contrast between God and Man. This after all is always the first step in the soul's deepest union with God. We must somehow be brought to the point of realising and admitting the awful contrast between God and ourselves. There must be the bowed head, the hushed voice, the reverent obeisance, and the broken heart. We must see ourselves, because we have seen God. We must see the King in His beauty, and cry, "Alas! I am undone!" We must behold Him as Job did, when he exchanged the hearing of the ear for the seeing of the eye. We must, like the publican, beat on our breast, as we go up to the Temple in prayer, saying, "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Only from such experiences at Sinai can we pass on to the beatific experiences of acceptance and peace.

God's Awful Appearance. It must have been a great spectacle on that third day. The dense clouds veiling the mountain-peaks anal riven with lightning! The thunder like the rattle of an army of angel drums or salvoes of heavenly artillery, announcing the approach of God! The furnace flames that cast a lurid light upon the scene! The thrilling notes of the trumpet, "exceeding loud!" Only once again will the ear of man hear that resonant voice, "for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trump of God, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

But we are not come to the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, or unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest! No, the blackness hid the face of God from the eyes of our dying Lord! The darkness was the midnight in which He cried, "Why, My God, hast Thou forsaken Me!" The tempest is that which broke on the Cross and exhausted itself! Thank God, we are to the windward of the storm, for we are to come to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling.

## Exodus 20:1-17 THE TEN WORDS

The Decalogue for all Mankind. The scene of the Giving of the Law is unparalleled in the history of our race. There is no single moment in the history of the nations--of Egypt, Babylon, or Rome, that can bear comparison with this august event. Search the annals of any nation under heaven, and there is but one report from every quarter. "Here were temples, pyramids, and palaces, wars and triumphs, discoveries and achievements, mythologies and ceremonials, but never is it recorded that God declared with audible voice His will." This event was not for the Jews alone, but for mankind, not for an hour, but for all time.

The Ten Words. The phrase "Ten Commandments," is suggested by our Lord's words to the young ruler, "Keep the commandments." (Mat 19:17) The Hebrew phrase for these Divine utterances is "The Ten Words." (Exo 34:28, Dt 4:13, marg.) But they are also described as The Law, the Covenant, and the Tables of Testimony. They are distinguished from all other words, even of inspiration, by these three characteristics,

- (1) They were spoken by God Himself;
- (2) They were written by the finger of God on the Tables of Stone; and
- (3) They set forth His will for our human life, as He wrote it originally on the heart of man, and as He is writing it always in our hearts and lives by the regenerating grace of His Spirit.

THE FOUNDATION OF LAW. (Distinction between Right and Wrong.)

What is the ultimate source of the distinction between Right and Wrong? Why is it wrong to steal, to commit adultery, or to do murder? Many might answer that question by saying: These actions were forbidden by God's voice on Sinai: they are wrong, because He said Thou shalt not. But suppose that He had never said "Thou shalt not," would they not still have been wrong? Or, travel back to the long ages which preceded the giving of the Law, were they not equally wrong, though as yet Sinai had never trembled beneath the utterance of "the fiery law?" (Dt 33:2) Or go to lands and peoples that have never heard of Sinai, is it not clear that for them also these things are wrong? Clearly then, Rightness and Wrongness do not depend on the Law of Sinai.

God Uttered Himself. What then is the basis of the distinctions between right and wrong? For this we must go beyond the scene on Sinai, beyond the utterance of God, to the nature of things, older than Creation, older than the oldest angel, as old as eternity, i.e. from everlasting. These words were spoken here, because they had already been uttered by the Eternal Word; and He uttered them because they were in the foundations of His own Being. They were engraven on stone, because they had always been graven on the Universe. Is not this what the Psalmist meant, when he said, "Judgment and righteousness are the habitation of Thy throne?" It is for this reason that though Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled; and it is on this ground also that God is able to judge the world. As each of us carries a watch which declares for us privately and individually the time which is measured by the revolutions of worlds, so each moral being has first-hand knowledge of right and wrong. The moral law is written on the heart; and Sinai is a convenient epitome of the great sanctions within us, which bless each act of obedience, crying, "Blessed are ye," and which denounce their curse, when we fail to continue in all things written in the Book of the Law.

The Law not Arbitrary but Necessary. These rewards and punishments are therefore not arbitrary but necessary. Just as man, whilst an inhabitant of this world, is bound and limited by certain conditions, which are known as natural laws, to infringe any of which is to incur instant suffering, not by an arbitrary act of God, but in the nature of things: so if anyone infringes these great Words, defying them against the remonstrances of conscience and the acknowledged standards of rectitude, there is but one result--he must suffer. There cannot but be for him the fiery indignation of offended righteousness. He that has sinned against the laws of fire, of electricity, of gravitation, of health, dies without compassion; of how much sorer punishment, think ye, will they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the remonstrances of conscience, and have done despite to the Spirit of Grace!

Heaven and Hell Necessary Outcomes of Conduct. Men sometimes argue as though Heaven were an arbitrary gift, and hell an arbitrary infliction, as an estate to a loyal supporter of the monarchy, or the gaol for a felon. No! Each is the necessary outcome of a life. We go like Judas to our own places. Feathers float up, lead sinks down. They that by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and incorruption, cannot but enjoy eternal life. It is theirs in the nature of things. They are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, begin forthwith to suffer tribulation and anguish by the very nature of things, (Rom 2:7)

Hooker's Dictum. Again, therefore, we are reminded of Hooker's immortal dictum: "Of law there can be no less acknowledged, that her seat is in the bosom of God; her voice the harmony of the world." To be out of harmony with that voice, is to be out of harmony with oneself, with all holy beings, with the nature of things, and with God, whose Being is the Fountain of Grace and Blessedness. That discord is hell.

Fourth Commandment. It might at first sight seem that the Fourth Commandment, demanding the observance of the seventh day as the Rest-Day, were an exception to the assertion that the Decalogue is founded on the nature of things. Is this a matter of conscience? Does this rest on eternal and unalterable sanctions? Will its violation entail necessary rather than arbitrary penalty?

There is no difficulty in answering these questions in the affirmative. The Law of the Rest-Day is engraven on the physical nature of man. Even when the revolutionists of France determined to abolish every trace of the Christian faith, they felt that humanity must have a respite from incessant toil, and appointed one-rest-day in ten, which had afterwards to be altered back to the older arrangement.

Man a Seven-Day Clock. Man is a seven-day clock. He must be wound up with regular accuracy; and his soul needs time to adjust itself equally with the spirit. The sanctions for Sabbath-keeping lie deep in the heart of Nature, and for this reason it was included with the rest in the Ten Words.

THE INTRODUCTORY SENTENCE. (Majesty and Love.)

"I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." At Sinai, men have been wont to discern only the sterner and more terrible sides of God's nature, but in view of this tender preface it is difficult to maintain that view. Granted that the opening phrase, "I am Jehovah thy God," declares the majestic authority of the Eternal, does not that tender sequel, "that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," recall the love that espoused the nation when cast out "to the abhorring of their person"? (Eze 16:5)

The Law Given for Man's Sake. Mark the order. It is that of the Gospel. First, God saves, and then delivers His law. Because He had

brought them out of darkness into marvellous light, therefore, as a return, He pleaded with them to remember His commandments to do them, not for His sake alone, but that it might be well with them during all their generations. It is out of love for us that God pleads with men. "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes ... for our good always that He might preserve us alive, as at this day." (Dt 6:24)

God's Order in Dealing with Israel. Had He propounded these laws to Israel in Egypt, they would have turned from them in despair. Crushed with oppression, smarting under the lash of the taskmaster, with a sense of being forgotten and out of mind, they would not have hearkened, for bitterness of spirit. They could not have respected the will of a God who seemed powerless against the might of Pharaoh! Either the God of their fathers could not, or He would not help them, and in either case was not calculated to win or hold their respect.

But God did not begin by proclaiming His law in Egypt. He began by manifesting His greatness in actions that appealed powerfully to the imagination of the people whom He had set about redeeming. Why He had seemed to sleep so long, they knew not, but they had seen His mighty arm awake and make itself bare in the eyes of the heathen, and they were now prepared to listen to His voice, since those thunders and lightnings that played about Sinai had been launched on their foes, and had brought terror into the heart of Pharaoh and his advisers.

"If Ye Love Me." He had brought them as on eagles' wings to Himself. His manna was each morning awaiting their search, His waters were flowing from the flinty rocks, His guiding pillar was before their eyes. What more could they desire to show His love?

But before us shines the more tender embodiment of God in Christ. He stoops to our mean life, treads our pathways, drinks of our cup, and is baptised with our baptism, then turns to us saying, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." He redeems us from the power of darkness, translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son, gives us His Son and Spirit, makes us heirs of an incorruptible inheritance and co-heirs with Christ, and then entreats us to walk in His ways and do His will.

The Whole of Man. With such a preamble, shall we not meditate on these words, as our Lord must have done till they nourish our innermost soul? "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Let us also remember those great words of the Preacher at the close of the Book of Ecclesiastes: "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep His Commandments; for this is the whole of man." (Ecc 12:13) Not "the whole duty of man," as it is in the A.V., but "the whole of man." That is to say, if a man will fear God and keep His commandments, not to be redeemed, but as redeemed, not to win love, but because he is loved, not to be saved, but because he is saved--then he is a whole man, and therefore a holy one. All else is empty and vain, as the soap bubbles that break in the air. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, as he passes in review the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1Jo 2:17) "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Rom 12:1-2) Because He has freed you, and brought you from the house of bondmen, render this your free and glad service.

THE CONTENTS OF THE DECALOGUE. (Division of the Decalogue.)

Note the divisions. That there were ten is clear from Dt 10:4, but opinions have differed as to how the material should be divided in order to give just ten. The division that we follow is that of the Prayer Book, the Greek Church, and the Reformed Church; but the Roman Church and the Lutherans combine our first and second into one, and break up our tenth into two. But this division does not acknowledge or emphasise the clear difference between having another God than Jehovah, which is one form of sin, and making an image of Him, which is another.

It has been thought by some that since there were two stone-tables of the divine inscription, the ten commandments were equally divided between them, five on each. If this were so, the law about our honouring our parents would be on the same level with the four that refer to God, and this might be justified by the reflection that in honouring them we really honour Him, in Whom every family in heaven and earth is named. But on the whole the old Division is better into four and six, the first regarding our duty to God, and the second our duty to man.

Duty to God First. Note the position of these two divisions. Duty to God stands first, and lays the needful foundations for the right discharge of our duties to man. The Love of God is the foundation of all love to our fellows. Neglect the duties of piety, and you will soon neglect your duties to your neighbour. The Scripture does not ignore the distinction between Religion, i.e. the duties we owe to God, and Morality, i.e. the duties implicated through earthly relationships, but it unites the two in the deeper idea that all duty must be done to God, Who is above all, through all, and in all. The precepts of the first Table enjoin that God be honoured in His being, worship, name, and day. The precepts of the second follow naturally, requiring that he who loves God should love his brother also, who is made in the image of God; and surely that love implies that he will refrain from injuring him in deed, in word, and in thought, and neither in his person, his wife, his property, nor his reputation.

Love and the Law. The whole of the Ten Words are gathered up in the one word Love. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. (Rom 13:8-10) If a man should love God perfectly, but have never seen the Decalogue, and if after years of holy communion with God, he should suddenly meet with this enumeration of the Divine Code, there would be no new feature that he would have to introduce into his behaviour, and no newly discovered wrong that he would have to avoid. On the other hand, it is certain that, apart from love, obedience to the law of God is impossible. The heart of the Ten Words is contained in Exodus 20:6 : "Showing mercy unto thousands that love Me and keep My commandments." It is in proportion as we love Him, that we can obey Him! Whatever of outward service or obedience we render to God or man, if love is withheld, the law is not fulfilled. "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth nothing."

The Supreme Necessity of Love. It is impossible to worship God in spirit and in truth, to reverence His Name, or delight in His Day, unless we love Him. It is impossible to keep the heart free from malice, hate, covetousness, and passion, except as it is possessed and filled by the opposite principle of love. Therefore when in answer to the challenge of His critics, our Lord refused to particularise any one of the Ten Words, but summed up the first table of the Law by saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength"; and summed up the second by saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," we can repeat the comment of His interlocutor, and say, "Master, Thou hast well said! There is none other commandment greater than these!"

The Decalogue a Unity. The Decalogue is therefore a Unity. In the Epistle of James, we are told by that austere son of the Law that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all." (Jam 2:10) It seems a severe utterance. We are apt to think that if we obey nine out of the ten Commandments our obedience will be put to our credit, even though we fail in the tenth. But in thinking thus, we ignore the fact that the ten words of Sinai are not ten separate enactments, having no connection with each other, except that they are included in the same code.

Ten Aspects of God. Remember that they are ten aspects of the Holiness of God, as it looks out on different phases of human life. If then we infringe one particular, we are proved to be deficient in perfect holiness. A perfectly good man cannot fail in any single point; just as a man cannot make a single provincialism in his speech, without betraying himself to be a Galilean. We only live, as we ponder and obey every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.

The Law a Revealing Power. These ten words imply that sin is in the world. Looked at from this standpoint, what a revelation is this of the evils of our hearts! You can judge of a nation by its statute-book, and you may judge of the heart of humanity by these ten words. Evidently it finds it hard to worship the one God apart from some symbol, it turns aside to vanity, it ignores His worship and rest, it is full of uncleanness, and hatred, of coveting and theft. "Out of the heart of men," said our Lord, "evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, coverings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness." (Mar 7:21-22) Judging from our knowledge of ourselves, and of the world around us, we are quite prepared to accept this enumeration, for there is not one of this terrible catalogue that is not included in these prohibitions. Is it not a grievous thing, that such a nature is ours by inheritance? How eagerly we need to utter the old prayer: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name." How gladly should we cling to the promise, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you ... And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." (Eze 36:25, etc.)

The Law becomes Death. The Relation of the Law to the Gospel In his profound self-anatomy, the great Apostle says that the commandment is holy, just, and good, but that it slew him. (Rom 7:11) What was good in itself became death to him, i.e. when he came to realise its perfectness and purity, his hope of ever being able to fulfil it, or to win the favour of God by fulfilling it, died. To use Bunyan's figure,--before he realised the claims and spirituality of the law, his heart had resembled an unswept room, in which the dust of months, undisturbed by the broom, lies in thick layers, though to a superficial gaze, viewing it in the twilight, it appears swept, cleansed, and garnished. But when the full light of the law fell on him and searched him, when he stood face to face with the mirror of eternal truth, and saw himself as he really was, he knew that he could never fulfil its high and holy demands. He died to self-confidence, died to self-satisfaction, died to the hope of ever gaining eternal life. Nay, more, the law even stirred up the slumbering evil of his nature by its prohibitions. Tell a child not to do a thing,--not to open a cupboard, not to break the seal of a letter--and you at once stir its whole nature to revolt. So Paul says sadly, "Sin revived, and I died." This is the invariable experience of those who observe carefully the phases of experience through which the soul passes.

Law from Moses, but Grace by Christ. What hope is there? None from man, but everything from Christ. We are, as the Apostle says, shut up to Him. The Law came through Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ. (Jn 1:17) "For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (Rom 8:3)

First our Lord fulfilled the obligations of the Law to the last detail. He was made under the Law for this very purpose. He magnified it

by His absolute obedience to all its jots and tittles. Not only did He abstain from its negative prohibitions, but He realised its positive requirements. When He died on the cross, He bore the sin and guilt of the world, and bearing them, delivered us from their curse. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us." (Gal 3:13) Dare to believe that He bare thy sins on His own body on the tree, and freed thee for ever from the house of thy sad and weary bondage. "Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins; and by Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Act 13:38-39)

Then, when we are redeemed, the Lord by His Spirit comes to live within us, and the Spirit of His life repeats in us His own life, His life of love and obedience and righteousness. "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law." (Rom 3:31)

## **Exodus 20:18-21; Hebrews 12:18-22 THE MOUNT THAT MIGHT BE TOUCHED**

The People at Sinai. The Hebrew people had seen a great sight, in which no other people have shared. As they stood massed in the level plain at the foot of Sinai, they had beheld the Divine Theophany.

"The earth trembled,

The heavens also dropped at the presence of God:

Even yon Sinai trembled at the presence of God, the God of Israel."

Such is the description of the Psalmist (Psa 68:8).

"When God of old came down from Heaven,

In power and wrath He came:

Before His feet the clouds were riven,

Half darkness, and half flame."

Such is the description of our modern time. (Keble: The Christian Year, "Whitsunday.")

Their Dread. The effect produced on the people by these accumulated terrors was panic-stricken flight. "They removed and stood afar off." They thought that they must die. They requested that Moses would act as mediator. "They said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." They were glad to participate in God's merciful providence, and to believe that He was the unseen background of their life. They had sung His praise on the shores of the Red Sea; they had thankfully appropriated the supplies with which He enriched the desert wastes; they had rejoiced in the shadow of the brooding-cloud by day, and the light of the pillar of fire by night. But there they stayed. They were unwilling that the naked beam of the Deity, unveiled and undiluted, should shine forth upon their mortal vision.

Man and the Divine Scrutiny. This tendency is characteristic of us all. We are quite prepared to admit the existence and providence of God, but we do not desire that He should obtrude His presence too obviously. The mass of men turn and hide their faces, or run away when the profounder aspects of life present themselves, much as a sensitive person will hurry past when there has been a terrible accident in the street, with which he feels incompetent to deal. Men do not object to think of God in His high heaven, but they object to conceive of each common bush as being aflame with the Divine fire.

The Reluctance of the Religious Professor. Take the normal religious man. True religion welcomes God's life and light into the innermost recesses of the soul, yields to Him the key of every department of life, views His hand in each particular providence, believes that no hair falls from the curly head of the child or the thin locks of age without the Father. But the typical church-goer of the time shrinks in alarm from such a Divine interpenetrating of life. "Not so near!" he cries in apprehensive tones; and then bids his priest or minister, his creed or sacrament, his church or meeting-house become his Moses, to mediate God and supply the smoked glass, that the tempered light may be mitigated for his seeing. "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak, lest we die."

What a contrast is this to the condition of soul that says with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," or, with David, "Be not silent unto me, lest if Thou be silent unto me, I become like unto them that go down into the pit." We are thankful for Moses, thankful for the Creed and the Church, but we cannot be content with these; our heart and our flesh cry out for the living God, "When shall we come and appear before God?"

The Reluctance of the Men of Science. Take the case of science. There is, of course, a noble army of scientific men who have passed up the shining staircase of Nature into God's pavilion. But with many others it is not so. They set themselves to ascertain the facts of the universe, to arrange those facts into laws, to describe the action of the dynamic forces that operate through those laws. But there they stay their footsteps. When the light of a personal intelligence and will beyond Nature begins to glimmer on their souls, they draw back, and begin to talk of laws, of forces, of an eternal something not themselves. Their feet are on the mountain-path that culminates in God, but they turn aside, when they are on the verge of the greatest discovery of all. "Let not God speak to us, lest we die!"

The Reluctance of the Politician. Take the case of modern politics. No one thinks of quoting the Bible in the chamber of legislation, or enforcing an argument with the teaching of Christ. When we argue for the rest-day, it is not because God made and hallowed it, or because our spiritual nature requires an opportunity for worship but because our physical nature requires for its efficiency a periodic rest. When we speak of ameliorative legislation, it is not because the love of God demands the love of man, but because we would provide against revolution. And even if missions are argued for, it is because they exert a civilising influence and promote trade. Are not these methods of expression which are artfully designed to evade the profoundest aspects of human life, the noblest sanctions of human conduct? "Let not God speak to us, lest we die."

A Contrast. We cannot help contrasting this attitude of mind and speech with the conduct of that much-misunderstood and thoughtlessly abused body, of whom Macaulay wrote: "They were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging in general terms an over-ruling providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of a Being, for whose power nothing was too vast and for whose inspection nothing was too minute ... Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on His intolerable brightness, and to commune with Him face to face ... The Puritan therefore was never alarmed, when he was bidden to stand still and listen to the voice of God. His closet and his church were full of the reverberations of that awful, gracious, and beautiful voice for which he listened. He made little of sacraments and priests, because God was so intensely real to him. What should he do with lenses, who stood in the full torrent of the sunshine!" (Essay on Milton.)

Causes of this Reluctance. This reluctance, on the part of ordinary men, to recognise the near presence of God arises from three remediable causes, which will repay our careful consideration.

(1) We are in danger of mistaking the true intention of our existence. (The Purpose of our Existence Misunderstood.)

Existence is from the Latin *ex*, out, *sto*, to stand. We have been called into existence that we may live, and move, and have our being in God, and know that we were doing so. We were made for God. Our soul was intended to communicate with the great Spirit, through our spirit. What the water is to the fish, what air is to the bird, what sunshine is to the eagle, that God's nature was intended to be to ours. As well might the fish ask not to be thrown into the water, or the bird ask that its cage-door might not be opened, admitting it to the air, or the eagle fly into a darksome cage, away from the glorious sunlight, as that any man should say, "Let God not speak to me, lest I die." The exact contrary is true: If God does not speak to us, we shall die; for the Speech of God is Jesus Christ, THE WORD.

From our Contact with the World. But the soul has yielded to the binding, blighting influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that antipodean trinity below which is the antithesis of the blessed Trinity above. Through the senses of the body, the soul has come under the dominion of the earth-sphere, and so by long and evil habits has lost its sensitiveness to the spiritual and eternal. The eyes of the heart have become blinded, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God should shine in upon the soul. It is as though a man had been so long imprisoned in darkness, that when liberty is at last granted him, he preferred to remain in his cell, to bearing the glare of sunshine or mixing in the unaccustomed life of his fellows. Many of the animals in our Zoological Gardens have become so accustomed to their unnatural conditions, that they would soon perish, if emancipated, and set to find the means of livelihood for themselves. Similarly the soul of man has dwelt so long and habitually in the life of the senses, that the spiritual function has become starved, perhaps atrophied. "The Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit." Men forget that they came from God, that they need God, that they are akin to God, having been made in His image and after His likeness, and that they can never be truly at rest till they rest in Him. It is for such reason that they cry, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die!"

Remedied through Christ. All this is altered in Christ. He comes to the sepulchre of sense, where the spirit lies entombed, and bids it awake, arise, and come forth. "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." We are born again of the Spirit, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The soul begins to use the wonderful apparatus of the spirit towards God, as formerly it used only the apparatus of the physical body towards the material world. And suddenly it awakens to see things which the physical eye had not seen, and to hear things which the physical ear had not heard, and to enjoy delights which the heart of the ordinary man has never conceived of; but which God has prepared for those who live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and are therefore endowed with spiritual discernment. The things of Christ are not known, save by those who are born of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned. Only the twice-born can see the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. But when

once the soul has seen them, it counts all things but loss for the excellency of that knowledge, and reckons them but dross in comparison. Then the cry becomes: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life."

(2) We are deeply conscious of sinnership. (The Consciousness of Sin is Powerful. There is yet another reason:)

The holiest are most conscious of their failure. They have done what they ought not, and have not done what they ought. They know that there is no health in them. There is not one who has not missed the mark. So many resolutions have been like spent arrows, so many have flown wide of the golden centre. "I was shapen in iniquity," says one, "and in sin did my mother conceive me." "Among whom," says another, "we all had our conversation in time past, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

But those who are yet in their sins, swept before temptation, as leaves before the autumn breeze, are also deeply conscious of sinner-ship. It is for this reason that they contrive, if possible, never to be alone, and that they rush through an unending series of diversions. Yes I that is the word--diversion. Everything must be sought and tried that promises to divert their thoughts from themselves. These people, as our Lord said, hate the light, and refuse to come to the light. They avoid the society of good people, will change seats on an ocean-going steamer rather than face for a week at meals a minister of religion; will banish from their houses the godly servant-maid, and from their shelves the religious book.

The Reminder of God Resented. And why all these precautions? Because the presence of anything that reminds them of God hurts their conscience, as daylight a diseased eye, or salt an open wound. "Where shall I go from Thy presence? or whither shall I flee from Thy Spirit?" is a question they put from quite other motives than animated the Psalmist. If the wings of the morning, or the uttermost parts of the sea; if hell itself; if the darkness of the darkest cave; if rocks and mountains would only hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the Lamb,--how gladly would they face any sacrifice, any distance, any other deprivation! It is for such reasons that they cry, "Let not God speak with us!" The strange thing is, that these people should desire to go to heaven when they die. What incongruity of thought! To be so afraid of the revealed presence of God here, and yet to desire the place of all others where "they see His face." But even in heaven it is improbable that they would see Him. A blind man might be face to face with a king without seeing him. A deaf man may sit amid ravishing music, and not hear a chord.

The Remedy in Christ. But our Lord has altered that. He has taught us that all sin and guilt are put away instantly and for ever for those who are penitent and believing. They shall not be remembered nor brought to mind; not even mentioned from the judgment throne; obliterated as a cloud from the summer sky; lost as a pebble in the depths of the sea! He clothes us in the white robe, frees us from the law of sin and death, puts a new song in our mouth, and presents us to the Father without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The supreme end and aim of our Saviour's work on our behalf is to bring us to God (1Pe 3:18).

(3) A lurking belief in the heart of man that man is more merciful than God. (Man is Deemed More Merciful than God. There is, lastly)

It is for this reason that men have created priests, who might bear gently with the ignorant and erring, because they themselves were compassed with infirmity, and needed to offer sacrifices for themselves. It was for this reason that the worship of the Madonna obtained so wide a vogue, especially in the Middle Ages.

But God's Mercy is Revealed in Christ. And it is for this reason, knowing our frailty and accommodating Himself to our weak faith, that God manifested Himself in human flesh. "It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, and make intercession for the sins of the people." Remember also how He said Himself to the despairing appeal of Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" No woman's heart is so tender, no mother's hand is so gentle, no father's care of his helpless babes is so pitiful as God's. He who made the dove's tenderness for her nestlings, or the sensitive watchfulness of the fallow-deer for her fawn, is surely more sensitive than either. He who causes the dew to distil, the light to fall so gently on our earth after its swift flight from the sun, and the soft rain to drop so lightly that it does not break the petals of an overblown rose, cannot be devoid of a similar delicacy to those who are weary and heavy laden, or as the feebly smoking flax and the bruised, broken reed. Is it not written in the same chapter, that He who sustains the stars in their mighty orbits, and calls them by their names, in the greatness of His power will also gently lead the ewes that are with young?

Let Us, then, Draw Near. Therefore the sacred writers cry exultingly, "Let us draw near with boldness, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water"; and again, "Ye who were once afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"; and again, "Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, or to blackness, and darkness, and tempest., but ye are come to Mount Sion, the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; to the Church of the First-Born; to God the Judge of all; to the spirits of just men made perfect; to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that bespeaketh better things than that of Abel." This is the ladder let down from heaven to earth. Let us reverse it, beginning from the last clause, and climb through the glowing links of this sublime sentence till we are permitted to dwell habitually in the City of God!

## Exodus 20:22-26 THE SUMMONS TO WORSHIP

The Covenant. Here begins the first paragraph in the Book of the Covenant which continues through the following chapters to Exo 23:19. The contents were communicated to Moses on the Mount, at the request of the people: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." Moses wrote all the words of the Lord in a book, and afterwards took the blood of sacrifices and sprinkled it on the people.

The Code of Laws. This book was therefore the first draft or nucleus of the Book of Exodus, as we now have it. There is much in it of most significant value, as bearing on the early history of the Hebrew people, and on ourselves. As to the former, we may say, in the words of Professor Maitland, "There can, so we think, be no doubt that the stage of civilization of which these laws speak to us is marvellously high. This may be the oldest Code of Laws in the world; but it is very far from being the most archaic."

Their Origin. It may be that these commands are really a codification of laws which had been handed down to Israel from the days of their fathers. It may be that they had been in vogue not only through the Egyptian bondage, but in the tents of Abraham. Here they are presented in a succinct and impressive form, with the solemn sanctions of Jehovah and the ratification of the people's voice. Moses probably set forth in them the principles on which he had been accustomed to administer justice, and the principles on which his co-assessors were to administer it.

Their Authority. But there was an altogether new authority communicated to these "judgments," or decisions, by the fact that God had announced them, and the people had received them, as the basis of their national life. "The gold had been lying about before, but it was now collected and coined into the currency of the kingdom. Old coins had been gathered in. All had now passed through the mintage of the Heavenly Sovereign, and bore the image and superscription of the King of the new theocracy."

The first of the three chapters contains laws regarding the person, the next laws regarding property, and the third miscellaneous laws, mostly regarding religious observances.

Ordinances as to Worship. Here in the forefront of all stand these ordinances as to worship. There is repeated the prohibition of the manufacture of idols, and the worship of Jehovah under the symbolism of either Egypt or Assyria. Then follows the injunction for the altar of earth on which burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were to be offered. As yet the place of Divine Worship had not been fixed, and would not be, until God placed the tent of Shiloh amongst His people. But in the interim these provisions were made for the erection of an altar at which the devout worshipper might approach the Heavenly Father. The patriarchal altars had evidently been of this description, and it was now provided that the same usage should continue. Elaborate structures of hewn and decorated stonework were not allowed, lest the objects carved on the stones should become objects of idolatrous worship.

The Offering. The burnt-offering of course stands for our entire surrender and consecration to God; whilst the peace-offering was a sacramental meal, in which the worshipper ate of the same sacrifice with his God (Lev. 1, 3). The sacrifices offered by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been of this character, because the sacrifices which bespoke atonement were not as yet permitted to be offered by ordinary men. They awaited the further development of the Priesthood and the Ritual, to which the following pages bear witness.

Let us deeply ponder the suggestion of this initial paragraph, that worship stands in the forefront of our relationships to God, and to each other. "In the beginning, God."

The Idea of Worship: The Sinai Stage. There were several stages in the development of the idea of worship among the Hebrew people. The first may be summarised as that of Sinai. When the mighty God descended there, clouds brooded over it, as we have seen, with forked lightning glancing to and fro amid the blackness, darkness, and tempest. Even Moses said, as he approached it, "I do exceedingly fear and quake." Very few of the children of men have had so pure a bosom as Moses, the man who seems to have been raised above the rank and file of men into a spirituality and purity of which the virgin peaks of Sinai were a symbol, and if the effect on his nature was so awe-inspiring, what must not have been that revelation of the Divine Majesty!

in Modern Life. But are there not some lives still that are represented by Sinai? They are always living under the brooding cloud, their religious sentiments are full of dread, their experience is sombre, dark, and uninviting. For them death is the leaving behind of the sunny landscape, and the threading of a dreary mountain pathway to the lonely desolations of Sinai, with its thunder and storm. It is not impossible that the words of Moses aptly describe your own life. "I exceedingly fear and quake when I come in contact with a religious man, and I do my best to avoid him; I exceedingly fear and quake when a religious subject is quoted in my proximity; I exceedingly fear and quake when I anticipate the act of death; I exceedingly fear and quake at the thought of living for ever. Religion is a burden, sorrow, and torment to me." Ah, any who speak thus need to ponder over, and ask God's inward teaching on those words of the Apostle: "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only

Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (Jn 1:14-16). Directly you see that God was more perfectly revealed in the winsomeness of Jesus than in the terror of Sinai, you will pass in a moment from the Sinai conception of worship.

The Shiloh Stage. God next recorded His Name in Shiloh. "The whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting (i.e. the Tabernacle) there" (Jos 18:1). Shiloh stands for the worship in symbol and outward form. The tabernacle, with its two sanctuaries, the holy and the most holy, the ark and altar, the veil and outer court, the high-priest and the priests, was a parable for all time. Very obviously it could not give real relief to the conscience. There was no direct contact between the worshipper and God. All he could hope for was that his representative would not forget to put his case before the Eternal and Almighty Father, when they were face to face. From first to last, the service stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances. There was the shadow of good things to come, not the very image of the things; and there was a remembrance of sins made year after year, with no consciousness of absolute remission and relief.

In Modern Life. This, again, is the type of the religion of not a few. They have no spiritual vision, no spiritual touch. Their highest aim is to fulfil diligently and conscientiously their religious duties, as prescribed by their religious directors and counsellors. They are regular and punctual, scrupulous and minute. So far as the outward observance and the inner desire to perform all that is required by the Church and her ministers, they are without reproach; and yet they never feel satisfied. The veil is never withdrawn. Always touching the garment's hem, they never get a glimpse of the face of the Wearer. Without a doubt these obtain the virtue of the Risen Life of Christ. But they have no assurance, no consciousness of child-ship, no witness of the Spirit. As it was in the days of Shiloh's sanctuary, when Samuel ministered there, so for them: "The Word of the Lord was precious (or rare) in those days; there was no open vision." There is something better for thee. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a great Priest over the house of God; let us draw near ... " (Heb 10:19-21, R.V.).

The Jerusalem Stage. God next recorded His Name in Jerusalem. For the full story of the overthrow of Shiloh and its causes, and of the transference of the seat of worship to Jerusalem, we must turn to Psalm 78:57-72 and 1 Kings 6., etc. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth was Mount Sion, the city of the Great King; but the special attraction which drew the crowds of devout men from every nation under heaven was the fact that God had said: "This is My rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Jerusalem was the city of the Great King, mainly because the Temple arose above all other buildings like a dream of white marble. Try and imagine the fascination of those great annual gatherings. The cornfields were bare, the vines had yielded their ruddy juice, and all the land was resting from the labours of the year. The villages yielded the beginnings of the pilgrim-host, which were swollen by confluent streams as every village and mountain-valley yielded their tributaries; and presently fathers, mothers, and children, greyheaded sires and aged women, with boys and girls of the third and fourth generations, that made hill and valley ring with laughter and song, crowded through the gates of the beloved city. The fathers told again to their children the great stories of the past, that they might pass them on to their children. They thronged the Temple-courts, participated in the holy rites, thrilled before the sacred words that were read or sung, and gave themselves up to all the holy associations that religion and patriotism could inspire. And even when darkness fell, and the clouds of Sennacherib's attack gather around the beleaguered city, Isaiah and others said, "There is no need of fear. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her, when the morning breaks."

In Modern Life. This is a phase of religious experience of which we all know something. The great festal crowds, the vast convocations, the uplifting volume of praise and prayer, the thrill of the mighty audience reacting upon each unit, the stirring sermon --all this is helpful, especially in the early stages of our religious life; and though, thank God, it is possible for any one of us to worship Him in the privacy of our own apartment, yet we all know something of the telepathy of common worship, and of the influence that passes from heart to heart in the emotion of a great audience. We should prize such opportunities. Probably we never realise how much we owe to them, until in long weeks of sickness, or in the comparative isolation of protracted journeyings, we are deprived of their impulse and consolation.

A Difficulty. There is always a difficulty, however, in deciding how much of the helpfulness of these services is due to the emotions, and how much to the felt presence of God. Our nature is so mysterious and intricate in its mechanism that we are not always aware as to the true origin and therefore true worth of what we take to be religion. It may only be an emotional fervour, and if so, it will lose its intensity, and have no vital effect on our inner life. It was to the people of Jerusalem that the prophet addressed, in God's Name, the words: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,--I cannot away with iniquity AND the solemn meeting" (Isa 1:13, R.V.). Notice that and. It is very emphatic. The solemn meeting is not sufficient to deliver the soul from its iniquity, because its effect may only be skin-deep.

The Stage of the Well or Spring. There was a fourth phase of which our Lord spoke, when He sat at noon beside the well, and which we may describe as the Worship of the Well or Spring. Let US recall those memorable words (Jn 4:21-26, R.V.): "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." Then almost pathetically He adds, as though God were turning away dissatisfied from all the vain worship of the Temple, "For such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers."

Our True Temple. The true temple is the spirit of man. Not there, but here: not without, but within: not far away, but in thy mouth and in thy heart. Thou mayest find, as Plato said, that though thou dwellest within the walls of a city, thou mayest be as in a shepherd's fold on a mountain. The same thought occurs frequently in the writings of Marcus Aurelius. Men seek for themselves private retiring-places, as country villages, the seashore, mountains; and no thoughtful person would throw a slight on the acquisition of such opportunities when possible. Our Lord loved and chose to frequent mountains, gardens, and the sea. Divine pleasures are found in solitude. With more power over our own spirits, we may return thence to the business of the world. But where this is not possible we may still worship God in the very beauty of holiness. At any time whatsoever, it is in our power to retire within ourselves and be at rest.

Heart, heart, awake! the love that loveth all  
Maketh a deeper calm than Horeb's cave,  
God in thee, can His children's folly gall?  
Love may be hurt, but shall not love be brave?

Thy holy silence sinks in dews of balm;  
Thou art my solitude, my mountain calm.  
Brood Thou around me, and the noise is o'er;  
Thy universe my closet with shut door,

The heart.

The Ordinances and Ourselves. The altar of earth is our humility that casts itself down in profound penitence and heart-break. Our burnt-offering is the consecration and devotement of spirit, soul, and body. "A body Thou hast prepared for me: behold I come to do Thy will, O God." Our peace-offering is our deep fellowship with God, as we commune with Him on the glory and beauty of the Only-Begotten Son. The place where He records His Name, and whither He comes to bless us, is within; and where the Shekinah shines in any heart, however humble, the commonest texture becomes transfigured, even as our Lord's simple homespun did, of which it is said, that His raiment became white and dazzling. We need to lift no tool to sculpture aught; no gods of gold or silver are required; the prohibition not to make any likeness of God is not for us, for have we not beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? No need to say, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," when we have seen Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person.

Our Praise. And when we worship thus, praise is our chief employ. We are not wholly indifferent to the command to make known our requests, but they are more frequently requests for other people than for ourselves, or, if we ask for ourselves, we include all with whom we live. We confess our sins, but we adore the Love that forgives and redeems. Whether in the aisle of pine-trees, or in the tiny garden, or by the margin of lake or river, we walk to and fro, saying aloud, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord." And suddenly we find ourselves part of the Holy Church throughout the world, irrespective of boundaries and divisions, as she joins her voice with the cry of the glorified hosts of perfected spirits before the throne. Then suddenly the glory of God shines over the humble plains of our daily life, and we hear a great multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, Peace on earth, Goodwill toward men."

## Exodus 21:1-32 THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The Law of the Covenant. "The Book of the Covenant," which extends to Exo 23:19, was a peculiarly sacred document. It contained the conditions on which the peculiar relationship between Israel and Jehovah was based. If they obeyed His voice indeed, and kept His covenant, they would become His peculiar treasure among all people, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exo 19:6).

It is quite likely, as I have already suggested, that many of the laws and judgments in these sections are a codification of existing customs, which had sprung up in the previous centuries, and may have dated from the days when, with his women-folk perched high on the backs of camels and a great retinue of household servants, Abram took his journey across the unoccupied territories between Ur of the Chaldees and Damascus.

Moses and Hammurabi. Strong confirmation to this suggestion is afforded by comparing these enactments with the Code of Hammurabi, probably the Amraphel of Gen 15:1, one of the most important personages in the history of Western Asia. (The Century Bible, p. 13.) He lived about 1900 B.C.; and in A.D. 1902 his monument--"a block of black diorite, nearly eight feet high"--was

discovered. The inscription on this precious stone contained a collection of the laws of his empire. There are many interesting points of agreement between the two codes; but there is nothing to prove that the great Hebrew Legislation was copied or borrowed from Hammurabi's, but rather that they emanated from some common source, which was probably the traditional law and custom prevailing throughout the ancient East at a very distant period. Wherever possible, as here, God takes up and endorses those conclusions to which the Spirit of Truth has led mankind.

The Conditions Reflected in the Laws: Civilisation. As we pass we must notice the simplicity of the state of civilisation which these laws reflect. The ox and ass figure largely in the enumeration of property, the one for the toils of agriculture, the other for burden-bearing. There are no fences on the broad pasture-lands and commons on which the cattle graze, hence the peril of persons being gored (Exo 21:28, etc.).

Justice. The administration of Justice was equally simple. There were no gaols, and the act of requital for wrongdoing had to be automatic and summary. Ordinarily, the rule was one of strict retaliation: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exo 21:24-25; Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21). This principle lay at the basis of Solon's administration of Athens, and of the Twelve Tables of early Roman law; and there was a prima facie appearance of justice in it which captivated simple people; but in practice it is uneven in its operation; and it would be obviously unwise for the sake of early society, where man was constantly engaged in fighting for his own, to increase the numbers of mutilated bodies, therefore the principle of preliminary compensation crept in and was legalised (Exo 21:19, Exo 21:22, Exo 21:30, Exo 21:32). But a clear distinction was drawn between the sudden act of passion--"stone or fist," and the premeditated act of revenge--"lying in wait" (Exo 21:14-18).

The Office of the Goel. In the early stages of human society the avenging of crime and wrong is the allotted work of the goel. To avenge the death of a kinsman was more than a right--it was a religious duty; and so strongly was this idea entertained that, long after the State had interfered, and made murder a matter of public prosecution, the nearest kinsman was imperatively bound to set the State procedure in motion. There is a trace of this in Exo 21:13, which doubtless referred, in the first instance, to a part of the camp, known as the Sanctuary, where a manslayer might find respite until it was determined whether he was guilty of homicide or murder. This arrangement became afterwards extended into the appointment of six refuge-cities. But side by side with this ancient institution, judges were evidently assuming responsibility on the part, and in the name, of society (Exo 21:22).

The Honour of Womanhood. A new conception of the honour of womanhood also begins to appear. The national conscience is instructed, not on the respect due to a princess or priestess, such as Deborah or Miriam, but to a humble and unknown female slave, of a poor girl sold by her parents into slavery. She would be placed in a position--which is of course in this Christian age unthinkable--of a kind of secondary wife. Our Lord says that this custom was permitted by the Mosaic Code, because of the hardness of the uninstructed heart (Mat 19:8); but He swept away these concessions, by the one authoritative sentence which reinstated the primal law of marriage,--"Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" i.e. the one man for the one woman, and the one woman for the one man, the only admissible exception being the commission of the one act which dissolves faith. God's way is not catastrophic, but by the gradual method of education and evolution, as the eye is prepared by the gradual dawn of daylight to endure the full glare of noon. But the Mosaic legislation, as set down here, was as immensely in advance of anything known in the world of that time as it was beneath the Christian standard. It had, however, the certain promise of woman's complete emancipation, because for the first time it conferred rights on the poor girl slave (Exo 21:7-11).

Slavery. The legislation before us deals largely with the question of slavery, which was an integral part of the social economy of that age. It would have been useless to prohibit it, until conscience had become educated to a certain level. In the first approach to complete emancipation, all that was possible was to regulate the conditions of slavery, and insert in the national code principles which would ultimately render it impossible for slavery to continue. We cannot forget that, not so very long ago, many members of the Christian Church justified slavery as the best condition for child-races, and that men in high standing as Christians held slaves. The Scriptures, however, have made the system impossible, not only because of the evils which are almost inevitable, but because of its fundamental doctrine, that all men were created by one God, redeemed by one precious blood, and intended to form one great family.

The Message to Ourselves. As we study these ancient laws, it becomes us to ask ourselves whether this Mosaic Code contained in the Book of the Covenant may not have a message for ourselves, in regard to our relations to our fellows, and especially to God.

Consideration for Servants. Our relations to servants and others must always be considered in the light of our attitude towards God. The maidservant--not now, thank God, a slave--but able to leave the household if she will, should always be kindly considered. She too is the centre of a little world, far away in some Lowland village or Highland glen, and the post bring no news that fills her soul with joy or sorrow, but which she must probably keep to herself. She has her life to live which is as much to her as yours and mine. Without undue interference, the mistress is somewhat responsible to some distant mother for the company she keeps and the way she spends her leisure. Do not forget that she sometimes needs a little colour in the drab of the kitchen-life. Put her in touch with a Bible-class or church, if possible. For her sake, if for no other, maintain the family-altar. At your hands, the soul may be required,

though you have only such rights in these matters as love and courtesy concede. But if you ignore her and such as she is, take care lest the temptations that master sons, and break mother's hearts, do not come back to you from her or her class.

Teach your children, and especially your sons, to honour the domestic servant, who is always at their beck and call. Not to give needless trouble, not to be unreasonable in our demands, not to be fretful, rude, passionate, and exacting, such are among the courtesies of a Christian home, and it is an invariable rule that those families are best served where the most courtesy and consideration are given to the servants. But be it remembered that it is no kindness to allow slackness, or permit rightful and necessary duties to be neglected. God Himself in His discipline of His children tempers goodness and exactitude. He comes to reckon with His servants, and does not shrink from inflicting heavy punishment on the unfaithful.

Charity in Thought and Speech. The prescriptions against sins of violence remind us that there are other ways of smiting men than with fist or stone. We remember the Psalmist's description of the assaults of his enemies: "Their words are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." If you cannot speak kindly of people, it is better to refrain from speaking of them. Look out for the good and favourable points in the characters of those around you; and always remember that your alertness in discerning faults arises from your own liability of committing the same. In condemning them you betray yourself. It may be necessary to warn people against them; but always tell God first what you are going to do, and ask Him to show exactly the time and place. Never do it casually, or be betrayed into it. Whenever you go into society, or are thrown with your confidential friend, offer the prayer: "Set a watch, O God, over my mouth, guard the door of my lips."

Sins of the Tongue. And if there has been undue licence in speech, to the detriment of any absent one, there should always be compensation, in the confession of the wrong done, or where that is not possible, in the reparation for the wrong by an additional meed of praise. Be exacting and rigorous with yourself in these matters, "Pay for the loss of his time, character, or prestige, and cause him to be thoroughly healed!"

Their Punishment. There is a profound truth contained in the ancient Lex Talionis, "An eye for an eye," etc. Every thought to which we give expression affects not only the person against whom we speak, but ourselves. Indeed, if a person stands fast in truth and love, we cannot harm him; our darts fall blunted to the ground. He is hidden as in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. No weapon that is formed against him can prosper, and every tongue that rises in judgment against him is condemned. If only God's servants, when they are maligned, would keep still and refrain from going hither and thither to explain and vindicate themselves, they would find God bringing forth their righteousness as the light and their judgment as the noon-day. But cruel and unkind statements come back to the person from whom they have emanated like the Australian boomerang. "Curses," the proverb says, "come home to roost." Every evil, malicious, and untrue word leaves its poison in the soul from which it emanates, and we reap the result of our idle words, until our own soul is sick and faint and poisoned. How little do the backbiters and gossipmongers of drawing-room or kitchen realise this!

Parents and Children. Of the honour and reverence due to parents we need hardly speak. Obedience is the law of a happy childhood; but it gradually passes into fellowship which, in a sense, is equally commanding. Parents do wisely, when they assist the process. They lose nothing by becoming the close companions and loving advisers of their grown sons and daughters. There is hardly anything more lovely than the mutual confidences of mothers and sons, of fathers and daughters: but it is a mistake when the parent forgets that children of twenty-five or thirty require different handling from that which was perfectly wise and right in their early teens: yet mothers have been known to order their grown daughters about as if they were children. This brings irritation and misunderstanding into what might be a very happy relationship.

Love the Fulfilling of the Law. That we are liable for any hurt which may be indirectly caused by us is an axiom which hardly needs to be emphasised; but as we turn from these injunctions, let us remember that Love is the fulfilling of the Law, and that in the Love of the Spirit we shall not only avoid these wrongs, but think on and practise whatsoever things are just, pure, lovable, and of good repute. We shall take care to practise not the negative, but the positive sides of the divine requirements. We shall realise that the Love of God begets a love for man which is infinitely sensitive.

The Case of the Bondman. We cannot turn from the remarkable paragraph with which this section opens, without recalling the use made of it in subsequent Scriptures. The seasons have been unkindly and the harvests have failed. The locust or mildew, the Nab or landlord have been too much for the small landowner. Vintage and olive-yield have been disappointing and disastrous. Bankruptcy can no longer be evaded. From the pressure of creditors, and the cries of hungry children, the farmer, distracted and hopeless, finally concludes to approach some rich neighbouring landowner, whose estate covers many far-extending acres. He obtains an interview, states his case, and asks for help. It is finally arranged that for the next six years he shall make over his land to be held by the great landlord, whilst his family and he become part of his household to be provided and cared for. Debts and creditors are referred for payment to his patron, and all legitimate requirements are met. The husband and father gladly gives his service to secure so great returns, always realising that in the seventh year he may go forth free. Even though at first the necessity to do another's behests might seem irksome, the consciousness of relief and security was prepondering and immense. The husband

and father would look into the faces of his dear ones, filling out with happier conditions and regular nourishment, and be abundantly repaid. At the expiration of the six years, the small farmer might again seek an interview with the man who had befriended him, and explain his profound unwillingness to assume the anxieties and risks of his former life. He would propose that the arrangement which had worked out so happily should become a permanent one. On this, the magistrates would be called in, and whilst in their presence the petitioner repeated the prescribed formula, "I love my master, I will not go out free," his ear would be bored through with an awl to the door post of his master's house, making him his servant for ever.

The Psalmist's Application and Our Own. It is to this that the Psalmist refers in Psa 40:6, when he says: "Sacrifice and offering

Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened [marg. digged, or pierced for me] ... I delight to do Thy will, O my God,"--words the significance of which have a sublime exposition in Heb 10:5-7. In our service of our Lord, these same words may be applied to us, as were so true of Him. We may serve Him under compulsion and constraint, because we see no other alternative, or we may serve Him with the devotion born of love. Oh for the latter! Oh to be constrained by the love of Christ! Oh to be able to say, deeply and gladly, "Bore my ear to Thy cross, dear Lord, and tie my wayward nature so closely to Thyself, that I may never be able to untie the knots. So I shall be for Thee, as Thou for the Father." And if you would know how the Lord Christ will treat you, His willing slave, read carefully the injunctions laid down for masters in Scripture, and remember that He will fulfil all those for you, and more also. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Lev 25:35-39; Col 4:1; and the Epistle to Philemon.

## Exodus 21:33, Exodus 22:15 THE RIGHTS OF PROPERTY

The Code and Christian Morals Compared. We are apt to take our rectitude and goodness as a matter of course, and it will be good to linger for a little over these paragraphs, with the view of inquiring if our Christian morality is as quick and sensitive as that of this ancient code.

As to Careless Neglect (Exo 21:33-36). The first case is that of water-cisterns, such as are very frequent in countries like Palestine, and are usually covered by a flat stone or a number of planks. To obtain water, it is necessary to uncover them; and it would be a gross act of carelessness to leave them so, lest animals, accustomed to come to them for water, should, on some hot and thirsty day, try to help themselves to drink, and should fall through the aperture. Whether the pit were full, or empty, or in process of construction, this would kill them. Obviously any person guilty of such gross carelessness would be held liable for the loss incurred. And the Christian must be equally careful lest any should suffer from his neglect.

If through his neglect to turn off a water-tap or a gas-jet, the property of an hotel-keeper is damaged, he must certainly own up to his neglect, and make good the damage. If his motor-car destroys a lamb or a fowl, he will certainly stay to make compensation. The Christian owner of property will see to it that the drains of his humblest cottage are in good condition, lest any harm accrue to a tenant's child; and if, through want of such care, a child should be ill and die of typhoid, he will unhesitatingly bear all the cost that can be fairly traced to his neglect. The Christian traveller will take care to leave the railway-carriage, hotel chamber, and other similar public resort in as good a condition as he would expect and desire, were he to be following next after himself. He will leave no pits behind him for the entangling of his fellow-travellers, because either he did not pay his accounts, or was discourteous and niggardly.

As to Possible Injury or Annoyance. The second case is that of an ox that had been known to be of a vicious disposition. The owner was bound to keep him in, or pay for the damage caused to another's property: and the Christian neighbour will not keep dogs that worry their neighbours' sheep or frighten their children; and will not disturb the quiet peace of others by the incessant noise of a gramophone or the practice of some strident instrument of brass.

As to the Law of Theft (Exo 22:1-4). The general principle was that theft should be punished by a fine. There was moral fitness in this, since a man paid for his raid on his neighbour's property by the loss of his own. Ordinarily, he was to restore to the robbed man double what he had taken; but if his actions gave evidence of a malignant and deep-seated purpose, he would have to pay fourfold for a sheep and fivefold for an ox. If unable to pay, he might be sold as a slave to make good the loss he had caused. The burglar, who attempted a house by night, might be killed in self-defence, but not if his attempt were made by day.

We should repudiate the charge of theft in this literal sense. But have we never stolen a fragment of our neighbour's good name, reputation, and standing? Have we never diverted to ourselves some of the love, respect, and credit that were due to him? Have we never laid claim to his ideas, thoughts, speeches, sermons, which we have passed off, *literatim et verbatim* as our own? If so, let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his own hands or brain the thing that is good.

As to the Law of Trespass (Exo 22:5-6). Next to theft, wanton damage of another's property is very reprehensible. The Israelite might turn his cattle into his neighbour's fields; or, either wantonly or accidentally, kindle a conflagration that would consume his corn, whether standing waiting for the sickle or already bound in shocks. Of course he must make the loss good. If we are animated by

the Love of God, we shall take as much care of our neighbour's interests as of our own. We shall consider whether we cannot build our house so as not unnecessarily to spoil his view. We shall not allow our love of game to hurt his poultry-yards or crops; we shall abstain from all intrusive and obnoxious acts. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." Christian men should look not only on their own things, but also on the things of others.

Above all, we must remember that the tongue is a fire, set on fire by Gehenna, and capable of setting on fire a whole neighbourhood. Ah, how much damage professedly Christian people have done by starting a fire "in the thorns!" Have we done so? Then let us spend the rest of our life in making amends, by disabusing the minds of those whom we have poisoned, and by humble apologies to the individual we have maligned.

As to the Law of Deposits (Exo 22:7-13). We are reminded of the sacred character of trusts, whether they consist of a secret entrusted on the pledge of inviolable confidence; or of a trusteeship of property made by a dying man to his choice friends for administration to widow or orphans and others; or of a wardship of young and immature children; or of manuscripts that need to be edited and published; or of funds given for investment. Few are there that have not come under one or other of these divisions! And it is well to observe the provisions here implied, and which may be summarised thus:

- (a) In the case of loss which is not chargeable on the neglect of the trustee, the trustee is not liable.
- (b) But if he take insufficient care, and damage ensues, he is bound to make good the injury caused by his neglect.
- (c) If he should embezzle his trust, single restitution must be followed by condign punishment.
- (d) In doubtful cases, the solemn assurance of the trustee that he had appropriated nothing should be accepted. The cause should come "before God," which may refer to the Court of Justice, where the trustee would be put on his oath.

Our Responsibility. As we entrust our souls to God, and expect Him to help that which we commit to Him, so we should accept no trust, whether of a secret, a child, a sum of money, or an office, without due deliberation. But when once undertaken, we should leave no i undotted and no t uncrossed, in our determined effort to fulfil the trust and confidence reposed in us.

This should especially be the case in the acceptance of public positions. Too many are absolutely reckless of the responsibility involved in giving their names to societies and institutions, or in assuming the honour associated with public functions, without fulfilling the duties that are involved. If you cannot honestly fulfil some public office, refuse to be pressed into it. If you cannot keep in touch with a society, have your name removed from the list of vice-presidents. If you will not inspect the report and balance-sheet, you are not justified in posing as sponsor, and gaining popularity or notoriety under false pretences. You are false to the trust which the public, unable to investigate for themselves, repose in you.

As to Borrowing (Exo 22:14-15). Not all of us are careful as to the duty of restoring borrowed articles with as little delay as possible, and in as good a condition as that in which we received them. How many books are there in your library that have been there an unconscionable time, so much that probably the owner has forgotten that they are in your possession! How many umbrellas, waterproofs, rugs, and other articles are being worn out by the borrowers until they are not worth returning! How much money we have borrowed for small expenses, which we have failed to repay! We forget that there is a text in the Psalms which says that it is "the wicked" who borroweth and payeth not again. We might object to applying that epithet to our borrowing friends, or having it applied to ourselves; but certainly the habit is wanting in the highest sanctions; and it would be very wholesome for us all if we would go through our household wares, discover all the books and other goods which are not ours, and return them to our friends with humble apologies. If we arrive at the altar, says our Lord, and remember that our brother has aught against us, we must leave our duty to God, in order first to address ourselves to performing our obligations to man.

The Importance of Detail. The things enumerated in this chapter may seem too small to mention; but after all nothing is small that touches character. The Master said that no jot or tittle should pass from the Law till all was fulfilled, and the fulfilment was to emanate from love and loyalty to Himself. Are we aware of the exactitude and minuteness of the demands of the Holy Spirit, His Spirit, the Spirit of Love? His word divides between joints and marrow. He notices cups of cold water, one idle word, one wayward look. The rocking-stones of great decisions impinge on very small points of rest. A whisper may start an avalanche. An aperture the size of a child's hand may wreck a dyke. We are not saved by attention to these minutiae, but if we are saved we shall not only be careful of the weightier matter of the law, but of straining out the gnats from the wine.

## **Exodus 22:16, Exodus 23:19. MISCELLANEOUS LAWS**

IT has been observed (See Pulpit Commentary on Exodus, which has supplied several valuable suggestions for this chapter.) that in this remaining section of the Book of the Covenant there is a want of method and logical sequence which makes it extremely difficult

to arrange its precepts in a manner which would commend itself to the modern mind.

The Care of the Wards of Jehovah. We are, first, attracted by those who may be fairly described as the wards or clients of Jehovah.

The Wronged Maid. Foremost among these is the young girl who has been cruelly wronged (Exo 22:16-17). At any rate she shall be secure of an honourable marriage, either by her seducer, or by the payment of a worthy dowry, enabling her to contract a worthy match, notwithstanding the indignity she has suffered. The religious person, man or woman, is encouraged, therefore, to espouse the cause of girls like this, who in every age of the world have been induced to fling away the choice jewel of their purity.

The Stranger. Next in order is the stranger (Exo 22:21). The Hebrews were prone to forget that terrible Egyptian experience, when their fathers were strangers in the land of Egypt; and the stranger in their midst was in danger of being imposed upon, as elsewhere and always. Without friends, imperfectly acquainted with the customs and language of the people among whom he is stranded, compelled to trust himself to those who lie in wait for the unsophisticated and simple, the stranger is much to be pitied, and how often he has been accounted an easy and valuable prey! That he is so often referred to in the Pentateuch is not only a distinctive characteristic of its mild and noble spirit, but gives an incentive to ourselves. The alien who had been attracted to shelter, as Ruth did, beneath the wing of the God of Israel, was to share the Sabbath rest (Exo 22:10), might bring his offerings to the Tabernacle door (Lev 17:8-9), and was even assured of the love of God (Dt 10:18-19). So far, therefore, from vexing, the Israelites were bidden to love them.

Our Duty. Ah! what blessing might accrue to the whole world if the Christian churches, through their members and adherents in the great centres of Christian civilisation, on either side of the Atlantic, could give a worthier welcome to the students that pour into them from all parts of the world to study in their universities, hospitals, and law courts! Instead of leaving our shores, for Burmah, India, China, or Japan, with a knowledge of our science, but contempt for our religion, how much might be done to attach them not only to ourselves but to the religion of Jesus Christ!

The Widow and the Fatherless. Next come the Widow and the Fatherless (Exo 22:22-24). The presence of this injunction on the statute-book furnishes melancholy evidence that these helpless ones, whose pitiful care is surely sad enough to melt hearts of stone, were not exempt from heartless cruelty and oppression. It is a very beautiful testimony, however, to the unique character of this legislation, that it so frequently emphasises Jehovah's solicitude for such. Throughout the Scriptures, the same spirit reveals itself. The widow and fatherless ate the tithe of the yearly produce (Dt 14:29), and received their share in the rejoicings of the great feasts (Dt 16:11-14). The widow's raiment might not be taken in pledge (Dt 24:17); and the gleanings of the harvest and the vintage were viewed as her perquisite (Dt 24:19-21). God sent Elijah to a widow-woman, beyond the precincts of Israel, that she should share in the provision prepared for His servant; and declared Himself to be the Father of the fatherless and Judge of the widow. The Saviour was urged by the widow's tears at Nain to recover her son to life and pure religion and undefiled before God the Father was declared by James to have this as its distinguishing note, that the widow is visited in her affliction. This is as dear to God as the unspotted purity of the holy soul. It is hardly necessary to inculcate on the Christian Church her duty to the widow. From the earliest days her desolate lot has engaged special solicitude (1Ti 5:3-9, 1Ti 5:16). And let any widow who may read these words take comfort from the assurance given here, that her cry will surely bring about Divine interposition on her behalf (Exo 22:23).

The Poor, The Poor also are specially mentioned (Exo 22:25-27). The reason of God's care for them is distinctively stated---"For I am gracious." Can Jesus Christ forget that His mother, when she presented Him in the Temple, could only bring two doves, because unable to afford more--this being in advance of the gifts of the Wise Men? The poor have only to cry, and He will hear. In the Israelite Commonwealth, not only were their richer brethren forbidden to make loans to them on interest, but they were expressly commanded to lend to them without (Dt 15:7-10). Those who had served as household slaves to extinguish their indebtedness, were to be dismissed full-handed (Dt 15:13-14). The poor labourer's garment, needed to envelop him in its warm folds by night, was to be restored to him at the end of the day, on the morning of which he had pledged it for tools or food. He was not to have the misery of a sleepless night in addition to his other anxieties and privations. Do we sufficiently consider those homeless wanderers who may be spending the night in the streets whilst we are snug within our curtains? Not that it is good to give indiscriminate charity, or to make the way of the spendthrift and wrongdoer easy; but there are homeless ones who cannot be classed with these---especially women and children. Christians should inform themselves in Social Science and take part in movements for Social Reform. Radical and far-reaching schemes, dealing with modern conditions, are mein urgently required than doles of charity. They cost more thought and take longer to evolve; but the result is more merciful and permanent. Poverty is due in its widest and largest aspects, not to wrongdoing, but to the preponderance of wealth in the hands of the few, instead of being evenly spread over the many. The goal of social reconstruction is that each human life should have a sufficiency of the great primal gifts of the Creator for its development and the realisation of its native possibilities.

Mercy to Dumb Animals. But the kine, the sheep, and the goats, which had just given birth to their first-born, came equally under the thoughtful care of the great Lawgiver, who ordained that, for a week at least, the mother should have the pleasure and relief of suckling her offspring (Exo 22:30). Thrice the Hebrews were forbidden to seethe a kid in its mother's milk (Exo 23:19; Exo 34:26;

and Dt 14:21), probably to inculcate a tender appreciation of the natural order, and of the relation subsisting between the mother and her offspring. It was against nature to make the mother an accomplice in the death of her child. The precept is capable of wide application. Would that all mothers were equally careful for their children!

The Stringency of this Legislation. The Stringency of this Legislation is apparent in the enumeration of crimes which were visited by the death-sentence in Exo 22:18, Exo 22:19, Exo 22:20. It was also afterwards affixed to the sin named in Exodus 22:28 (see Lev 24:16). Much discussion has been aroused by the sentence here passed on witches and witchcraft, which led to much cruelty in the Middle Ages, and immediately after the Reformation. Large numbers of innocent women were burned or hanged on the merest suspicion of the black arts, but certainly we have gone to the other extreme in the licence we give to crystal-gazers, to those who profess to read the future from the palm, or to summon spirits at their will. Beyond doubt, as the monuments prove, the Egyptians practised the use of the planchette; and every method was adopted by Moses to stamp out from the Hebrew race practices which invariably draw off the soul from the worship and service of God.

Our Duty. What have we to do with demons, we, who have firsthand rights to enter into the immediate presence of the Lord of all principality and power? When I accept the hospitality of a wealthy friend, who has troops of servants at his disposal, his welcome does not confer on me the right to command his servants. If I require their special assistance, it is a matter of honour and etiquette alike to request him to bid them help me. Whenever a soul becomes a member of the divine household, it has to deal not directly with the departed, the angels, or demons, but always with the Mediatorship of Christ. If He chooses to transmit a message to the beloved who have gone to be with Him, or to commission a ministering Angel to help us, it is for Him absolutely and only to take the initiative, and to do as He will among the armies of Heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. "He is the Head of all Principality and Power."

The Administration of Justice. The provisions for the administration of justice are very precise (Exo 23:1-9). They affect the witnesses, the judges, and the accuser or plaintiff. Witnesses are warned against inventing an untrue tale, or circulating one (Exo 23:1-2). Judges are warned against being affected by the voice of the multitude, as Pilate was. They are not to be moved by the outcry of the mob, or the venom of a partizan press. They are not to be biased by sentimentality on behalf of the poor, or partiality for the rich. They are specially charged to see to it that the innocent should not suffer, that the wicked should not escape, that foreigners should get justice; whilst a bribe was not to be entertained for a moment (Exo 23:2-3, Exo 23:6-9). Accusers also are specially exhorted not to slay the innocent by making a false charge; which, even though it were disproved, might blight the defendant's name, soil his character, and shorten his days (Exo 23:7).

What a tender interpolation is that of Exo 23:4-5, with respect to the ox or ass of an enemy! We can almost see the pious Israelite meeting the wandering ox of a man who had done his worst to injure him, and leading it back to the homestead, just in time to meet the owner coming in search; or finding his enemy tugging in vain to get his fallen ass on his feet, and hastening to lift it. Their joint-act could hardly fail to bring the two men together and soften asperities. It was not Moses who said that the Hebrews were to hate their enemies. It was an unwarrantable conclusion which the rabbis founded upon his legislation. Here and in other places the glory of the coming dispensation had begun to shine on the jewels of the ancient breastplate of judgment.

The Feasts to be Observed. The Code closes with a specification of the Religious Festivals which were to be observed by the people. When they had attained to the goal of their long pilgrimage, and were settled in the good land beyond the Jordan, they were enjoined to allow the land to rest on each seventh year. In Egypt, where the soil was continually replenished by the overflow of the mighty Nile, the land could yield crop after crop without exhaustion; but in Canaan, where there was no such natural provision, and where the science of the rotation of crops and of artificial manuring was unknown, the land must have become prematurely exhausted, save for some such provision as this. Only by lying fallow through the septennial year could it retain its fertility as a land of corn and wine, of vineyards and oil-olive. The farmer learnt the necessity of care and forethought; the poor, who are specially mentioned, were allowed to help themselves to what grew of itself, as to the wild produce of woods and hedgerows; whilst the people generally had opportunity for thought and prayer, for religious exercises, and for domestic and social pleasure. It is not improbable also that in this year the festivals at the Tabernacle were prolonged for the solemn reading of the Law in the ears of all the people, as was the case in the days of Nehemiah (Dt 31:10-11; Neh 8:1-15). From the reference in 2 Chronicles 34:21 it would appear that this holy and wise arrangement had not been acted on; but for us how great a lesson is taught by the suggestion of this provision, followed as it is by that of the Sabbath-rest! The question is whether the irreligion of our time may not be directly traceable to the unbroken drive and rush in which the modern world is living. We were not meant to work incessantly either at business or pleasure-taking. Long quiet days are necessary for the bliss of the family, the cultivation of the religious life, and for the growth of the soul in wisdom and strength. Otherwise we cannot be holy men unto God (Exo 22:31).

Thrice each year the males were required to appear before God, and none was to appear before Him empty. All ancient religions had their festivals; and it is well that the children of God should maintain great convocations and conventions, when they feel the pulse of a great multitude engaged in praise, and prayer, and consecration. Heaven itself owes much of its delight to the great multitude, which no man can number, and to the vast orchestra of ten thousand times ten thousand voices. The Feast of

Unleavened Bread fell in the early spring and commemorated the Exodus. The Feast of Harvest (or weeks) followed fifty days afterwards and commemorated the Giving of the Law; it was a peculiarly joyful occasion (Dt 16:9-11), and for us is associated with the marvels of Acts 2. The Feast of Ingathering (or Tabernacles) began in the early part of October, when the olives had been gathered and the vintage was completed. The demand for this thrice-repeated visit to a common meeting-place was not tiresome, because Palestine was not bigger than Wales; and there was no better way of maintaining the Unity of the Nation in an age when there were no posts, telegraphs, telephones or daily Press.

Covenant and Character. As we conclude this brief review of the legislative contents of the Book of the Covenant, all the precepts of which the people definitely promised to fulfil, we can see from the crimes which were forbidden how much of heathen idolatry and custom still clung to the chosen race, which it would take long centuries of fiery ordeal to extirpate. But in this legislation we find the beginnings of their greatness; the genesis of that wonderful development which enabled them to furnish mankind with their sacred lyrics and epics, their unexcelled theology and ethics, their Psalmists, Prophets, Apostles and Teachers, and of whom, according to the flesh, came Jesus the Christ.

We cannot do better than close these chapters by the most eloquent passage in Lord Redesdale's Introduction to Chamberlain's Foundations of the Nineteenth Century--"The ancient Jew was not a soldier--foreigners furnished the bodyguard of his king. He was no sailor like his cousins the Phoenicians, indeed he had a horror of the sea. He was no artist--he had to import craftsmen to build his Temple--neither was he a farmer nor merchant. What was it, then, that gave him his wonderful self-confidence, his toughness of character, which could overcome every difficulty, and triumph over other races? It was his belief in the sacred books of the law, the Torah; his faith in the promises of Jehovah; his certainty of belonging to the chosen people of God. The influence of the books of the Old Testament has been far-reaching indeed, but nowhere has it exercised more power than in the establishing of the character of the Jew. If it means so much to the Christian, what must it not mean to him? It is his religion, the history of his race, and his individual pedigree, all in one. Nay! it is more than all that: it is the attesting document of his covenant with his God."

## Exodus 23:20-33 THE PREPARED PLACE AND THE ANGEL-GUIDE

"BEHOLD, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared" (Exo 23:20). The Prepared Place for the Hebrews.

### I. The Prepared Place.

In the dawn of history we see the patriarchal family leaving the Euphrates Valley and making across the desert for the land of which God had spoken. "The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land that thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen 12:1; Gen 13:14-15). This promise which Jehovah made with Abraham He now confirmed to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, "Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of thine inheritance."

--And for us. "Now these things happened unto them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1Co 10:11, R.V.). For the Hebrews the prepared place was "the good land beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon," of which Moses spoke so pathetically; the land flowing with milk because of its pastures, and with honey because of its flowers; "the glory of all lands," because of its fountains and springs, its mountains and vales, and its impregnable fastnesses. It gleamed before the eye of the pilgrim-host as the Highland valley to that of the far-travelled emigrant returning to see the place of his birth. It behoved them from afar to press on through vicissitudes and perils, undaunted and resolute.

For the young, the prepared place seems to be success, love, and home: when the results of strenuous toil begin to be assured, and the firm land appears. Thus in the story of Creation, when chaos began to give place to order and beauty, the smile of Paradise answered to the love of the one man for the one woman.

For the saint, it is, generally speaking, the place of which the Master said, "In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself."

In that Land We shall be Perfected. The attractiveness of the fair land of Heaven arises from three anticipations.

(1) We shall be perfected. There is not one of us that is not weary of the constant fret of the inward conflict. If only we could realise our ideals, if only we were always what we are in our best moments, if only the will were never uncrowned, if only the throne of

conscience were never upturned. Our consciousness of God's presence is so fitful and the springs of eternity so intermittent. But there the vision of our Lord will be unimpaired. We shall see Him, and be like Him. We shall be perfectly good, desiring and realising only the best. Our whole being will be responsive to the summons of His will, and never get jangled and out of harmony. We shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, because He will make us exceeding glad with His countenance.

And shall be in Accord with Our Surroundings.

(2) We shall be in accord with the Nature of things. Beauty is the remaining trace of the Creator's original workmanship. It is the hallmark of the Eternal. And when we are in perfect accord with Him, she drops her veil and makes us beside ourselves with ecstasy. Have you never walked to and fro, or sat quietly, amid some scene of natural beauty, like a summer morning on the hills, so intoxicated with the inner view of Nature that you hardly knew whether you were in the body or out? And have there not been other experiences, when the beauty of some natural law, or Divine handiwork, or moral splendour has broken freshly upon the eye of your mind, and you have been filled with speechless awe and reverence? These are rare and memorable experiences, and foreshadow the perfect unveiling of things as they are, when the mountains shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Creation is now subjected to vanity. She groaneth and travaileth in pain, but when she is delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, when the sons of God are manifested, and the new heavens and earth are born, then God will destroy the face of the covering that is cast over all the peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations, and will swallow up death in victory.

And shall have Fellowship with the Blessed.

(3) We shall have uninterrupted fellowship with the blessed. Without us they cannot be made perfect, and are awaiting us. To sit at the feet of Paul, to talk with John, to hear the story of Creation or Redemption from the lips of one of the Elders, like him who questioned about the great multitude--"one of the elders answered, saying unto me"--to greet the holy dead, to resume the long-interrupted converse, to take up the broken and snapped threads of friendship and fellowship, without the possibility of misunderstandings, heartbreaks or severance--surely all this, in the sweet society of Paradise, is enough to quicken our footsteps. Some lonely people amongst us may even thank God for their lonely hours, for they will realise the joys of heavenly fellowship as none else can. To no feet are grass and moss so soft as to those which have climbed long and arduously the difficult flint-paved path.

The Possibilities of the Present. Such are some of the thoughts that cluster around the place that Christ has prepared for them that love Him. But how great a mistake it is to postpone these blessings till we have passed through the Doors of the West! Many, for instance, read those inspiring words of 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 as if they referred only and solely to the other life; they somehow miss the explanatory clause which follows immediately. Let us read the passage again: "Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit" (R.V.). The latter words prove that they have been revealed to some, as is certainly on record; but if to some, why not to all? Why should we not receive, here and now, the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us by God? The one condition is that we should not be carnal, but spiritual, and that the eyes of our heart are enlightened that we may know. The trouble is, with most of us, that from the earliest infancy many loving friends have helped us to make use of the body, by which we know the world around us; and so few have helped us to recognise and use the Spirit, by which we come to know the Unseen, the Infinite, and the Divine.

Why Wait Till Death? It is not needful to wait for death ere we enter on the enjoyment of the good things prepared for us before the foundations of the earth were laid. Our eternity does not begin from death, but from the soul's second birth. We begin to live the religious life, which means that we live, and move, and have our being in the Presence of God, and in constant touch with Him. Forgiveness, Salvation, the New Birth are all preliminary to this. They are the vestibule to the Palace. Suddenly the soul finds that God is all and in all, that it is a child in the Divine Love, who need go no more out, and it hears the assurance which is borne in perpetually on its inner consciousness, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is Thine."

Then those three experiences, which we have located in the other world, begin to be habitual possession of the soul. In union with Christ, it comes to itself, it obtains the child's open vision of Nature, and it knows that it has become one with the Holy Catholic Church, and is admitted to the communion of saints. "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours, and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1Co 3:22-23).

The Angel-Guide. II. The Angel Convoy. This Angel was no ordinary or created angel. He is repeatedly identified with Jehovah Himself. God's name--His essential nature---is in Him. The martyr Stephen, in his defence, speaking of Moses, said, "This is He that was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai" (Act 7:38, R.V.). Now, we know Who that Angel was, and what He said. "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, The place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exo 3:4-5). Malachi describes Him as "the messenger of the Covenant" (Mal 3:1), whose way was to be prepared by John the Baptist. We can have no difficulty, therefore, in accepting the general

consensus of Christian opinion, which has identified this Angel who was to help Israel in the way, and bring them to the prepared place, with Jesus Christ, the ever-blessed Son of God, to Whom is given the prerogative of pardoning or refusing to pardon sin.

For the Soul's Pilgrimage. The Lord Jesus is the supreme Guide of the Soul's Pilgrimage. To abide in Him is to be saved from walking in darkness, and to have the light of life. He is the door and the way. As we yield ourselves to Him we are led into the deep things of God. But in order to appreciate Christ's guidance in "the Way"--the phrase by which Christianity was known in its earliest years (Act 9:2, R.V.)--we must be born of the Spirit, live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. The natural man lives only in the sensuous and intellectual realms. His outlook into the spiritual world is through a window of horn, or some similar almost opaque medium. The higher faculties, which the Apostle calls the eyes of the heart, must be opened before we know the hope of His calling, or the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, or the exceeding greatness of His power toward them that believe. We can only know what Christ wafts to unfold, as fast as and to the degree in which we increase in spiritual perception; and our spiritual faculties can only mature, as our physical faculties did, through use, i.e. through obedience.

Submission to His Control. If any man is willing and resolved to do His will, he shall know, and shall follow on to know the Lord whose advent and work are prepared as the morning. Take heed then to the Christ above you, and more especially to the Christ within you. Harken unto His voice speaking in the Horeb-Cave of your soul. Be not rebellious against Him, for if you will indeed harken to His voice and do all that He speaks, then you will be brought into union with God and the nature of things. The stars in their courses will fight for you. The mountains shall bring peace, and the little hills righteousness. God will be an enemy to your enemies, and an adversary to your adversaries. For Christ Himself shall go before you, and bring you in to possess those parts of your own nature which have hitherto been held by the Amorite, the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Those who obey Christ find Him to be as the Angel, whilst those who refuse Him discover Him to be as a hornet. God wafts to bless, but if a man refuses and resists Him, He whets His sword.

Progress and Means.

### III. The Royal Progress of the Soul.

The way to Canaan was infested by enemies, and the land itself was held by the nations already enumerated, but so long as Israel followed the Angel-Guide there was no power amongst them all that could resist them. The one condition was obedience--the hearkening to His voice; and for us there is no other. Obey the voice that speaks in Scripture: obey the voice that speaks in moral intuitions: above all, obey the voice of the Good Shepherd, in the depths of the soul, of which Jesus said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." As we obey Him, we climb the mountain, and as we climb we see the ever-extending panorama of truth, which is a far-reaching continent, only trodden by those who are willing to go in and possess it by the obedient following of Christ.

But notice the promises which will be fulfilled in our experience.

(1) Guidance. "Mine angel shall go before thee Exo 23:23). It was superhuman guidance. He preceded them in the Pillar of Cloud and Flame, indicating the safest and directest of the desert-tracks, as no Arab or Bedawin could; and wherever the cloud brooded the manna fell and the water flowed. The inner guidance of the Spirit of Jesus was of priceless value to Paul, as much in the paths He blocked as those He opened (Act 16:6, Act 16:7, Act 16:10). And it is promised to every soul that will lay aside its own plans, and be still.

(2) Material Blessing (Exo 23:25-26). There would be bread and water, immunity from disease, fertility of cattle, and the fulfilment of the term of life. It is not necessary to spiritualise all these, though they have their spiritual counterparts. But godliness has the promise of this life as well as of the next. It is a great word which is spoken of Abraham, when we are told that "Abraham died in a good old age, an old man, and full." Surely this is what under normal conditions a child of God, who has followed the laws of Christ, may attain to--a full life, overflowing with grace and truth, strength and sweetness, and perfectly satisfied.

(3) The Conquest of Canaan (Exo 23:27, etc.). This was to be a gradual process, "little by little," but it would be sure. If the Israelites had been asked which they preferred, they would doubtless have replied, let it be done "at once." But that policy would have led to the incursion of wild animals and the deterioration of the cultivated soil, and it was better in every way for the Divine purpose to be executed with Divine deliberation. This made the conquest more thorough and lasting. It also enabled the Israelites to consolidate and organise their conquests, as they went from one point to another. "Little by little" does the work of God proceed through the individual soul. "Little by little" do the conquests of the Cross win over the world. "Little by little" is the unfolding purpose of Redemption made manifest to men and angels. Supposing it were otherwise, and that as the result of some extraordinary outpouring of God's Spirit whole nations and continents should suddenly turn to Him, how impossible it would be for the Church to overtake, supervise, instruct, and consolidate. There would be profound peril of error creeping in, and of the wrong leaders coming to the front. It is not good for the whole responsibility of a Kingdom to be cast on a child, it is better for him to grow into it little by little. And the constant necessity for watchfulness, for discipline, and for the practice of the warrior's outfit, is a great asset. The fact

that all our enemies are not suddenly extirpated forbids the sleep of the enchanted ground and the enervation of the heated plain. It is good even to have an incentive, and to be compelled to own "that we are not already perfect, but we follow on."

Needed Warnings. It should be noticed that the injunctions against idolatry are constantly repeated. We find them in Exodus 23:24 and again in Exo 23:32-33. The stringency of these reiterated commands apparently could not be too strongly emphasised, because of the filthy rites with which the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, of Chemosh and Rimmon, and of Canaanite deities was celebrated. It would be shameful even to mention the things that were done in their temples; and the emblems which the Israelites were commanded to destroy were highly indecent. Alas, that they disobeyed these commands, and that the story of the chosen people is one long series of provocations to the Angel of the Covenant. Thus the full limits of God's promise, mentioned here, were not realised until the reign of Solomon, and even then for but a little while, and it remains for yet another King to reign from the River to the end of the World. But let us take the warning seriously to heart, lest by our disobedience and failure we also limit the Holy One of Israel, and curtail the measure of influence, usefulness, and efficiency, which otherwise might be ours.

## Exodus 24:1-18 CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF APPROACH

A Wondrous History. This is an amazing chapter with its four concentric circles of approach to the Most High; and, however true as an historical narrative, it is still more illuminating and inspiring when considered as conveying admonition and encouragement for ourselves.

It appears that Moses descended from the Mount bearing in his mind the first draft of the Book of the Covenant. With a summary of this he made the people acquainted, and on the following morning he ratified the covenant by special rites before he ascended with the elders, in harmony with the Divine Invitation, to one of the lower spurs of the mountain. He then again descended with them to the plain, where he received a further summons to ascend the mountain in company with Joshua, who was comparatively a young man at that time, though giving remarkable evidence of his sincere piety and devotion (Exo 33:11).

The First Circle.

I. The Outer Circle formed by the Masses of the People.

They were still kept without the barriers. It is expressly said, "they shall not come near." Though they were included in the Divine purpose, they had a very unintelligent appreciation of its real significance or importance. Had they really understood either the one or other, surely the shameful scene of the worship of the golden calf would never have been enacted. When Moses first recited the conditions of the Covenant, they answered with one voice: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do." But probably they were more attracted by the general suggestion of occupying the promised land than aware of the binding nature of the conditions on which the occupation was to be based.

The Blood Rite. It would appear that Moses committed the laws to writing that very night, and rose very early in the morning to ratify them with the most solemn ceremonial. From time immemorial men have bound themselves to each other by exchanging blood. There is no tie amid the Bedawin more inviolable than this, and on this basis, though not exactly in the usual method, Moses sought to bind the people and Jehovah. An altar was built, twelve pillars were erected as a permanent memorial and young men selected from the firstborn sons of leading families, who officiated as priests until the family of Levi was set apart for that high office, offered burnt-offerings and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. It must have been a solemn scene, witnessed by a great concourse of people, who may even have climbed the mountain-slopes, other than those of Sinai, to witness it. Moses' actions were specially observed as he collected the blood in basins, sprinkling half of it on the altar, and reserving the remainder till he had read once more the enumeration of the law from the book, probably of papyrus leaves, like those which have been recently discovered in Egypt, and on the pages of which he had written the law. When, a second time, the people had cried, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient," he took the blood which he had reserved, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward" (Heb 9:20, R.V.).

A Sacramental Union. By thus sprinkling both the altar, as representing God, and the people, who were the parties to the covenant on the other side, Moses made both parties partakers of the same blood, and so secured a kind of sacramental union. Yet within a few weeks it was trodden under foot in shameful orgies and dances, showing that however stoutly men asseverate their determination to keep their vows of consecration, even going so far as to write and sign them with their own blood, nothing will avail to keep them steadfast, short of the promise of the new covenant, in which God says: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, I will put my laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb 10:16-17, R.V.).

Promise but not Service. Too many professing Christians resemble these people. They are willing enough to receive all the benefits

of religion, but are unchanged in heart and purpose; easily moved in this direction or that, like the waves of the sea, driven by the winds and tossed; fickle and passionate; crying "Hosanna" to-day and "Crucify" to-morrow; no real love, though much speech; quickly yielding the produce of the shallow soil, but beneath hard as adamant. They take the solemn sacrament in the morning, but have violated the solemnest sanctions of human life by night-fall. Of such the verdict of our Lord is only too true. "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." They remind us of those who gathered round the Master during His earthly ministry, attracted by the eloquences of His teaching and the splendour of His miracles, but to whom He would not trust Himself, because He knew what was in man.

The Second Circle.

II. The next Circle was formed by the Seventy Elders, together with Aaron and his two sons.

They ascended the mountain-side, some distance beyond the barrier, at the express invitation of Jehovah. They were allowed a closer approach, but still the restriction remained--"Worship ye afar off."

The Vision. They were not allowed to come near. Israel beheld no similitude of God at the giving of the Decalogue (Dt 4:12-15); but the narrative at this point suggests that these favoured men were permitted to behold some appearance of the Divine Being who had invited them for this purpose. Moses beheld the form of the Lord (Num 12:8), Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon the Throne (Isa 6:1). For Ezekiel there was the appearance of a man upon the throne (Eze 1:26). What the Elders saw we cannot tell, but the mention of feet suggests a human form. Might not this have been an anticipation of the Incarnation? We are told that Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God, and it may be that there are unexplored mysteries in those wonderful words of Genesis: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness!" But four interesting remarks are appended.

The Sapphire Pavement.

(1) "There was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone." The blue sapphire is one of the loveliest of jewels, reminding us of the deep azure of the sky, the blue of Geneva's Lake or the glacier-fissure, the bluebell and the Alpine flowers. Depth, distance, serenity, calm, gentleness, and peace shine in unrivalled beauty through the sapphire rays, as though pouring from exhaustless fountains. The evident intention was to set forth the milder glories of God's character, as reconciled with Israel, in contrast to those more terrible manifestations which accompanied the giving of the Law, and had filled the hearts of the people with awe. As we think of that sapphire work we are inclined to exclaim, Oh, the depth, not only of the wisdom, but of the Love of God! Above us is Love in Excelsis; beneath us is Love in Profundis; within are Love and Peace as an ocean; behind us is Love from everlasting; before us is Love to the uttermost. It besets us behind and before. It is about our path and our lying-down. It provided our mother's breast at birth, and will provide the soft bosom of mother-earth for our resting-place, when our spirit will have been received into the Father's Home, which Love hath gone to prepare. And in the meanwhile it paves our way thither with sapphire.

The Unclouded Splendour.

(2) "As it were the body of Heaven in its clearness." Did not this represent God's transcendence, His superiority to the thunderstorms that darken the lower skies, His independence of the clouds, which at the best form His temporary vesture and hiding-place? The terrors of the Law were laid aside; here was unclouded clearness, light, love, and forgiving grace. All their sin was removed so far as the east is from the west, and blotted out as a thick cloud. Too often our vision of God is dimmed and beclouded by the earth-born clouds which originate in the misconceptions and sins of our own hearts. If only we were more careful to guard against these, and to keep an open firmament between the waters above and the waters below, dividing the Heavenly from the Earthly, and the spiritual from the sensual, how much more often would we dwell under the very heaven for clearness!

The Security of the Nobles.

(3) "Upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand." This sentence bespeaks some surprise. Evidently they had ascended with considerable alarm, and their families were awaiting their return with some anxiety. It is clear that if they had never returned nobody in the camp would have been very much surprised. We are always thinking that God will lay His hand on us. We take our pleasures sadly, because afraid to seem too happy. We love our dear ones with a nervous dread, lest if we love them too well they will be snatched from us. We speak of thunder and lightning and earthquake as "the act of God." We hardly dare think of a spell of unmitigated and unclouded delight, lest God should overhear our thoughts and hasten to mingle some sour with the sweet, some alloy with the pure gold. It is very sad, because such conceptions of God shed a sombre shadow on our life's landscape and shut out the sunshine. What a contrast there is between the thoughts of many children of God and the outbursts of the Psalms! Even Jeremiah in his Lamentations affirms that He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men! Do let us put out of our minds these hard and hurtful thoughts. We are accepted in the Beloved, and ours is the God Who is only good (Ps. 73: 1, R.V., marg.). Dare to believe that all is love, only love, pitiful and tender, rejoicing in human joy. Let us rejoice in every good thing which God gives, always believing that the last will be best, and that there will be sugar at the bottom of the cup. Do not believe that He will lay His hand on you, except to anoint and bless.

The Divine Condescension.

(4) Also they saw God, and did eat and drink. Some people eat and drink without beholding God; others behold God, and are too shy or afraid to eat and drink; but evidently these seventy elders were perfectly at their ease. As they were engaged in the sacrificial meal, feeding, it may be, on the reserved remnants of the peace-offerings, slain earlier in the day (Exo 24:5), they became conscious of the near presence of God; and it did not affright them. When in the village inn, the Stranger who had so greatly commended Himself to Cleopas and his friend had taken the bread, and blessed, and broken it, their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; so was it as these elders ate of the peace-offerings, which were specially distinguished from the other offerings and sacrifices as being a feast of fellowship and communion between the human guests and the Divine Host. We are reminded also of Christ's words, Who tells us that He stands at the door and knocks, to be first assured that He will be welcomed, and that then He will come in to sup with us, and we with Him. But in this case He brings the sacred victuals with Him, as Melchizedek did, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings.

What Might Have Been. It was thus that these men, to whom Moses entrusted the care of the camp during his approaching absence, were prepared for the ordeal to which they were to be exposed. Abraham was prepared for the assault of the King of Sodom by the previous advent of Melchizedek. Our Lord--may we not say it reverently?--was fortified by the passion of the Passover which immediately preceded it. And if these elders had only realised the full significance of that meal, that vision, that consciousness of the Divine Presence, they would have stood like rocks against the clamour of the people for the golden calf. But it was not to be, and we can never forget that they at last perished in the desert, whilst Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire on the very threshold of their priestly office. How near we may come to harbour, and yet be shipwrecked! Balaam desired to die the death of the righteous, and certainly he enjoyed unusual revelations of God, but he fell on an ignominious battlefield, and his name is handed down through the ages as an arch-tempter. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." It is possible to pass from the communion table to perdition. The Circle of Joshua.

III. The Circle represented by Joshua.

If the first and lowest circle represents those who are satisfied with the outward show of moving religious spectacles; and the second those who are capable of some glimpses into the eternal, which, however, have no permanent effect on character; this higher circle, with its solitary occupant, Joshua, may stand for the eager piety of many in the ranks of young manhood or womanhood, which lacks as yet the perfect vision of a Moses, but will be satisfied with nothing less. These have already fought and won their fight with Amalek. Amalek stands for the flesh, and Joshua had routed the Amalekite hosts before he came to Sinai, therefore he could stand nearer the centre than others, who were only occupied with the lower attractions of the meal, of which they ate and drank, apparently deriving nothing beyond. We must have met and conquered the Amalek of the flesh, if we are to see God. The child of appetite cannot climb to, and cannot breathe in, that rare atmosphere. Spiritual things are only discerned by spiritual senses, and our spiritual faculties are developed just in proportion as we crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. But the spiritual force that is generated in obedience and conflict will carry the soul triumphantly through the forty years of wandering, and bring it into the land of Canaan, where it shall lead the hosts into the rest of God. Only Caleb and Joshua of all that host were destined to that supreme privilege! The Circle of Moses.

IV. The last and highest circle of approach to God is represented by Moses.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the Mount, and be there And Moses rose up and his minister Joshua; and Moses went up into the Mount of God." But as they drew near the cloud which covered the Mount an arrest was placed upon their further advance. Though summoned, Moses went no further, until he received a further invitation. For six days the two waited, absorbed in prayer and meditation, and on the seventh Moses heard his name uttered from out of the midst of the cloud. Leaving Joshua to await his return, he entered the excellent glory, which to those beneath appeared like devouring flame; and as we see him enter we can only repeat the words of the Psalmist: "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom Thou chooseth, and causest to approach unto Thee, that He may dwell in Thy courts!" When shall that day appear when we also shall see Thy face, and have Thy name written on our foreheads? Grant to us grace, when our name is called, to be so clothed in the righteousness of Christ that we may not be ashamed or turned back!

## Exodus 25:1-9 IN THE MOUNT WITH GOD

The Import of Moses and the Cloud. When we finished our last chapter, the impression may have been left that the entrance of Moses within the cloud was an emblem of the moment of our passage at death from the earthly house of this physical body to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. But that is not the lesson derived from this incident in the New Testament. It is

used there as the emblem and symbol of that Divine fellowship to which we are summoned during this mortal life, when all, with unveiled face, may behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and beholding, be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.

The Tabernacle. Great as had been the service rendered by Moses in the Exodus and the Red Sea, in the march through the wilderness and the giving of the Law, there was other and perhaps more important work to be done in the erection or ordering of the Tabernacle, and in translating into material forms the recondite and sublime spiritual truths which were to be enshrined there for centuries, and figuratively for all time. It was for this purpose that he was summoned within the encircling cloud. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

The Preparation of Moses. Moses, Stephen says, was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt (Act 7:22), but that wisdom, which was intellectual and earthly, would not help him here, though it might be serviceable in translating into human thought and speech the mysteries that were to be communicated to the artificers and the crowd. But the natural (physical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, and he cannot know them, says the Apostle, because they are spiritually discerned. It was necessary, therefore, even for Moses to become aware of the things of the Spirit of God by another organ of cognition, namely the spiritual faculties, which alone are capable of receiving and understanding the things of the Spirit. In modern parlance, this organ of spiritual cognition is described as subliminal consciousness, and in similar phraseology. But we prefer to use the expressions of the Apostle, which are clear and simple. He distinguishes between the wisdom belonging to this world and its leaders, who are soon to pass away, and the wisdom of God which is hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes, to those of the child-heart, who are spiritually-minded, who live and walk in the use of their spiritual vision, for there God's Spirit draws aside the veil, so as to reveal, intuitively and at a glance, the deep things of the Divine nature. Among human beings, pursues the Apostle, who knows a man's inner thoughts except the man's own spirit within him? and if we are to know God's inner thoughts it must be by His Spirit! But Spirit communicates only with Spirit, as in wireless telegraphy the transmitter and the receiver must be in perfect accord. It is clear, therefore, that the mind of Christ can only be made known by His Spirit to the spirits that have become percipient and receptive. We can now understand why Moses was left waiting for six days on the threshold of the great revelation, that he might lay aside his own wisdom and become perfectly attuned to the Spirit of Revelation, who was prepared to communicate the deep things of God.

Its Meaning for Us. Need we emphasise this profound lesson? By the new birth most, if not all, of the readers of these pages have been born of the Spirit, but probably they do not realise that, just as in natural birth they were born into the natural world, with an apparatus to apprehend it, so in the new or second birth they were born into the spiritual world, with an apparatus suited for it. The mistake, however, is that whilst they have never ceased to use the apparatus of the human body to receive through it the impressions of the outer world and react on it, yet they have allowed the senses and powers of these spirits to atrophy from disuse. Ah, the pity of it! Our mothers, nurses and friends did their best to train us in the use of the one, but we have had so few to help us to use the other. Like young eaglets, we have trembled on the edge of the nest, and if our Heavenly Father has threatened to break up our nest, and precipitate us out on the steeps of air, we have violently protested against His cruelty and have clung to the tattered remnants of the nest, dreading to use our enfeebled and useless wings, which might have borne us sunwards.

When Moses was entirely yielded to the Spirit's guidance and teaching he was able to discern things which before had been hidden. "The spiritual man discerneth all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man."

#### (1) The Plan of the Tabernacle.

(1) He beheld the perfect Plan. "According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Exo 25:9). These words repeat themselves like an echo among the mountains. Sometimes at least they strike the ear from now until the Fall of the Second Temple was close at hand (Heb 8:5); and when Scripture in its comparatively narrow compass repeats one injunction so often, we may be sure that it deserves to be deeply pondered, and made one of the outstanding factors of life.

The whole Tabernacle, in all its courts and hangings, its altars and furniture, stood complete in the mind of God, and may have been represented by its Architect in a visible form. This at least is suggested by the use of that word pattern. Was some outward fashion of the Tabernacle presented to the eye of Moses, to help heart and mind to comprehend the Divine conception? Was some fairy shape created out of rainbow mist? Were curtains woven on the looms of wise-hearted angels? Were ark and altar, boards and hangings, table and laver reproduced of that same stuff of which dreams are made? Within the precincts of cloud, on some mountain level, did a visible pattern stand forth of what Moses was to reproduce upon the desert sand, that, carrying the picture in his eye, as well as in his soul, he might be able exactly and accurately to reconstruct it? If so, when the completed structure stood on the desert sand, he alone must have been disconsolate, amid the many rejoicing crowds, as he contrasted the very best that their united talents and gifts could produce, with what he had seen when he was on the Mount.

The Plan of our Lives. There is a profound lesson here. All our life has been preconceived in the mind of God, and every son and daughter is called, not only to see His face and live, but to behold the plan and pattern of life, which has to be reconstructed in

actual living, so that we may say with our Lord, "The Son can do nothing of Himself--He can only do what He sees the Father doing; for whatever He does, that the Son does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and reveals to Him all that He is Himself doing. And greater deeds than these will He reveal to Him, in order that you may wonder.

The words I speak are those which I have seen in the presence of the Father" (Jn 5:19; Jn 8:38, Weymouth).

Three Attitudes Towards Design and Order. There are three sorts of men.

First, those who care only for the forms of things. They have no ideals, they form no purpose. Without any upward or heavenward glance they day by day drift forward on the current of any whim or caprice, before the light and variable gales of fashion. To do the behest of the hour, in good form, and at the impulse of the moment, or at the call of routine and habit, is all they desire or concern themselves with.

There is a higher type of manhood than that. We know many who have some positive plan or programme of what they would like to make of their lives. The poet, the artist, the inventor of gems, the discoverer--each of these works more or less to a pattern which has been the dream of their boyhood, and with much witchery it has beckoned them to follow. They have seen a pattern, though it has not been shown them where Moses saw his, and they have not the driving-force on the one hand, or the sense of absolute assurance on the other.

A More Excellent Way. Each of these falls beneath the conception presented in the text, of the man who is accustomed to live in the presence of God, and who believes that of every year, of every month, and of every day there is a complete pattern. The ideal of his friendships is there, and he expects to be led from one stage into another of tender intimacy and ennobling intercourse. The ideal of his marriage, the ideal of his home, the ideal of his business-life, the ideal of each summer holiday, the ideal of the manner in which he is to pass home to God--each is there on the Mount, and he is at perfect peace, only desiring to build as near as may be to the pattern which lives in the thought of God. The same thought is contained in that assertion of Eph 2:10, R.V. "For we are His workmanship [the Greek word is *poiema*] created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them."

The Secret of a Blessed Life. This is the secret of a blessed life. Do not be driven by circumstances; do not be shaped by Fate or Destiny; do not sullenly follow out your own plan and scheme, but continually hide yourself in God, wait your six days, as Moses did, and see the perfect pattern you are afterwards to reproduce. In some cases it is shown in early childhood, and from the first the young prophet, like Jeremiah, hears God saying: "Before I formed thee... I knew thee;... I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations, to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak." In other cases, the pattern is revealed piecemeal. We are asked to weave a curtain, or make an altar, or shape a plank, and we have no sort of idea what they will look like when all are placed together. It will be a discovery indeed when some faithful souls who lived by the day, doing just the day's work, will awake to see an invisible hand composing the disjointed pieces, and building them together as a fair temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit. Be of good cheer, you are building for Eternity!

If it be asked what we see when we are alone with God, we may answer with great reverence that we behold the nature of our Lord, standing forth as the perfect Exemplar, the Heavenly Pattern. His character, words, sufferings, most blessed obedience unto death, His absolute devotion to the Father's will these are the pattern. He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. As the holy Apostle John puts it, we are to walk even as He walked, we are to purify ourselves as He is pure, we are to be righteous as He is righteous, and as He is, so are we to be in the world.

(2) The Significance of its Details.

(2) Moses saw also into the significance of the various parts of the pattern. We are told in Exodus 31:18 that when God had made an end of communing with Moses upon Mount Sinai He gave unto him the two tables of stone. That word communion is very significant, because it implies intercourse and reciprocity of thought.

How Revealed. By its very nature, communion involves speech between two parties; and when we learn that God communed with Moses, it could not for a moment be implied that there was a monologue, and that God poured an uninterrupted stream of instruction into the mind of Moses, without a remark or response on his part. We must believe, on the contrary, that there was a perpetual interchange of question and answer. In this narrative, from this chapter to the verse just now quoted, Moses gives an account of what happened on the Mount, but makes no announcement of his share in it. He dwells only on what God said; but that word communion compels us to interpolate at nearly every paragraph the reverent inquiries, and probably the adoring ejaculations, of the human pupil.

A Reminiscence of Moody. Some years ago, when Mr. Moody, sitting in the porch of his home at Northfield, was talking with me about his British friends, he gave a very tender and appreciative characterisation of Dr. Andrew Bonar, whom he greatly admired and revered. He told me several things that Dr. Bonar had said, which had made a profound impression on his mind, and it is to that rich

and devout imagination that the following paragraphs are due. They are the reproduction, in a very halting fashion, of faraway words, blurred and dimmed by the abrasion of many years. I admit that probably the conception is too materialistic, but it is at least vivid enough to live as a rich mosaic on the walls of our imagination.

The Questions of Moses. There stood the Tabernacle; in vision it may have been life-size. Moses may have been able to walk through the rainbow mists, the golden wreaths of light, in company with God, and to stand, so to speak, with God side by side in the Most Holy Place, or in the Holy Place, with its seven-branched candlestick and shewbread table. As they passed through, and paused at the laver, or the great brazen altar, or the furniture of the Holy Place, may we not suppose that Moses reverently questioned God as to the inner meaning of each separate item? He does not give us the inner significance in these chapters. It would have been unintelligible to that age, but, no doubt, God would explain it to His faithful servant.

The Cherubim. "Why, O Most Holy God, do those cherubim bend over that ark? ... It is because angels see, in that which the ark represents, mysteries which they desire to fathom."

The Lid. "And why is the ark covered by that golden lid? It is because the obedience of the Christ to the holy law will one day meet and cover its entire demand, as contained in those tablets of stone beneath."

The Veil. "And why this heavy, veil? ... Because the worshipper must, in the first instance, be excluded, and only after centuries have passed will it be rent, so that those that love Me may come and enjoy the fellowship thou art enjoying now."

The Candlestick. "And why that seven-branch candlestick?" "To set forth the light which must shine through Israel to the world."

The Table. "And why that shewbread table? ... Because the life of the Christ is to be the bread of the whole world."

The Incense. "Why this incense? ... Because as the fragrance of the incense is grateful to the nostrils, so the prayers of My people are pleasant and delightful to Me."

The Laver. "But why this great laver? ... Because those who come near Me must ever wash themselves, their feet and hands, which had become befouled."

The Altar. "And this brazen altar standing here, why so large, why those horns? ... Ah," the answer might have been, "that is to represent the supreme act where My love is to make an Atonement for the sins of the world."

Do not you think therefore, that God was led by Moses' questions, as they communed together, deeper and deeper, to interpret the very heart and mysteries of the Atonement, until Moses understood, as perhaps no other man has understood, even in New Testament times, the whole drift, and plan, and conception of God's redeeming love? What a marvellous talk that must have been it seems almost as if the Spirit anticipated the Epistles to the Hebrews, the Romans, the Ephesians, and the Colossians, and the deep and holy teaching of St. John.

A Present Possibility. "They communed together". That is possible for us still--communion with God--not simply to read the Bible and to take chapter after chapter in the order in which they stand, but that we should commune with God through the Word, standing on our Sinai every morning, face to face, in communion with Him, asking Him questions about all things which perplex and startle us, and receiving the plan of life and duty.

(3) The Men for the Building.

(3) Moses also beheld the agents through whom the Fabric of the Tabernacle was to be constructed and the source of the necessary materials. It is more than probable that Moses had no knowledge of the genius and skill which were maturing in Bezalel and Aholiab. Their unique qualifications were a complete discovery when he heard of them from the Spirit of God. The very phrase See, with which their names were first uttered, seems to denote that they were to break on Moses with a kind of startlement: and it must have been bewildering to learn that there was in the camp a sufficiency of material for the execution of the work, and still more a disposition to make over these riches for such an object. Had he been thrown on the resources of his intellect and experience, Moses would have been at his wits' end to discover either artificers or materials for the gigantic task, which would cost at least a quarter of a million of pounds sterling. Like Andrew, he would have wondered, "Whence shall we buy bread?" But as he stood there with God in the Mount of Vision, all was disclosed. We will deal with these at length in future chapters, but in the meanwhile to any who stand bewildered before some great programme, which requires workers and materials, we would say, Do not worry and yield to nervous misgiving, but go and stand with God upon the Mount.

The Tabernacle an answer to Man's need. There is much in the earlier paragraphs of this chapter to startle us, because it seems as though a backward step had been taken in the education of the chosen people. When they emerged from the land of Egypt, they worshipped the Almighty without Tabernacle or Temple. The stars lit the way to fellowship and communion; and under the expanse of the sky, with its depths of fathomless blue, they worshipped the Father Who is in heaven. Was it not a retrograde policy on the part of Moses to erect a Tabernacle in which God should dwell, and in which He should hold fellowship with His people? Not so, because what is vague and insubstantial will fail to grip and hold the heart and conscience of man. He needs not the universe only, but a home; not an extended vault of sky, but some holy spot where the bush burns with fire. It is profoundly important for man to have a definite and concrete thought of God, in order that he may rise from that to the abstract, and discover the fire of God burning at every point and pinnacle of existence. For such reasons God said to Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exo 25:8).

The Structure of the Ark. In the inmost recess of that house Moses was ordered to place the throne from which God's presence would be immediately revealed, and the lambent flame of the Shekinah shine with pure and awful radiance. We need not enter upon prolonged discussion of the construction of the Ark. It was a box of acacia-wood, three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide, and two feet three inches deep. Upon the lid lay a slab of solid gold, valued at £25,000 of our money, which was shadowed by the wings of the bending cherubim, as they knelt apparently looking together into the mysteries of which that slab of gold spoke.

The remainder of the Ark was gilded within and without with gold, and the whole must have become encrusted with blood, as the High Priests, year after year, besprinkled it with the blood of the victims slain on the Day of Atonement.

Its Import. All this was a parable for that time and for all time, "the Holy Spirit thus signifying" (Heb 9:8). That quotation is very pertinent to the understanding of these symbols, because of the distinct statement that there was a divine intention in their construction. Are we not told that God spake of old time by divers portions and in divers manners (Heb 1:1)? This is one of those manners. He spake to man in the Holy Scriptures, on the history of the chosen people, and in the very apparatus which is so minutely furnished in these pages.

An Abiding Meaning. We must remember that God is One, and that His Truth is One. He did not pursue one method of salvation with the Hebrew and another with the Christian. There is no variation in the essential principles of moral or spiritual truth, whether stated in the Old Testament or the New. There may be an ever-growing and clearer appreciation and understanding of truth, but truth is immutably the same. As, therefore, we look into these symbols we shall encounter the same eternal facts of Redemption as those that underlay the death of the Cross, and which must underlie for evermore the Divine attitude towards those who shall have been redeemed from among men. God is the same, His years fail not, the thoughts of His heart shall endure for ever, and in studying these old-world emblems we shall be treading in the first steps of the Creator, Redeemer, and Moral Ruler of men.

There is an incidental lesson here for us all. The Tabernacle with its contents was the subject of much Divine thought and care. It was not a poor hut run up in an hour. It was not the creation of human fancy. Man was not the creator, but the executor of the Divine programme and plan. It was thus that God made the heavens and the earth. He was alone when the foundations of the heaven and earth were laid. To Him alone must be attributed, also, the pattern of the human life of our Lord, in which the Tabernacle was duplicated in flesh and blood. And He is intimately concerned in the fashioning of all our life. In the minutest details He is immediately interested; and in the Most Holy Place of our nature, within the veil, there is a shrine, where angels might tread with reverence, because His holy presence is there.

The Ark as a Symbol.

I. The Ark of the Covenant.

This wooden box, underlaid and gilded with gold, was the symbol of God's presence with His people. Its presence in the camp, as we shall see, indicated that the God of their fathers was amongst them, their fellow-pilgrim across the desert waste, sharing their anxieties, fighting their battles, sorrowing in their griefs, entering into that sympathetic companionship which was a perpetual source of inspiration and comfort. In all life there must be movement and change. We go forward because the Cloud beckons, and to linger behind would forfeit the manna and the safeguard. But the foreign becomes familiar, and the lonely is peopled with loving presences when God's sensible presence is with us.

The Ark at Jordan: and its Lesson. When Israel came to the swellings of Jordan, before the touch of the feet of the priests who bore the Ark of the Covenant, the floods fled right and left, leaving a passage for the hosts. They had not passed that way before, but the way was cleft for them. Do you ever ask what will you do at the swellings of Jordan? Do you fear that heart and strength will fail? Do you dread the touch of the cold water? Do you wish that you had lived in days when bushes burned with fire, when voices spoke from the Mount, when the Angel seemed visibly to precede the host, when the Captain of the Lord's host stood with drawn sword, and One like the Son of Man walked the glowing embers with His faithful witnesses? There is no need to cherish such backward yearnings. There is a Presence with us, a Divine Companionship, the Angel of the Covenant, the Christ of God! Like a voice ringing

down a mountain-ravine, we hear His imperishable words, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end." Shall we not answer: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"? Even if our emotions have not yet realised the experience, yet let our faith affirm the fact with unflinching emphasis.

The Ark at Jericho: and its Lesson. When Israel approached Jericho, and the high walls, built up to heaven, threatened to be an impassable barrier, "Joshua called unto the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." "And the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed the priests." "And the rearward came after the ark." "So the ark of the Lord compassed the city." It was not the march of the priests, nor blast of the horns, nor the shout of the people, but the presence of the Ark of the Lord of the whole earth that levelled those mighty obstacles.

So will it always be for those who abide in the secret of the Lord. For them the mountains and the hills shall be made low, before them difficulties shall be dissipated as heaps of chaff. When the soul, in dismay, as it faces the walled cities, asks, "Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom?" it turns with strong faith to the Almighty Christ, saying, "Wilt not Thou, O Son of God?" and as the result, the triumphant cry rings out: "Through Him we shall do valiantly, for He it is that shall tread down our adversaries."

The Ark in Captivity: and its Lesson. When Israel had grievously sinned, and the Ark of the Covenant was forfeited to the Philistines --as though, since the Divine presence had departed, the symbol must also depart--wherever the Ark was borne, it carried destruction to the idols and populations of Philistia. Dagon was found on successive mornings fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord, and only the stump was left. The people were smitten with sore diseases, so that they said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to His own place" (1Sa 5:11). It was necessary for Jehovah to vindicate the symbol of His presence, and the fear and awe of Him falling on the Philistines laid them open to the sore ravages of the plague. It is the presence of God in the Church which is the sole talisman of victory. When we realise that He is in our midst, we cannot be moved, nay, we are more than conquerors. "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it" (Isa 19:1). In these days of religious declension, throughout professedly Christian nations, we are too apt to say that the situation has passed beyond our powers to retrieve it. "And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon his seat beside the gate, watching the way [margin], for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out" (1Sa 4:12-13, R.V.). Then the venerable judge fell backward and died, and the wife of the slain priest bore a son, and named him Ichabod, saying, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." But when Israel had resumed its ancient attitude towards God, all this was altered. The Ark was replaced, because God was replaced in the affection of His people; and the power of Philistia was absolutely and permanently broken by the successive victories of David and Joab.

How is it with You? How is it with you? Have the inward foes been too strong? Have they desolated your peace? Have they robbed you of the sense of God's redeeming grace? Dare to believe that whatever has transpired cannot break the Divine Covenant. It was the Ark of the Covenant, remember, which was seen by the divinely-instructed John when the Temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His Temple the Ark of His Covenant, (Rev 11:19). The Ark, of which we are speaking, may have perished when the Babylonians took the Holy City and burned the Temple; but the reality, of which it was the symbol, abides with the Church and the individual soul. God cannot break His Covenant. Though we believe not, He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself; and it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, i.e. victory over the power of appetite and passion. He will not give it grudgingly, or with niggard hand. He is only too glad to see us walking in the light of an unaccusing, uncondemning conscience. Only dare to affirm it. Dare to believe that notwithstanding all your failures and sins, He stands by His ancient promises, and that if you will but believe, even you shall see the glory of God in your restoration to that fair image which He conceived for thee before the worlds were made. Dare to step out on these immutable facts, which can no more be altered by your sinful changes than clouds can deflect the heavenly bodies in their constant order.

The Symbol Transient: the Facts Enduring. The symbol may pass, and must. Indeed, its transience was clearly foretold: "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more" (Jer 3:16, R.V.). But the essential spiritual fact abides, to which the Apostle refers in that sublime series of questions, for which there is only one reply: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

The Mercy-Seat as a Symbol.

II. The Ark was not only the symbol of the Divine Presence,

The Mercy-seat furnished a remarkable symbol of Divine Redeeming Grace. The word rendered "Mercy-seat" really means "a covering," with special reference to the forgiveness and covering of transgression and sin. The same word occurs in the Greek of the New Testament, where we are told by the Apostle that the Father hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith, by His

blood, and in the passing over of sin (Rein. Jn 3:25, R.V.). The same Greek word is used in the Epistle to Hebrews to designate "the Mercy-seat" (Heb 9:5). So that we might render the first-quoted passage thus: "The Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a Mercy-seat."

Christ and the Mercy-Seat. In Jesus Christ the Divine and the human meet perfectly. It has been said, indeed, that the word Christ conveys the idea of Deity endowed with a familiar human element. Christ is the Divinely human, and the humanly Divine. "There are two words: God and man. One describes pure Deity, the other pure humanity. Christ is a word not identical with either, but including both. It is the Deity in which humanity has part, it is the humanity in which Deity resides. It is that special mediatorial nature which has its own double wearing of both, the ability to stand between and reconcile the separated manhood and Divinity." (Phillips Brooks : The Mystery of Iniquity.)

There is so strong a trace of the same Greek word in that familiar passage of John's First Epistle: "He is the propitiation for our sins" --that there also we might read it, "He is the Mercy-seat for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." We can better understand, therefore, the inner meaning of the Divine Spirit, when, speaking of the Mercy-seat, He says, "There will I meet with Thee, and I will commune with Thee from above the Mercy-seat, from between the two Cherubim which are upon the Ark of the Testimony."

Emmanuel: God With Us. When the High Priests entered within the veil, or the ordinary priests ministered before it, and they thought of the Shekinah shining above the Mercy-seat, they knew that God was there, not only in the terror of His majesty, purity, and holiness, but in His tender, redeeming, forgiving grace. His glory was there, not to slay, but to illumine, not to abash, but to attract. In fact, they might almost have adopted words afterwards to be spoken: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2Co 5:19). How good it would be if timid, doubting souls could take this to their hearts! They dread Him, stand aloof, feel that they are cut off and banished, whereas the love of God in Jesus Christ awaits them; broods in gentle, holy and unabated light; waits to unfold the riches of His grace; and does not impute trespasses to the penitent and believing soul.

The Sprinkled Blood. The Mercy-seat must have become encrusted with blood, as, in successive years, succeeding High Priests, who were not permitted to continue by reason of death, sprinkled there the blood of the victims slain on the great Day of Atonement. Those slain were the perpetual remembrance of the atonements which had been made and accepted. So we think of Calvary, where precious blood was freely shed, and we remember that Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us, and that when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Let us dare to believe, then, that God does not impute our iniquities to us, and let us draw near with a true heart, in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.

God's Abundant Mercy. It is a sweet word! A seat of mercy, baptised in mercy, from which mercy flows forth. Not wrath, not judgment, not indignation, but mercy is pouring forth from its original fountain in the heart of God. Compute the mercy around us in Nature, in the adaptation of music to the ear, of light to the eye, of savoury food to the palate! Consider the comfort and beauty of the world, the tender joys of home, the daily providence and care! Recall the mercy that burst forth into fresh expression at the manger-bed, and streamed from the wounds inflicted on the cross! Great and wonderful are all these, but they are crowned in the risen Christ. Let us realise, then, that the glorified nature of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, of the Lamb that was slain, is the trysting-place where God's mercy meets our sin and sorrow, our pain and grief, our fear and dread with infinite tenderness and sufficiency.

The Tables of the Law.

III. Tables of the Law.

Underneath the Mercy-seat and at the bottom of the Ark lay the Tables of the Law (Dt 10:5). When the people sinned against God, and made the golden calf, the Law of God leapt from crag to crag, as though descending in a hurricane of judgment; but that was abnormal. Its usual position was to lie unseen and still beneath the Mercy-seat. How true a symbol this! Beneath all in God's universe--in the world, in the Church, and in God's dealings with men, there is the silent presence of law. Whatever storms sweep the sky, they do not disturb the silent beauty and order of Nature. Beneath the changes of the evolutions and revolutions there is the immutable precision of natural law, on which man counts with absolute certainty. And what is true in Nature is true also in Religion. The Divine Mercy is exercised in accordance with Justice.

Mercy and Justice. Two Apostles insist on this. Paul says God showed forth His Righteousness when He set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiation; and John says that He is faithful and just when He forgives sin. Our Saviour in His life and death magnified the Law and made it honourable. Not one jot or one tittle is allowed to pass unfulfilled. There is no fear that it will ever arise to take by the throat and demand payment from any whom God has accepted. If we may put it so materially--the gold of our Saviour's obedience even unto death is of the exact size and pattern of the demand of the moral law. When He said, "It is finished," He meant that nothing more need be added or subtracted, and that what He had done, He had done, mediatorially and sufficiently for us all. Does

not this explain the presence of the blood-marks? Where the law comes in collision with our fallen race, there are always blood and tears, not only of each individual, but of one for another, and most of all by Him who stood as our Representative, who was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; on whom was the chastisement of our peace, and by whose stripes we are healed. Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Free from Law and Bound by Law. But though we are free from the law in one sense, we are subject to it in another. We have not to meet either its exactions or penalties, in the matter of our personal salvation. Its demands were met, its inflictions suffered, on our behalf, by the great Representative Man, in whom we stand. But we are under the law to Christ. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom 3:31). "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:4). "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (Rom 8:3-4). Directly we accept the Mercy-seat, we bind ourselves more closely than ever to keep that law which is summed up in the one word, Love. We desire more than ever to please God. We do not obey to earn salvation, but being saved we obey. We do not work up to the Cross, but down from it. The Holy Spirit writes the law, not upon tables of stone, but upon the fleshly tablets of the heart, so that we say with the Psalmist, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yea, Thy law is within my heart."

The Cherubim. Space forbids me to expatiate on the bending forms of the cherubim. They represented at once guardianship, reverence, inquiry, and worship. The Israelites were taught that their experiences, their lessons, their progress in the knowledge of God were of absorbing interest to beings beyond their ken. The very angels desired to look into the mysteries connected with their redemption (1Pe 1:12). And we remember that on us also similar interest is concentrated; that as the drama of human history unfolds, the process is watched with absorbing interest by other eyes than man's; and that now to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places is being made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Exodus 25:23-30; Lev 24:5-9 THE TABLE OF THE PRESENCE-BREAD**

The Table of Shew-bread: its Structure. The Table of Shew-bread, as we generally call it, stood on the right-hand side of the Holy Place, as the priests entered it. It was three feet long, a foot and a half broad, and two feet three inches high. It was thus quite a small table, narrow for its length, and rather below the ordinary height. It seems to have been regarded as of primary importance, because in this chapter its description follows immediately on that of the Ark. It was, like other articles, of acacia-wood, overlaid with pure gold; the surface was surrounded by an edging or border; and the legs were held together by a broad flat bar, which strengthened their framework. This is described as "the border of an hand-breadth round about." At the corners, or ends, of the legs, were rings, through which the staves were placed for its carrying, as is represented in the bas-reliefs on the Arch of Titus. The spoons, or incense-cups, the flagons and chalices were all of gold, and were employed for the libations and the burning of incense, which accompanied the weekly presentation of the twelve loaves, or cakes of bread.

The Shew-bread. These were renewed on each Sabbath-day, the stale ones being consumed by the priests in the Holy Place. The loaves were specially made of fine flour, and were known as "the bread of face," or "bread of presence," because they were set before the face or presence of God, who dwelt in the Holy Place, and the intention, so far as we can spell it out, was to suggest that, as man feeds upon the bread, which God gives in answer to his daily prayer, so man must provide the Divine Nature with food on which the Divine Spirit also may feed. Man cannot exist without the impartation of God's nature, and in turn must minister to Him what shall afford Him satisfaction. We are to walk worthy of God unto all pleasing. Our bodies are to be a living sacrifice acceptable to God. Probably the Lord's Supper was intended to convey this dual thought. Whilst we eat of the bread and drink of the wine, which God has given to us in Jesus Christ, He also draws near to commune with us. Our Lord is His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased; and our faith, love, obedience, and adoration provide Him with profoundest satisfaction.

Its Symbolism. The injunction was very precise: "Thou shalt set upon the table the Presence-bread before Me alway." In two passages it is described as "the continual bread" (Num 4:7, 2Ch 2:4). When the trumpet gave the signal for the march, the loaves and vessels were left undisturbed in their accustomed places, and over them all three coverings were placed, of blue, of scarlet, and of sealskin. There was therefore no interruption of the continued symbolism of the Unity of the chosen people.

This thought pervades the Scriptures. If we go back to the days of the Judges, when the land was repeatedly swept by whirlwinds of judgment, when every man did as seemed right in his eyes, and there was no unity of government or authority, we find that the Presence bread was still offered with undeviating regularity. This is established by the incident told of David, when he sought the hospitality of the High-Priest at Nob, and "did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests" (Mar 2:25-26). Evidently, through those stormy centuries the twelve loaves still stood before God, an emblem of the essential unity of Israel. When,

afterwards, schism came, and the ten tribes, under the leadership of Jeroboam, broke away from the house of David, still upon the holy table, in Solomon's temple, the twelve loaves were presented, representing an unimpaired oneness.

So when Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, that had been broken down by Jezebel's orders, he took twelve stones, "according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." In the prophet's thought, as in God's, the sorrowful strife and alienation between the northern and southern groups were as though they were not, in view of the Eternal Covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

A Witness to the Unity of the People. When the ten tribes were carried into captivity, and scattered far and wide through Babylonia, Persia, and Asia Minor, still each Sabbath the priests brought the twelve loaves, and placed them on the Table of Presence, as though God knew well where to find his scattered people, and in His judgment they continued one. Then followed the captivity of the seventy years, and afterwards the return to the Temple of the priests, the people, and the holy bread. And in our Lord's time, though Israel was rent and scattered, and Simeon and Dan had long since disappeared, still the twelve loaves were presented; and in a remarkable sentence Paul, speaking before Agrippa of the promise made unto the fathers, expressed his belief in the unbroken number of the tribes, when he said: "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God, night and day, hope to attain." In the opening of his epistle, James sends greeting to the twelve tribes of the dispersion. Our Lord assured His Apostles, that in the regeneration they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. On the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. Dan is indeed missed out of the enumeration of Rev. 7., but the sacred associations of twelve are still maintained by the dual representation of Joseph. Remember also Ezekiel's unfulfilled prophecy (Eze 37:15, etc.).

The Unity of Christ's Church. Throughout this is one of those deep and subtle suggestions of the way in which the objective ideal of the Church, as an undivided and sacred unity, stands before God, upon the pure table of our Lord's nature, in which the gold of Deity and the shittim-wood of humanity blend. Amid all the storms that have swept the world since our Lord constituted His Church, throughout those disastrous periods of division and distraction, there have still been, in the Divine estimation, "one body, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all." Always the twelve loaves, the wine of His blood, and the frankincense of His merit, for we are made "accepted in the Beloved."

Not Necessarily a Visible Unity. It need hardly be remarked that this unity was never intended to be organic, because Jesus prayed that His own might be one as the Father and He were one. "Holy Father," He said, "keep them in Thy Name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are." But the unity of the Godhead is clearly not physical, or visible, or organic. It is mystical and spiritual. It is therefore certain that those who suppose that the unity of the Church must be patent to the senses have wholly misconceived the Divine ideal. The members of the body of Christ were never intended to be gathered into one organisation, to repeat one formulary, or march in military array. Uniformity is far removed from unity; and you may have perfect unity apart from uniformity. A tree is a unity, though there is a vast diversity between the gnarled branches and the cones which it tosses on the forest-floor. A house is a unity, though there is no similarity between the gabled roof and the deep-laid foundations. A body is a unity, but the eyelash differs widely from the bones of the skeleton.

Uniformity is impossible where there is life, as the most superficial consideration of the autumnal produce of orchard, field and garden proves. Wherever, therefore, Uniformity has been insisted on, death has ensued. Just before the Reformation of the sixteenth century, it seemed as though the Inquisition had extinguished every trace of nonconformity with the tenets and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, she might have almost literally adopted the proud boast of Babylon: "As one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, so have I gathereth all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or that opened the mouth, or chirped" (Isa 10:14, R.V.). But at this period it is incontestable that the religious life of Christendom was dead; except where the limited Piedmontese, in the high Alps, kept a spark burning amid the grey ashes.

External Uniformity Unattainable. The same mistake is perpetrated by those who demand uniformity of creed as by those who insist on uniformity of ritual. You cannot make all men climb alike, or express identical conceptions in identical words. A creed is, after all, an intellectual effort, whereas religion is not the creature of the mind or reason, but of the heart and spirit. It is a life, the importation and reception of the divine nature, the inauguration of that eternal condition of existence which will be still young when all human formularies and conceptions have been put away, as a man puts away the things of childhood. If your soul is united to the Head of the Church by a living faith, through which the life of Christ enters and pervades it, you must be reckoned a member of the Body, though you may have passed through none of those ecclesiastical systems which at the best are but broken lights, reflecting the sunlight at different angles.

Variety Within the Church of Christ. In the Church there is room, therefore, for an infinite variety. Each brings his own contribution; and we must gather with all saints, if we would comprehend the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of Christ. You cannot see the whole sky, the whole mountain, the whole broad ocean, nor can I; but I will tell you what I have seen, tasted, and handled of the Word of Life, and you shall tell me what you have experienced. Thus our spirits shall have fellowship one with

another. There will be a mutual exchange in commodities, as we report our discoveries of the unsearchable riches of Christ. For none has exactly the same view-point as another has; and none exactly the same definition or formula. Be yourself! Make your own discoveries of the manifold grace of Christ. If you cannot bring grapes from Eschol, bring pomegranates or figs. Bartimaeus and the man born blind had different stories to tell of the way in which they were healed, but they both saw, and owed the sight which revealed the world to the same voice and touch. Whether you swam to shore or floated on a broken piece of ship-furniture, or a spar; makes very little difference, so long as you have been saved from the storm, and stand there with the rest in the circle round the fire lighted because of the cold. You are probably right in what you affirm, but wrong in what you deny. You are justified in holding firmly to your special fragment of Truth, but be willing to admit that you have not everything, and that others may be as conscientious, as true to truth, and as eager for its maintenance and diffusion as yourself. Seek to gain from others whatever will perfect your religious life, rounding it to a more complete circle, and touching it to finer issues. "I long to see you," said the Apostle, "that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift ... that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith" (Rom 1:11-12, R.V.).

Christ the Bond of Unity. Christ is the bond of unity to His Church--Christ in each individual, and each individual in Christ. Let us never forget that gracious reciprocity. The sponge must be in the ocean and the ocean in the sponge. Each believer is written in the Lamb's Book of Life by the same fingers. Each of us has been grafted into the true Vine, though in different places. Each of us has some function in the mystical body. We were in Him when He died, and rose, and entered the Father's presence. In Him we have access into this grace wherein we stand. We are in Him, as those twelve loaves stood on that pure table. The gift of Christ, on the other hand, has been made to each one of us, that He might realise Himself through all the experiences of all His members. As of old it required four Gospels to reveal to mankind what Jesus Christ was, so all believers are required to set forth and exemplify to the world all the excelling glories of our Emmanuel. It is for this reason that we are told that the Church is His Body, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). It demands a great multitude, which no man can number, to reveal the full beauty of the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven.

One in Him. Was it not of this that our Lord spoke, when He said: "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and Thou in Me" (Jn 17:22-23). In such radiance the Church now stands before God. He sees her essential unity. Its denial does not disintegrate it. Its obscuration does not impair it. The very members of the Church that compose the Unity may be unaware of it, and may denounce each other; but, even so, the twelve stones are in the same breastplate and the twelve loaves stand side by side on the same table. The members of a large family of boys and girls may be scattered far and wide over the world, but to the mother, in her daily and nightly prayer, there is but one family, and to her they seem sheltered still under the wings of her brooding love.

When Savonarola was about to be burned, the Papal Legate, dressed in his scarlet robes, stood beside his scaffold, and cried: "I cut thee off from the Church triumphant and the Church militant." But the martyr replied truly: "You may cut me off from the Church militant, but over the Church triumphant thou hast no power." Only two things can cut a man off from the Holy Catholic Church, considered in her loftiest ideals, and these are unforgiveness to the brethren and departure from the living God.

But as surely as the Lord accounts us members of the same mystical Body, He bids us give diligence to keep the unity of that Body in the bonds of peace. We are not required to create the unity, but to manifest it. We are to recognise as one with us, those who may differ not only in their ritual, and credal expression, but in heart and spirit, giving no sign of recognition or fellowship; but, notwithstanding, we are to think of them as one with us. Without the other neither can be made perfect. Let us, therefore, in this way hasten the time when our Lord shall present the Church to Himself, a glorious Church, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing.