

WILLIAM BLAIKIE

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:
THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY: THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

With a purely historical book like Joshua before us, it is of importance to keep in view two ways of regarding Old Testament history, in accordance with one or other of which any exposition of such a book must be framed.

According to one of these views, the historical books of Scripture, being given by inspiration of God, have for their *main* object not to tell the story or dwell on the fortunes of the Hebrew nation, but to unfold God's progressive revelation of Himself made to the seed of Abraham, and to record the way in which that revelation was received, and the effects which it produced. The story of the Hebrew nation is but the frame in which this Divine revelation is set. It was God's pleasure to reveal Himself not through a formal treatise, but in connection with the history of a nation, through announcements and institutions and practical

dealings bearing in the first instance on them. The historical books of the Hebrews therefore, while they give us an excellent view of the progress of the nation, must be studied in connection with God's main purpose, and the supernatural interpositions by which from time to time it was carried out.

The other view regards the historical books of the Hebrews in much the same light as we look on those of other nations. Whatever may have been their origin, they are, as we find them, like other books, and our purpose in dealing with them should be the same as in dealing with books of similar contents. We are to deal with them, in the first instance at least, from a natural point of view. We are to regard them as recording the history and development of an ancient nation – a very remarkable nation, no doubt, but a nation whose progress may be referred to ascertainable causes. If we find natural causes sufficient to account for that progress, we are not to call in supernatural. It is an acknowledged law, at least as old as Lord Bacon, that no more causes are to be assigned for phenomena than are true and sufficient to account for them. This law, and the investigations which have taken place under it, have expunged much that used to be regarded as supernatural from the history of other nations; and it will only be according to analogy if the same result is reached in connection with the history of Israel.

In this spirit we have recently had several treatises dealing with that history from a purely natural standpoint. Very earnest endeavours have been made to clear the atmosphere, to expiscate

facts, to apply the laws of history, to weigh statements in the balances of probability, to reduce the Hebrew history to the principles of science. The general effect of this method has been to bring out results very different from those previously accepted. In particular, there has been a thorough elimination of the supernatural from Hebrew history. Natural causes have been judged sufficient to explain all that occurred. The introduction of the supernatural in the narrative was due to those obvious causes that have operated in the case of other nations and other religions: – love of the mythical, a patriotic desire to glorify the nation, the exaggerating tendency of tradition, and readiness to translate symbolical pictures into statements of literal occurrences. Hebrew historians were not exempted from the tendencies and weaknesses of other historians, and were ready enough to colour and apply their narratives according to their own views. It is when we subject the Hebrew books to such principles as these (such writers tell us) that we get at the real history of the nation, deprived no doubt of much of the glory with which it has usually been invested, but now for the first time reliable history, on which the most scientific may depend. And as to its moral purpose, it is just the moral purpose that runs through the scheme of the world, to show that, amid much conflict and confusion, the true, the good, the just, and the merciful become victorious in the end over the false and the evil.

The difference between the two methods, as an able writer remarks, is substantially this, that "the one regards the Hebrew

books as an unfolding of God's nature, and the other as an unfolding of the nature of man."

The naturalistic method claims emphatically to be scientific. It reduces all events to historical law, and finds for them a natural explanation. But what if the natural explanation is no explanation? What becomes of the claim to be scientific if the causes assigned are not sufficient to account for the phenomena? If science will not tolerate unnatural causes, no more should it tolerate unnatural effects. A truly scientific method must show a fit proportion between cause and effect. Our contention is that, in this respect, the naturalistic method is a failure. In many instances its causes are wholly inadequate to the effects. We are compelled to fall back on the supernatural, otherwise we are confronted with a long series of occurrences for which no reasonable explanation can be found.

We are reminded of an incident which a popular writer, under the *nom de plume* introduced in a novel, bearing the title "We Two." Erica, the daughter of an atheist, assists her father in conducting a journal. She gets from him for review a Life of David Livingstone, with instructions to leave his religion entirely out. As she proceeds with the work, she becomes convinced that the condition is impossible. To describe Livingstone without his religion would be like playing *Hamlet* without the part of Hamlet. Not only does she find her task impossible, but when she comes to an incident where Livingstone, in most imminent danger of his life, gets entire composure of mind from an act of devotion,

she becomes convinced that this could not have happened had there not been an objective reality corresponding to his belief; and she is an atheist no more. Erica now believes in God. *Se non e vero e bene trovato.*

In like manner, we believe that to delineate Old Testament history without reference to the supernatural is as impossible as to describe Livingstone apart from his religion. You are baffled in trying to explain actual events. Long ago, Edward Gibbon tried to account for the rapid progress and brilliant success of Christianity in the early centuries by what he called secondary causes. It was really an attempt to eliminate the supernatural from early Christian history. But the five causes which he specified were really not causes, but effects, – effects of that supernatural action which had its source in the supernatural person of Jesus Christ. These "secondary causes" never could have existed had not Jesus Christ already commended Himself to all sorts of men as a Divine Saviour, sent by God to bless the world. In like manner we maintain that behind the causes by which our naturalistic historians attempt to explain the remarkable history of the Jewish people, there lay a supernatural force, but for which the Hebrews would not have been essentially different from the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, or any other Semitic tribe in their neighbourhood. It was the supernatural element underlying Hebrew history that made it the marvellous development it was; and that element began at the beginning, and continued more or less actively till Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

Let us try to make good this position. Let us select a few of the more remarkable occurrences of early Hebrew history, and, in the language of Gibbon, make "a candid and reasonable inquiry" whether or not they can be accounted for, on the ordinary principles of human nature, without a supernatural cause.

1. It is certain that from the earliest times, and during at least the first four centuries of their history, the Hebrew people had an immovable conviction that the land of Canaan was divinely destined to be theirs. Of the singular hold which this conviction took of the minds of the patriarchs, we have innumerable proofs. Abraham leaves the rich plains of Chaldæa to dwell in Canaan, and spends a hundred years in it, a stranger and a pilgrim, without having a single acre of his own. When he sends to Padan Aram for a wife to Isaac he conjures his servant on no account to listen to any proposal that Isaac should settle there; the damsel must at all hazards come to Canaan. When Jacob determines to part from Laban, he sets his face resolutely towards his native land across the Jordan, although his injured brother is there, thirsting as he knows for his blood. When Joseph sends for his father to go down to Egypt, Jacob must get Divine permission at Beersheba before he can comfortably go. Joseph, for his services to Egypt, might reasonably have looked for a magnificent tomb in that country to cover his remains and perpetuate his memory; but, strange to say, he prefers to remain unburied for an indefinite time, and leaves a solemn charge to his people to bury him in Canaan, carrying his bones with them when they leave Egypt. In

the bitterness of their oppression by Pharaoh it would have been much more feasible for their champions, Moses and Aaron, to try to obtain a relaxation of their burdens; but their demand was a singular one – liberty to go into the wilderness, with the hardly concealed purpose of escaping to the land of their affections. Goshen was a goodly land, but Canaan had a dearer name – it was the land of their fathers, and of their brightest hopes. The uniform tradition was, that the God whom Abraham worshipped had promised to give the land to his posterity, and along with the land other blessings of mysterious but glorious import. With this promise was connected that Messianic hope which like a golden thread ran through all Hebrew history and literature, brightening it more and more as the ages advanced.

It is vain to account for this extraordinary faith in the land as theirs, and this remarkable assurance that it would be the scene of unwonted blessing, apart from a supernatural communication from God. To suppose that it originated in some whim or fancy of Abraham's or in the saga of some old bard like Thomas the Rhymer, and continued unimpaired century after century, is to suppose what was never realized in the history of any people. In vain do we look among natural causes for any that could have so impressed itself on a whole nation, and swayed their whole being for successive ages with irresistible force. That "God spake to Abraham to give him the land" was the indefeasible conviction of his descendants; nor could any consideration less powerful have sustained their hopes, or nerved them to the efforts and perils

needful to realize it.

2. No more can the leaving of Egypt, with all that followed, be accounted for without supernatural agency. It is the contention of the naturalistic historian that the Israelites were very much fewer in number than the Scripture narrative alleges. But if so, how could an empire, with such immense resources as the monuments show Egypt to have had, have been unable to retain them? Wellhausen affirms that at the time Egypt was weakened by a pestilence. We know not his authority for the statement; but if the Egyptians were weakened, the Israelites (unless supernaturally protected) must have been weakened too. Make what we may of the contest between Moses and Pharaoh, it is beyond dispute that Pharaoh's pride was thoroughly roused, and that his firm determination was not to let the children of Israel go. And if we grant that his six hundred chariots were lost by some mishap in the Red Sea, what were these to the immense forces at his disposal, and what was there to hinder him from mustering a new force, and attacking the fugitives in the wilderness of Sinai? Pharaoh himself does not seem to have entered the sea with his soldiers, and was therefore free to take other steps. How, then, are we to account for the sudden abandonment of the campaign?

3. And as to the residence in the wilderness, even if we suppose that the Israelites were much fewer in number than is stated, they were far too great a multitude to be supported from the scanty resources of the desert. The wilderness already had its inhabitants, as Moses knew right well from his experience as a

shepherd; it had its Midianites and Amalekites and other pastoral tribes, by whom the best of its pastures were eagerly appropriated for the maintenance of their flocks. How, in addition to these, were the hosts of Israel to obtain support?

4. And how are we to explain the extraordinary route which they took? Why did they not advance towards Canaan by the ordinary way – the wilderness of Shur, Beersheba, and Hebron? Why cross the Red Sea at all, or have anything to do with Mount Sinai and its awful cliffs, which a glance at the map will show was entirely out of their way? And when they did take that route, what would have been easier than for Pharaoh, if he had chosen to follow them with a new force, to hem them in among these tremendous mountains, and massacre or starve them at his pleasure? If the Israelites had no supernatural power to fall back on, their whole course was simply madness. We may talk of good fortune extricating men from difficulties, but what fortune that can be conceived could have availed a people, professing to be bound for the land of Canaan, that, without food or drink or stores of any kind, had wandered into the heart of a vast labyrinth, for no reasonable purpose under the sun?

5. Nor can the career of Moses be made intelligible without a supernatural backing. The contention is, that the desire of the people in Egypt for deliverance having become very strong, especially in the tribe of Levi, they sent Aaron to find Moses, remembering his former attempt on their behalf; and that, under the able leadership of Moses, their deliverance was secured by

natural means. But does this explain the actual campaign in Sinai? Who ever heard of a leader that, after he had roused the enthusiasm of his people by a brilliant deliverance, arrested their further progress in order to preach to them for a twelvemonth, and give them a system of law? Did Moses not possess that instinct of a general that must have urged him to push on the moment the Egyptians were drowned, and amid the enthusiasm of his own troops and the consternation of the Canaanites, fling his army upon the seven nations, and seize their land by a *coup de main*? Abraham before him and Joshua after him found the value of such prompt, sudden movements. Never had a leader a more splendid opportunity. What could have induced Moses to throw away his chance, bury his people among the mountains, and remain inactive for months upon months? Is there any conceivable explanation but that he acted by supernatural direction? The Divine plan was entirely different from any that human wisdom would have contrived. It is as clear as day that, had there been no Divine power controlling the movement, the course taken by Moses would have been simply insane.

6. Nor could the law of Moses, first given in such circumstances, have acquired the glory which surrounded it ever after, had there been no manifestation of the Divine presence at Sinai. The people were greatly dissatisfied, especially at their delays. The only course that would have quieted them was to push on towards Canaan, so that their minds might be animated by the enthusiasm of hope. Under their detentions they greedily seized

every occasion that presented itself for growling against Moses. How little they were in sympathy with his ideas of religion and worship was apparent from the affair of the golden calf. The history of the time is an almost unbroken record of murmuring, complaining, and rebellion. Yet the law which originated with Moses in these circumstances became the very idol of the people, and, according to the naturalistic historians, was the means of creating the nation, and welding the tribes into a living unity! We can quite easily understand how, in spite of all their growlings, the law as given at Sinai should have taken the firmest hold of their imagination and kindled their utmost enthusiasm in the end, if it was accompanied by those tokens of the Divine presence which the whole literature of the Hebrews assumes. And if Moses was closely identified with the Divine Being, the surpassing glory of the occasion must have been reflected on him. But to suppose that a discontented people should have had their enthusiasm roused for the law simply because this Moses commanded them to observe it, and that they should ever after have counted it the holiest, the most Divine law that men had ever known, is again to postulate an effect without a cause, and to suppose a whole people acting in disregard of the strongest propensities of human nature.

7. Then, as to the generalship of Moses. How are we to explain the further detention of the people in the wilderness for nearly forty years? If this was not the result of a supernatural Divine decree, it must have proceeded from the inability of Moses to

lead the people to victory. No people who had struggled out of bondage in order to enter a land flowing with milk and honey, would of their own accord have spent forty years in the wilderness. At Hormah, they were willing to fight, but Moses would not lead them, and they were beaten. Either the wandering of the forty years was a Divine punishment, or the generalship of Moses was at fault. He abandoned himself to inaction for an unprecedented period. There was no shadow of benefit to be gained by this delay; nothing could come of it (apart from the Divine purpose) but wearing out the patience of the people, and killing them with the sickness of hope deferred. And if it should be said that the forty years' wandering was a myth, and that probably the wilderness sojourn did not exceed a year or two at most, is it conceivable that any people in its senses would invent such a legend? – a legend that covered them with shame, and that was felt to be so disgraceful that the whole region was shunned by them; insomuch that with the exception of Elijah, we do not read of any member of the nation ever making a pilgrimage to the spot which otherwise must have had overwhelming attractions.

8. At last Moses suddenly awakes to activity and courage. And the next difficulty is to account for his success at the eleventh hour of his life, if he had no supernatural help. No phrase occurs more frequently in naturalistic explanations than "it is likely." Likelihood is the touchstone to which all extraordinary statements are brought, although, as Lord Beaconsfield used to tell us, "it is the unexpected that happens." Borrowing the

touchstone for the nonce, we may ask, Is it likely that, after a sleep of eight-and-thirty years, Moses of his own accord, without any apparent change of circumstances, sprang suddenly to his feet, and urged the people to attempt the invasion of the land? Is it likely that all the inertia and fears of the people vanished in a moment, as if at the touch of a magician's wand? And when it came to actual fighting, is it likely that these shepherds of the desert were able of themselves not only to stand before a trained and successful warrior like Sihon King of the Amorites, who had so lately overrun the country, but to defeat him utterly and take possession of his whole territory? Is it likely that Sihon's neighbour, Og King of Bashan, though warned by the fate of Sihon, and therefore sure to make a more careful defence, shared the fate of the other king? Or if Og was a mere myth, as Wellhausen strangely maintains, is it likely that the Israelites got possession of the powerful cities and well-defended kingdom of Bashan without striking a blow? Is it likely that, after this brilliant victory, Moses, who was still in full vigour, detained them again for weeks to preach old sermons, and sing them songs, and make pathetic speeches, instead of dashing at once at the petrified people on the other side, and acquiring the great prize – Western Palestine? Strange mortal this Moses must have been! – wise enough to give the people an unexampled constitution and system of laws, and yet blind to the most obvious laws of military science, and the most elementary perceptions of common sense.

And now we come to Joshua, and to the book that records his

achievements.

Joshua was no prophet; he made no claim to the prophetic character; he succeeded Moses only as military leader. Consequently the Book of Joshua contains little matter that would fall under the term "revelation." But both the work of Joshua and the book of Joshua served an important purpose in the plan of Divine manifestation, inasmuch as they showed God fulfilling His old promises, vindicating His faithfulness, and laying anew a foundation for the trust of His people. In this point of view, both the work and the book have an importance that cannot be exaggerated. The naturalistic historian regards the book as merely setting forth, with sundry traditional embellishments, the manner in which one people ousted another from their country, much as those who were then evicted had dispossessed the previous inhabitants. But whoever believes that, centuries before, God made a solemn promise to Abraham to give that land to his seed, must see in the story of the settlement the unfolding of a Divine purpose, and a solemn pledge of blessings to come. "The Ancient of days," who "declares the end from the beginning," is seen to be faithful to His promises; and if He has been thus faithful in the past, he may surely be trusted to be faithful in the future.

If, then, Joshua's work was a continuation of the work of Moses, and his book of the books of Moses, both must be regarded from the same point of view. You cannot explain either of them reasonably in a merely rationalistic sense. Joshua could

no more have settled the people in Canaan by merely natural means than Moses could have delivered them from Pharaoh and maintained them for years in the wilderness. In the history of both you see a Divine arm, and in the books of both you find a chapter of Divine revelation. It is this that gives full credibility to the miracles which they record. What happened under Joshua formed a most important chapter of the process of revelation by which God made Himself known to Israel. In such circumstances, miracles were not out of place. But if the Book of Joshua is nothing more than the record of a raid by one nation on another, miracles were uncalled for, and must be given up.

Rationalists may count us wrong in believing that the Hebrew historical books are more than Hebrew annals – are the records of a Divine manifestation. But they cannot hold us unreasonable or inconsistent if, believing this, we believe in the miracles which the books record. Miracles assume a very different character when they are connected into a sublime purpose in the economy of God; when they signalize a great epoch in the history of revelation – the completion of a great era of promise, the fulfilment of hopes delayed for centuries. The Book of Joshua has thus a far more dignified place in the history of revelation than a superficial observer would suppose. And those historians who bring it down to the level of a mere record of an invasion, and who leave out of account its bearing on Divine transactions so far back as the days of Abraham, spoil it of its chief glory and value for the Church in every age. There is nothing of

more importance, whether for the individual believer or for the Church collectively, than a firm conviction, such as the Book of Joshua emphatically supplies, that long delays on God's part involve no forgetfulness of His promises, but that whenever the destined moment comes "no good thing will fail of all that He hath spoken."

The Book of Joshua consists mainly of two parts; one historical, the other geographical. It was the old belief that it was the work of a single writer, with such slight revision at an after time as a writing might receive without essential interference with its substance. The author was sometimes supposed to be Joshua himself, but more commonly one of the priests or elders who outlived Joshua, and who might therefore fitly record his death. It has been remarked that there are several traces in the book of contemporary origin, like the remark on Rahab – "She dwelleth in Israel even unto this day" (vi. 25). It must be allowed, we think, that there is not much in this book to suggest to the ordinary reader either the idea of a late origin or of the use of late materials.

But recent critics have taken a different view. Ewald maintained that, besides the Jehovist and Elohist writers of whose separate contributions in Genesis the evidence seems incontrovertible, there were three other authors of Joshua, with one or more redactors or revisers. The view of Kuenen and Wellhausen is similar, but with this difference, that the Book of Joshua shows so much affinity, both in object and style, to the

preceding five books, that it must be classed with them, as setting forth the origin of the Jewish nation, which would not have been complete without a narrative of their settlement in their land. The composition of Joshua is therefore to be brought down to a late date; we owe it to the documents, writers, and editors concerned in the composition of the Pentateuch; and instead of following the Jews in classing the first five books by themselves, we ought to include Joshua along with them, and in place of the Pentateuch speak of the Hexateuch. Canon Driver substantially accepts this view; in his judgment, the first part of the book rests mainly on the JE (Jehovist-Elohists) document, with slight additions from P (the priestly code) and D2 (the second Deuteronomist). The second half of the book is derived mainly from the priestly code. But Canon Driver has the candour to say that much more difficult to distinguish the writers in Joshua than in the earlier books; and so little is he sure of his ground that even such important documents as J and E have to be designated by new letters, *a* and *b*. But, all the same, he goes right on with his scheme, furnishing us with tables all through, in which he shows that the Book of Joshua consists of ninety different pieces, no two consecutive pieces being by the same author. Most of it he refers to three earlier writings, but some of these were composite, and it is hard to say how many hands were engaged in putting together this simple story.

One is tempted to say of this complicated but confidently maintained scheme, that it is just too complete, too wonderfully

finished, too clever by half. Allowing most cordially the remarkable ability and ingenuity of its authors, we can hardly be expected to concede to them the power of taking to pieces a book of such vast antiquity, putting it in a modern mincing machine, dividing it among so many supposed writers, and settling the exact parts of it written by each! Is there any ancient writing that might not yield a similar result if the same ingenuity were exercised upon it?

To judge of the source of writings by apparent varieties of style, and call in a different writer for every such variety, is to commit oneself to a very precarious rule. There are doubtless cases where the diversity of style is so marked that the inference is justified, but in these the evidence is unmistakably clear. Often the evidence against identity of authorship *appears* very clear, while it is absolutely worthless. Suppose that three thousand years hence an English book should be found, consisting, first, of an eloquent exposition of a parliamentary budget; secondly, a scheme for Home Rule in Ireland; thirdly, a dissertation on Homer; and fourthly, essays on the "Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture" – how convincingly might the critics of the day demonstrate, beyond possibility of contradiction, that the book could not be the work of the single man who bore the name of William E. Gladstone! In like manner, it might be made very plain that Milton could never have written both "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," or "Paradise Lost" and the "Defence of the English People." Cowper could not have written "John Gilpin"

and "God moves in a mysterious way." Samuel Rutherford could not have written his "Letters" and his "Divine Right of Church Government." Moreover, in the course of years a writer may change his style, even when his subject is the same. The earlier essays of Mr. Carlyle show no traces of that most quaint, terse, graphic style which became one of his outstanding characteristics in later years. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of change of style in a great writer is that of Jeremy Bentham. In Sir James Mackintosh's Dissertation prefixed to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (eighth edition) he says: "The style of Mr. Bentham underwent a more remarkable revolution than perhaps befell that of any other celebrated writer. In his early works, it was clear, free, spirited, often and seasonably eloquent... He gradually ceased to use words for conveying his thoughts to others, but merely employed them as a short hand to preserve his meaning for his own purpose. It is no wonder that his language thus became obscure and repulsive. Though many of his technical terms are in themselves exact and pithy, yet the overflow of his vast nomenclature was enough to darken his whole diction."

If we compare the criticism of the Book of Joshua with that (let us say) of Genesis, the difference in the clearness of the conclusions is very great. By far the most striking basis of the criticism of Genesis is the feature that was noticed first – the occurrence of different Divine names, Elohim and Jehovah, in different portions of the book. Now, although it is held that the *combined* JE document was used in compiling Joshua, there is

no trace of this distinction of names in that book. Nor is there much trace of other distinctions found in Genesis. So that it is no great wonder that Canon Driver is uncertain whether, after all, that was the document that was used in compiling Joshua. Then, as to the grounds on which the Deuteronomist is supposed to have had a share in the book. Wherever anything is said indicating that under Joshua the Divine purposes and ordinances enjoined by God on Moses were fulfilled, that is referred to the Deuteronomist writer, as if it would have been unnatural for an ordinary historian to call attention to such a circumstance. For instance, the remark of Rahab that as soon as the Canaanites heard what God had done to Egypt, and to the two kings of the Amorites on the other side of Jordan, their hearts fainted, is referred to the Deuteronomist, as if it had rather been an idea of his than a statement of Rahab's. It is strange that Canon Driver should not have seen that this is the very hinge of Rahab's speech, because it gives us the explanation of the remarkable faith that had taken possession of her polluted heart. The truth is, we can hardly conceive that any part of the book should have been written by one who did not connect Joshua with Moses, and both of them with the patriarchs, and who was not impressed by the vital connection of the earlier with the later transactions, and likewise by the single Divine purpose running through the whole history.

But we are far from thinking that there is no foundation for any of the conclusions of the critics regarding the Book of Joshua.

What seems their great weakness is the confidence with which they assign this part to one writer and that part to another, and bring down the composition of the book to a late period of the history. That various earlier documents were made use of by the author of the book seems very plain. For instance, in the account of the crossing of the Jordan, use seems to have been made of two documents, not always agreeing in minute details, and pieced together in a primitive fashion characteristic of a very early period of literary composition. The record of the delimitation of the possessions of the several tribes must have been taken from the report of the men that were sent to survey the country, but it is not a complete record. There are other traces of different documents in other parts of the book, but any diversities between them are quite insignificant, and in no degree impair its historical trustworthiness.

As to the hand of a reviser or revisers in the book, we see no difficulty in allowing for such. We can conceive an authorized reviser expanding speeches, but thoroughly in the line of the speakers, or inserting explanatory remarks as to places, or as to practices that had prevailed "unto this day." But it is atrocious to be told of revisers colouring statements and modifying facts in the interests of religious parties, or even in the interest of truth itself. Any alterations in the way of revision seem to have been very limited, otherwise we should not find in the existing text those awkward joinings of different documents which are not in perfect accord. Whoever the revisers were, they seem to have

judged it best to leave these things as they found them, rather than incur the responsibility of altering what had already been written.

It has generally been assumed by spiritual expositors that there must be something profoundly symbolical in a book that narrates the work of Joshua, or Jesus, the first, so far as we know, to bear the name that is "above every name." The subject is considered with some fulness in Pearson's "Exposition of the Creed," and various points of resemblance, not all equally valid,¹ are noted between Joshua and Jesus.

The one point of resemblance on which we seem to be warranted to lay much stress is, that Joshua gave the people REST. Again and again we read – "The land rested from war" (xi. 23), "The land had rest from war" (xiv. 15), "The Lord gave them rest round about" (xxi. 44), "The Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren" (xxii. 4), "The Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about" (xxiii. 1). That was

¹ "The hand of Moses and Aaron brought the people out of Egypt, but left them in the wilderness, and could not seat them in Canaan... Joshua, the successor, only could effect that in which Moses failed... The death of Moses and the succession of Joshua pre-signified the continuance of the law till Jesus came... Moses must die that Joshua might succeed... If we look on Joshua as the judge and ruler of Israel, there is scarce an action which is not predictive of our Saviour. He begins his office at the banks of the Jordan where Christ is baptized, and enters upon the public exercise of his prophetic office. He chooseth there twelve men out of the people to carry twelve stones over with them; as our Jesus thence began to choose His twelve apostles... It hath been observed that the saving Rahab the harlot alive foretold what Jesus once should speak to the Jews – 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.'..."

Joshua's great achievement, as the instrument of God's purpose. Yet in Hebrews we read that this was not the real rest – it was only a symbol of it: "If Joshua had given them rest, then would God not afterward have spoken of another day." The real rest was the rest arising from faith in Jesus Christ. Many persons look on Joshua as a somewhat dry book, full of geographical names, as unsuggestive as they are hard and unfamiliar. Yet on every one of the places so named faith may see inscribed, as in letters from heaven, the sweet word rest. Each of these places became a home for men who had been wandering for some forty years in a waste howling wilderness. At last they reached a spot where they did not fear the long familiar summons to "arise and depart." The sickly mother, the consumptive maiden, the paralysed old man might rest in peace, no longer terrified at the prospect of journeys which only increased their ailments and aggravated their sufferings.

The spiritual lesson of this book then is, that in Jesus Christ there is rest for the pilgrim. It is no slight or unevangelical lesson. It is the echo of His own glorious words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Whosoever is weary – whether under the burden of care, or the sense of guilt, or the bitterness of disappointment, or the anguish of a broken heart, or the conviction that all is vanity – the message of this book to him is, – "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." Even now, the rest of faith; and hereafter, that rest of which the voice from heaven proclaimed – "Blessed are the

dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

CHAPTER II

JOSHUA'S ANTECEDENTS

Four hundred years is a long way to go back in tracing a pedigree. Joshua's might have been traced much farther back than that – back to Noah, or for that matter to Adam; but Israelites usually counted it enough to begin with that son of Jacob who was the head of their tribe. It could be no small gratification to Joshua that he had Joseph for his ancestor, and that of the two sons of Joseph he was sprung from the one whom the dying Jacob so expressly placed before the other as the heir of the richer blessing (1 Chron. vii. 20-27). It is remarkable that the descendants of Joseph attached no consequence to the fact that on the side of Joseph's wife they were sprung from one of the highest functionaries of Egypt (Gen. xli. 45), any more than the children of Mered, of the tribe of Judah, whose wife, Bithiah, was a daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chron. iv. 18), gained rank in Israel from the royal blood of their mother. The glory of high connections with the heathen counted for nothing; it was entirely eclipsed by the glory of the chosen seed. To be of the household of God was higher than to be born of kings.

Joshua appears to have come of the principal family of the tribe, for his grandfather, Elishama (1 Chron. vii. 26), was captain and head of his tribe (Num. i. 10, ii. 18), and in the order

of march through the wilderness marched at the head of the forty thousand five hundred men that constituted the great tribe of Ephraim; while his son, Nun, and his grandson, Joshua, would of course march beside him. Not only was Elishama at the head of the tribe, but apparently also of the whole "camp of Ephraim," which, besides his own tribe, embraced Manasseh and Benjamin, being the whole descendants of Rachel (Num. ii. 24). Under their charge in all likelihood was a remarkable relic that had been brought very carefully from Egypt – the bones of Joseph (Exod. xiii. 19). Great must have been the respect paid to the coffin which contained the embalmed body of the Governor of Egypt, and which was never lost sight of during all the period of the wanderings, till at length it was solemnly deposited in its resting-place at Shechem (Josh. xxiv. 32). Young Joshua, grandson of the prince of the tribe, must have known it well. For Joshua was himself cast in the mould of Joseph, an ardent, courageous, God-fearing, patriotic youth. Very interesting to him it must have been to recall the romance of Joseph's life, his grievous wrongs and trials, his gentle spirit under them all, his patient and invincible faith, his lofty purity and self-control, his intense devotion to duty, and finally his marvellous exaltation and blessed experience as the saviour of his brethren! And that coffin must have seemed to Joshua ever to preach this sermon, – "God will surely visit you." With Joseph, young Joshua believed profoundly in his nation, because he believed profoundly in his nation's God; he felt that no other people in the world could have such a destiny,

or could be so worthy of the service of his life.

This sense of Israel's relation to God raised in him an enthusiastic patriotism, and soon brought him under the notice of Moses, who quickly discerned in the grandson a spirit more congenial to his own than that of either the father or the grandfather. Not even Moses himself had a warmer love than Joshua for Israel, or a more ardent desire to serve the people that had such a blessed destiny. In all likelihood the first impression Joshua made on Moses might have been described in the words – "It came to pass that the soul of Moses was knit with the soul of Joshua, and Moses loved him as his own soul."

In no other way can we account for the extraordinary mark of confidence with which Joshua was honoured when he was selected in the early days of the wilderness sojourn, not only to repel the attack which the Amalekites had made upon Israel, but to choose the men by whom this was to be done. Why pass over father and grandfather, if this youth, Joshua, had not already displayed qualities that fitted him for this difficult task better than either of them? We cannot but note, in passing, the proof we have of the contemporaneousness of the history, that no mention is made of the reasons why Joshua of all men was appointed to this command. If the history was written near the time, with Joshua's splendid career fresh in the minds of the people, the reasons would be notorious and did not need to be given; if it was written long afterwards, what more natural than that something should be said to explain the remarkable choice?

On whatever grounds Joshua was appointed, the result amply vindicated the selection. On Joshua's part there is none of that hesitation in accepting his work which was shown even by Moses himself when he got his commission at the burning bush. He seems to have accepted the appointment with humble faith and spirited enthusiasm, and prepared at once for the perilous enterprise.

And he had little enough time to prepare, for a new attack of the Amalekites was to be made next day. We may conceive him, after prayer to his Lord, setting out with a few chosen comrades to invite volunteers to join his corps, rousing their enthusiasm by picturing the dastardly attack that the Amalekites had made on the sick and infirm (Deut. xxv. 17, 18), and scattering their fears by recalling the promise to Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." That Moses knew him to be a man of faith whose trust was in the living God was shown by his promise to stand next morning on the hill top with the rod of God in his hand. Yes, the rod of God! Had not Joshua seen it stretched out over the Red Sea, first to make a passage for Israel, and thereafter to bring back the waters on Pharaoh's host? Was he not just the man to value aright that symbol of Divine power? The troop selected by Joshua may have been small as the band of Gideon, but if it was as full of faith and courage it was abundantly able for its work!

The Amalekites are sometimes supposed to have been descendants of an Amalek who was the grandson of Esau (Gen.

xxxvi. 12), but the name is much older (Gen. xiv. 7), and was applied at an early period to the inhabitants of the tract of country stretching southwards from the Dead Sea to the peninsula of Sinai. Whatever may have been their origin, they were old inhabitants of the wilderness, well acquainted probably with every mountain and valley, and well skilled in that Bedouin style of warfare which even practised troops are little able to meet. They were therefore very formidable opponents to the raw levy of Israelites, who could be but little acquainted with weapons of war, and were wholly unaccustomed to battle.

The Amalekites could not have been ignorant of the advantage of a good position, and they probably occupied a post not easy to attack and carry. Evidently the battle was a serious one. The practised and skilful tactics of the Amalekites were more than a match for the youthful valour of Joshua and his comrades; but as often as the uplifted rod of Moses was seen on the top of the neighbouring hill, new life and courage rushed into the souls of the Israelites, and for the time the Amalekites retreated before them. Hour after hour the battle raged, till the arm of Moses became too weary to hold up the rod. A stone had to be found for him to sit on, and his comrades, Aaron and Hur, had to hold up his hands. But even then, though the advantage was on the side of Joshua, it was sunset before Amalek was thoroughly defeated. The issue of the battle was no longer doubtful – "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Exod. xvii. 13).

It was a memorable victory, due in effect to the hand of God as really as the destruction of the Egyptians had been, but due instrumentally to the faith and fortitude of Joshua and his troop, whose ardour could not be quenched by the ever-resumed onslaughts of Amalek. And when the fight was over, Joshua could not but be the hero of the camp and the nation, as really as David after the combat with Goliath. Congratulations must have poured on him from every quarter, and not only on him, but on his father and grandfather as well. To Joshua these would come with mingled feelings; gratification at having been able to do such a service for his people, and gratitude for the presence of Him by whom alone he had prevailed. "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name be the glory." It was a splendid beginning for Israel's wilderness history, if only it had been followed up by the people in a kindred spirit. But there were not many Joshuas in the camp, and the spirit did not spread.

It is remarkable what a hold that incident at Rephidim has taken on the Christian imagination. Age after age, for more than three thousand years, its influence has been felt. Nor can it ever cease to impress believing men that, so long as Moses holds out his rod, so long as active trust is placed in the power and presence of the Most High in the great battle with sin and evil, Israel must prevail; but if this trust should fail, if Moses should let down his rod, Amalek will conquer. It was well that Moses was instructed to write the transaction in a book and rehearse it before Joshua. Well also that it should be commemorated by another

memorial, an altar to the Lord with the name of "Jehovah-nissi," the Lord my banner. How often has faith looked out towards that unknown mountain where Aaron and Hur held up the weary arms of Moses, and what a new thrill of courage and hope has the spectacle sent through hearts often "faint yet pursuing"! Happily on Joshua the effect was wholesome; a less spiritual man would have been puffed up by his remarkable victory; but in him its only effect, as was shown by the whole tenor of his future life, was a firmer trust in God, and a deeper determination to wait only on Him.

It was no wonder that after this Joshua was selected by Moses to be his personal comrade and attendant in connection with that most solemn of all his duties – the receiving of the law on the top of the mount. Here again was a most distinguished honour for so young a man. Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, with seventy of the elders, were summoned to ascend to a certain height and worship afar off; while Moses, accompanied by Joshua, went up into the mount of God (Exod. xxiv. 13). What became of Joshua while Moses was in immediate fellowship with God is not very apparent. The first impression we derive from the narrative is that he was with Moses all the time, for when Moses begins his descent Joshua is at his side (Exod. xxxii. 17). Yet we cannot suppose that in that most solemn transaction of Moses with Jehovah when the law was given any third party was present. On a careful study of the narrative throughout it will probably be seen that when, after going up a certain distance in company with

Aaron and his sons and the seventy elders, Moses was called to a higher part of the mount, Joshua accompanied Moses (Exod. xxiv. 13), and that he was with Moses during the six days when the glory of God abode on Mount Sinai and a cloud covered the mount (ver. 15); but that when God again, after these six days, called to Moses to ascend still higher, and Moses "went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up to the mount" (ver. 18), Joshua remained behind. His place of rest would thus be half-way between the spot where the elders saw God's glory and the summit where God talked with Moses. But the remarkable thing is, that from that place Joshua would seem never to have moved all the forty days and forty nights when Moses was with God. We can hardly conceive a case of more remarkable obedience, a more striking instance of the quiet waiting of faith. To a youth of his spirit and habits the restraint must have been somewhat trying. We know that Aaron did not remain long on the hill, for he was at hand when the people cried for "gods to go before them" (Exod. xxxii. 1). Impatience of God's slow methods had been a snare to the fathers – to Abraham and Sarah in the matter of Hagar; to Rachel when she raised the petulant cry, "Give me children, or else I die"; to Jacob when the promises seemed broken to atoms, and "all things" seemed "against him." Joseph alone had stood the trial of patience, and now Joshua showed himself of the like spirit. The word of Moses to him was like an anchor holding the ship firmly against the force of wind and tide. What a solemn time it must have been, and what a precious

lesson it must have taught him for the whole future of his life!

More than three thousand years have sped away, but have the servants of God on an average reached the measure of Joshua's patience? Prayers unanswered, promises unfulfilled, sickness protracted during weary years of pain, disappointments and trials coming in troops as if all God's waves and billows were passing over them, active persecution bringing all the devices of torture to bear upon them, – how have such things tried the patience, the waiting power of the servants of God! But let them remember that if the trial be severe the recompense is great, and that in the end nothing will grieve them more than to have distrusted their master and thought it possible that His promises would fail. "God is not unrighteous to forget." Richard Cecil tells that once, when walking with his little son, he bade him wait for him at a certain gate till he should return. He thought he would be back in a few minutes, but meanwhile an unexpected occurrence constrained him to go into the city, where, under an engrossing piece of business, he remained all day utterly forgetful of his charge to the boy. On his return at night to his suburban home, the boy was nowhere to be found. In a moment the order to remain at the gate flashed on his father's memory. Was it possible he should still be there? He hurried back and found him – he had been told to wait till his father returned, and he had done as he had been told. The boy that could act thus must have been made of no common stuff. So are they who can say, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry."

At last Joshua rejoins his master, and they proceed towards the foot of the mount. As they approach the camp, a noise is heard from afar. His military instinct finds an explanation, – "There is a noise of war in the camp." No, says the more experienced Moses; it is neither the shout of victors nor of vanquished, it is the noise of singing I hear; and so it was. For when they reached the camp, the people were at the very height of the idolatrous revelling that followed the construction and worship of the golden calf, and the sounds that fell on the ears of Moses and Joshua were the bacchanalian shouts of unholy and shameful riot. What a contrast to the solemn and holy scene on the top! What a gulf lies between the holy will of God and the polluted passions of men!

During the painful scenes that ensued, Joshua continued in faithful attendance on Moses; and when Moses removed the tabernacle (the temporary structure hitherto used for sacred services) and placed it outside the camp, Joshua was with him, and departed not out of the tabernacle (Exod. xxxiii. 11). We are not told whether he ascended the mount the second time with Moses, but it is likely that he did. At all events he was much with Moses at this early and susceptible period of his life. The young man did not recoil from the company of the old, nor did he who had been commander in the battle of Rephidim shrink from the duty of a servant. Deeper and deeper, as he kept company with Moses, must have been his impression of his wisdom, his faith, his loyalty to God, and his entire devotion to the welfare of his people; and stronger and stronger must have waxed his

own desire that if ever he should be called to a similar service he might show the same spirit and fulfil the same high end!

The next time that Joshua comes into notice is not so flattering to himself. It is on that occasion when the Spirit descended on the seventy elders that had been appointed to assist Moses, and they prophesied round about the tabernacle. Two of the seventy were not with the rest, but nevertheless they got the spirit and were prophesying in the camp. The military instinct of Joshua was hurt at the irregularity, and his concern for the honour of Moses was roused by their apparent indifference to the presence of their head. He hurried to inform Moses, not doubting but he would interfere to correct the irregularity. But the narrow spirit of youth met with a memorable rebuke from the larger and more noble spirit of the leader, – "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Not long after this Joshua was appointed to another memorable service. After the law-giving had been brought to an end, and the host of Israel had removed from the mountain to the borders of the promised land, he was appointed one of the twelve spies that were sent forward to explore the country. Formerly his name had been Oshea; it was now changed to Jehoshua or Joshua. The changing of the name was in itself significant, and still more the character of the change, by which a syllable of the Divine name was inserted in it. For, by the practice of the nation, the changing of a name denoted a man's entrance

on a new chapter of his history, or his coming out before the world in a new character. So it was when Abram's name was changed to Abraham, Sarai's to Sarah, and Jacob's to Israel; so also when Simon became Cephas, and Saul Paul. But the new name given to Joshua was in itself more remarkable – Joshua, that is, Jehovah saves: in the New Testament, Jesus. No doubt it looked back on the victory of Rephidim when the Lord wrought such a deliverance in Israel through Joshua. But it indicated that the feature that had appeared at Rephidim would continue to characterise him during his life. It was a testimony from Moses, and from Him who inspired Moses, to the character of Joshua, as it had come out during all the close intercourse of Moses with him. And it invested Joshua with a dignity that ought to have raised him very highly in the eyes of the other spies, and of all the congregation of Israel. Who could be more worthy of their respect than the young man who had shown himself so faithful in all his previous history, and who had now received a name that indicated that it would be the distinction of his life, like Him whom he prefigured, to lead his people to the enjoyment of God's salvation?

The forty days spent by the twelve men in exploring the land were a great contrast to the forty days spent by Joshua on the mount. All was inactivity and patient waiting in the one case; all was activity and bustle in the other. For there is a time to work and a time to rest. If at the one period Joshua had to put a restraint on his natural activity, at the other he could give it full swing.

Apart from its more immediate object, this early tour through Palestine must have been one of surpassing interest. To witness each spot that had been made memorable and classical by the lives of his forefathers; to sit by the well of Beersheba, and recall all that had happened there; to repose under Abraham's oak at Mamre; to bow at the cave of Machpelah; to recall the visits of angels at Bethel, and the ladder which had been seen going up to heaven, – was not only most thrilling, but to a man of Joshua's faith most inspiring; because every spot that had such associations was a witness that God had given them the land, and a proof that even though the sons of Anak were there, and their cities were walled up to heaven, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob would be faithful to His promise, and, if the people would only trust Him, would right speedily place them in full possession.

Caleb and Joshua were the only two men whose faith stood the test of this survey; the rest were thoroughly cowed by the greatness of the difficulties. And Caleb seems to have been the foremost of the two, for in some places he is named as if he stood alone. Probably he was the one who came forward and spoke; but even if Joshua's faith was not so strong at first, it was no dishonour to be indebted to the greater courage and confidence of his brother.

We can hardly doubt that in their long marches and quiet encampments the twelve men had many a discussion as to what they would advise, and that the ten felt themselves beaten both

in argument and in faith by the two. Long before they returned to the camp of Israel they had taken their sides, and by the sides they had taken they were determined to abide.

When they come back, the ten open the business and give their decided judgment against any attempt to take possession of the land. Impatient of their misrepresentations, Caleb perhaps strikes in, repudiates the notion that the people are not able to take possession, and urges them in God's name to go up at once. But it is easier far to stir up discontent and fear than to stimulate faith. The cry of the congregation, "Up, make us a captain, and let us return to Egypt," shows how strongly the tide of unbelief is flowing. Moses and Aaron are overwhelmed. The two leaders fall on their faces before the congregation. But neither the cry of the congregation nor the attitude of Moses and Aaron daunts the two faithful spies. With clothes rent they rush in, renewing their commendations of the land, laying hold of the Almighty Protector, and scorning the opposition of the inhabitants, whose hearts were cowed with terror and whose defence was departed from them. It was a fine spectacle, – the two against the million – the little remnant "faithful found among the faithless." But it was all in vain. "All the congregation bade stone them with stones." And in their impulsive and excitable temper the horrible cry would have been obeyed had not the glory of the Lord shone out and arrested the infatuated people (Num. xiv. 10).

For this shameless sin the penalty was very heavy. The congregation were to wander in the wilderness for forty years till

all that generation should die off; the ten unfaithful spies were to die at once of a plague before the Lord; and not one of the generation that left Egypt was to enter the promised land. How easily can God defeat the purposes of man! Where is now the proposal to make a captain and return to Egypt? "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"

Joshua and Caleb are doubly honoured; their lives are preserved when the other ten die of the plague; and they alone, of all the grown men of that generation, are to be allowed to enter and obtain homes in the land of promise.

For eight-and-thirty years we hear nothing more of Joshua. Like Moses, he has an interesting youth, then a long burial in the wilderness, and then he emerges from his obscurity and does a great work, second only to that of Moses himself. The first mention of him after his long eclipse is immediately before the death of Moses. God virtually appoints him to be his successor, and directs both of them to present themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation (Deut. xxxi. 14). And Moses calls him to his office, gives him a charge and says, "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee" (Deut. xxxi. 23).

We might earnestly desire, in entering on the study of Joshua's life, to draw aside the veil that covers the eight-and-thirty years, and see how he was further prepared for his great work. We might like to look into his heart, and see after what fashion this

man was made to whom the destruction of the Canaanites was entrusted. A religious warrior is a peculiar character; a Gustavus Adolphus, an Oliver Cromwell, a Henry Havelock, a General Gordon; Joshua was of the same mould, and we should have liked to know him more intimately; but this is denied to us. He stands out to us simply as one of the military heroes of the faith. In depth, in steadiness, in endurance, his faith was not excelled by that of Abraham or of Moses himself. The one conviction that dominated all in him was, that he was called by God to his work. If that work was often repulsive, let us not on that account withhold our admiration from the man who never conferred with flesh and blood, and who was never appalled either by danger or difficulty, for he "saw Him who is invisible."

CHAPTER III

A SUCCESSOR TO MOSES

Joshua i. 2

There are some men to whom it is almost impossible to find successors. Men of imperial mould; Nature's primates, head and shoulders above other men, born to take the lead. Not only possessed of great gifts originally, but placed by Providence in situations that have wonderfully expanded their capacity and made their five talents ten. Called to be leaders of great movements, champions of commanding interests, often gifted with an imposing presence, and with a magnetic power that subdues opposition and kindles enthusiasm as if by magic. What a bereavement when such men are suddenly removed! How poor in comparison those who come next them, and from among whom successors have to be chosen! When the Hebrews mourned the death of Samson, the difference in physical strength between him and his brethren could not have appeared greater than the intellectual and moral gulf appears between a great king of men, suddenly removed, and the bereaved children that bend helpless over his grave.

A feeling of this sort must have spread itself through the host

of Israel when it was known that Moses was dead. Speculation as to his successor there could be none, for not only had God designated Joshua, but before he died Moses had laid his hands upon him, and the people had acknowledged him as their coming leader. And Joshua had already achieved a record of no common order, and had been favoured with high tokens of the Divine approval. Yet what a descent it must have seemed from Moses to Joshua! From the man who had so often been face to face with God, who had commanded the sea to make a way for the redeemed of the Lord to pass over, who had been their legislator and their judge ever since they were children, to whom they had gone in every difficulty, and who for wisdom and disinterestedness had gained the profound confidence of every one of them; – what a descent, we say, to this son of Nun, known hitherto as but the servant of Moses – an intrepid soldier, no doubt, and a man of unflinching faith, but whose name seemed as if it could not couple with that of their imperial leader!

Well though Joshua did his work in after life, and bright though the lustre of his name ultimately became, he never attained to the rank of Moses. While the name of Moses is constantly reappearing in the prophets, in the psalms, in the gospels, in the epistles, and in the apocalypse, that of Joshua is not found out of the historical books except in the speech of Stephen and that well-known passage in the Hebrews (iv. 8), where the received version perplexes us by translating it Jesus. But it was no disparagement of him that he was so far surpassed

by the man to whom, under God, the very existence of the nation was due. And in some respects, Joshua is a more useful example to us than Moses. Moses seems to stand half-way in heaven, almost beyond reach of imitation. Joshua is more on our own level. If not a man of surpassing genius, he commends himself as having made the best possible use of his talents, and done his part carefully and well.

The remark has been made that eras of great creative vigour are often succeeded by periods dull and commonplace. The history of letters and of the fine arts shows that bursts of artistic splendour like the Renaissance, or of literary originality like the Augustan age in Roman or the Elizabethan in English literature, are not followed by periods of equal lustre. And the same phenomenon has often been found in the Christian Church. In more senses than one the Apostles had no successors. Who in all the sub-apostolic age was worthy even to untie the latchet of Peter, or John, or Paul? This inferiority is so manifest that had there been nothing else to guide the Church in framing the canon of the New Testament, the difference between the writings of the Apostles and their companions on the one hand, and of men like Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Hermes on the other, would have sufficed to settle the question. So also at the era of the Reformation. Hardly a country but had its star or its galaxy of the first magnitude. Luther and Melancthon, Calvin and Coligny, Farel and Viret, John à-Lasco and John Knox, Latimer and Cranmer, – what incomparable men they were! But

in the age that followed what names can we find to couple with theirs?

Of other sections of the Church the same remark has been made, and sometimes it has been turned to an unfair use. If in the second generation, after a great outburst of power and grace, there are few or no men of equal calibre, it does not follow that the glory has departed, and that the Church is to droop her head, and wonder to what unworthy course on her part the degeneracy is to be ascribed. We are not to expect in such a case that the laws of nature will be set aside to gratify our pride. We are to recognise a state of things which God has ordained for wise purposes, although it may not be flattering to us. We are to place ourselves in the attitude in which Joshua was called to place himself when the curt announcement of the text as to Moses was followed by an equally curt order to him – "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise."

The question for Joshua is not whether he is a fit person to succeed Moses. His mental exercise is not to compare himself with Moses, and note the innumerable points of inferiority on every side. His attitude is not to bow down his head like a bulrush, mourning over the departed glory of Israel, grieving for the mighty dead, on whose like neither he nor his people will ever look again. If there ever was a time when it might seem excusable for a bereaved nation and a bereaved servant to abandon themselves to a sense of helplessness, it was on the death of Moses. But even at that supreme moment the command

to Joshua is, "Now therefore arise." Gird yourself for the new duties and responsibilities that have come upon you. Do not worry yourself with asking whether you are capable of doing these duties, or with vainly looking within yourself for the gifts and qualities which marked your predecessor. It is enough for you that God in His providence calls you to take the place of the departed. If He has called you, He will equip you. It is not His way to send men a warfare on their own charges. The work to which He calls you is not yours but His. Remember He is far more interested in its success than you can be. Think not of yourself, but of Him, and go forth under the motto, "We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners."

In many different situations of life we may hear the same exhortation that was now addressed to Joshua. A wise, considerate, and honoured father is removed, and the eldest son, a mere stripling, is called to take his place, perhaps in the mercantile office or place of business, certainly in the domestic circle. He is called to be the comforter and adviser of his widowed mother, and the example and helper of his brothers and sisters. Well for him when he hears a voice from heaven, "Your father is dead; now therefore arise!" Rouse yourself for the duties that now devolve upon you; onerous they may be and beyond your strength, but not on that account to be evaded or repudiated; rather to be looked on as spurs provided and designed by God, that you may apply yourself with heart and soul to your duties, in

the belief that faithful and patient application shall not be without its reward!

Or it may be that the summons comes to some young minister as successor to a father in Israel, whose ripe gifts and fragrant character have won the confidence and the admiration of all. Or to some teacher in a Sunday-school, where the man of weight, of wise counsel, and holy influence has been suddenly snatched away. But be the occasion what it may, the removal of any man of ripe character and gifts always comes to the survivor with the Divine summons, "Now therefore arise!" That is the one way in which you must try to improve this dispensation; the world is poorer for the loss of his gifts – learn you to make the most of yours!

It was no mean impression of Moses that God meant to convey by the designation, "Moses My servant." It was not a high-sounding title, certainly. A great contrast to the long list of honourable titles sometimes engraved on men's coffins or on their tombs, or proclaimed by royal herald or king-at-arms over departed kings or nobles. One of the greatest of men has no handle to his name – he is simply Moses. He has no titles of rank or office – he is simply "My servant." But true greatness is "when unadorned adorned the most." Moses is a real man, a man of real greatness; there is no occasion therefore to deck him out in tinsel and gilt; he is gold to the core.

But think what is really implied in this designation, "My servant." Even if Moses had not been God's servant in a sense and

in a degree in which few other men ever were, it would have been a glorious thing to obtain that simple appellation. True indeed, the term "servant of God" is such a hackneyed one, and often so little represents what it really means, that we need to pause and think of its full import. There may be much honour in being a servant. Even in our families and factories a model servant is a rare and precious treasure. For a real servant is one that has the interest of his master as thoroughly at heart as his own, and never scruples, at any sacrifice of personal interest or feeling, to do all that he can for his master's welfare. A true servant is one of whom his master may say, "There is absolutely no need for me to remind him what my interest requires; he is always thinking of my interest, always on the alert to attend to it, and there is not a single thing I possess that is not safe in his hands."

Does God possess many such servants? Who among us can suppose God saying this of him? Yet this was the character of Moses, and in God's eyes it invested him with singular honour. It was his distinction that he was "faithful in all his house." His own will was thoroughly subdued to the will of God. The people of whom God gave him charge were dear to him as a right hand or a right eye. All personal interests and ambitions were put far from him. To aggrandise himself or to aggrandise his house never entered into his thoughts. Never was self more thoroughly crucified in any man's breast. Beautiful and delightful in God's eyes must have seemed this quality in Moses, – his absolute disinterestedness, his sensibility to every hint of his Master's will,

his consecration of all he was and had to God, and to his people for God's sake!

It was thus no unsuggestive word that God used of Moses, when He told Joshua that "His servant" was dead. It was a significant indication of what God had valued in Moses and now expected of Joshua. The one thing for Joshua to remember about Moses is, that he was the servant of God. Let him take pains to be the same; let him have his ear as open as that of Moses to every intimation of God's will, his will as prompt to respond, and his hand as quick to obey.

Was not this view of the glory of Moses as God's servant a foreshadow of what was afterwards taught more fully and on a wider scale by our Lord? "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus sought to reverse the natural notions of men as to what constitutes greatness, when He taught that, instead of being measured by the number of servants who wait on us, it is measured rather by the number of persons to whom we become servants. And if it was a mark of Christ's own humiliation that "He took on Him the form of a servant," did not this redound to His highest glory? Was it not for this that God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name? Happy they who are content to be God's servants in whatsoever sphere of life He may place them; seeking not their own, but always intent upon their Master's business!

And now Joshua must succeed Moses and be God's servant

as he was. He must aim at this as the one distinction of his life; he must seek in every action to know what God would have him to do. Happy man if he can carry out this ideal of life! No conflicting interests or passions will distract his soul. His eye being single, his whole body will be full of light. The power that nerves his arm will not be more remarkable than the peace that dwells in his soul. He will show to all future generations the power of a "lost will," – not the suppression of all desire, according to the Buddhist's idea of bliss, but all lawful natural desires in happy and harmonious action, because subject to the wise, holy, and loving guidance of the will of God.

Thus we see among the other paradoxes of His government, how God uses death to promote life. The death of the eminent, the aged, the men of brilliant gifts makes way for others, and stimulates their activity and growth. When the champion of the forest falls the younger trees around it are brought more into contact with the sunshine and fresh air, and push up into taller and more fully developed forms. If none of the younger growth attains the size of the champion, a great many may be advanced to a higher average of size and beauty. If in the second generation of any great religious movement few or none can match the "mighties" of the previous age, there may be a general elevation, a rise of level, an increase of efficiency among the rank and file.

In many ways death enters into God's plans. Not only does it make way for the younger men,² but it has a solemnizing and

² "Can death itself when seen in the light of this truth [the adjustment of every being

quickening effect on all who are not hardened and dulled by the wear and tear of life.

What a memorable event in the spiritual history of families is the first sudden affliction, the first breach in the circle of loving hearts! First, the new experience of intense tender longing, baffled by the inexorable conditions of death; then the vivid vision of eternity, the reality of the unseen flashing on them with living and awful power, and giving an immeasurable importance to the question of salvation; then the drawing closer to one another, the forswearing of all animosities and jealousies, the cordial desire for unbroken peace and constant co-operation; and if it be the father or the mother that has been taken, the ambition to be useful, – to be a help not a burden to the surviving parent, and to do what little they can of what used to be their father's or their mother's work. Death becomes actually a quickener of the vital energies; instead of a withering influence, it drops like the gentle dew, and becomes the minister of life.

And death is not alone among the destructive agencies that are so often directed to life-giving ends. What a remarkable place is that which is occupied by Pain among God's instruments of

in animated nature to every other] be denied to be an evidence of benevolence? I think not. The law of animal generation makes necessary the law of animal death, if the largest amount of animal happiness is to be secured. If there had been less death there must also have been less life, and what life there was must have been poorer and meaner. Death is a condition of the prolificness of nature, the multiplicity of species, the succession of generations, the co-existence of the young and the old; and these things, it cannot reasonably be doubted, add immensely to the sum of animal happiness." – Flint's "Theism," p. 251.

good! How many are there who, looking back on their lives, have to confess, with a mixture of sadness and of joy, that it is their times of greatest suffering that have been the most decisive in their lives, – marked by their best resolutions, – followed by their greatest advance! And it sometimes would seem as if the acuter the suffering the greater the blessing. How near God seems at times to come to the height of cruelty when really He is overflowing with love! He seems to select the very tenderest spots on which to inflict His blows, the very tenderest and purest affections of the heart. It is a wonderful triumph of faith and submission when the sufferer stands firm and tranquil amidst it all. And still more when he can find consolation in the analogy which was supplied by God's own act, – "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

And this brings us to our last application. Our Lord Himself, by a beautiful analogy in nature, showed the connection, in the very highest sense, between death and life – "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it beareth much fruit." "Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." When Jesus died at Calvary, the headquarters of death became the nursery of life. The place of a skull, like the prophet's valley of dry bones, gave birth to an exceeding great army of living men. Among the wonders that will bring glory to God in the highest throughout eternity, the greatest will be this evolution of good from evil, of happiness from pain, of

life from death. And even when the end comes, and death is swallowed up of victory, and death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, there will abide with the glorified a lively sense of the infinite blessing that came to them from God through the repulsive channel of death, finding its highest expression in that anthem of the redeemed – "Thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."

CHAPTER IV

JOSHUA'S CALL

Joshua i. 2-5

Joshua has heard the Divine voice summoning him to the attitude of activity – "Arise!" Directions follow immediately as to the course which his activity is to take. His first step is to be a very pronounced one – "Go over this Jordan": enter the land, not by yourself, or with a handful of comrades, as you did forty years ago, but "thou and all this people." Take the bold step, cross the river; and when you are across the river, take possession of the country which I now give to your people. The time has come for decided action; it is for you to show the way, and summon your people to follow.

It was a very solemn and striking moment, second only in interest to that when, forty years before, their fathers had stood at the edge of the sea, with the host of Pharaoh hurrying on behind. At length the hour has come to take possession of the inheritance! At length the promise made so many hundred years ago to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is ripe for fulfilment! You, children of Israel, have seen that God is in no haste to fulfil His promises, and your hearts may have known much of the sickness

of hope deferred. But now you are to see that after all God is faithful. He never forgets. He makes no mistakes. His delays are all designed for good, either to chasten or to try, and thus confirm and bless His people. He will now bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noon-day.

There were two things that might make Joshua and the people hesitate to cross the Jordan. In the first place, the river was in flood; it was the time when the Jordan overflowed its banks (Josh. iii. 15), and, being a rapid river, crossing it in such circumstances might well seem out of the question. But in the second place, to cross the Jordan was to throw down the gauntlet to the enemy. It was a declaration of war, and a challenge to them to do their worst. It was a signal for them to assemble, fight for their hearths and homes, and strain every nerve to annihilate this invader who made such a bold claim to their possessions. All the children of Anak whom Joshua had seen on his former visit would now range themselves against Israel; all the seven nations would muster their bravest forces, and the contest would not be like Joshua's battle with Amalek, finished in a single day, but a long succession of battles, in which all the resources of power and skill, of craft and cunning would be brought to bear against Israel. According to appearances, nothing short of this would be the result of compliance with the command, "Go over this Jordan."

On the one hand, therefore, compliance was physically impossible, and on the other, even if possible, it would have been fearfully perilous. But it is never God's method to give impossible

commands. The very fact of His commanding anything is a proof of His readiness to make it possible, nay, to make it easy and simple to those who have faith to attempt it. "Stretch out thy hand," said Christ to the man with the withered hand. "Stretch out my hand?" the man might have said in astonishment, – "why, it is the very thing I am unable to do." "Rise up and walk," said Peter to the lame man at the Beautiful gate. "How can I do that?" he might have replied; "don't you see that I have no use of my limbs?" But in these cases the helpless men had faith in those who bade them exert themselves; they believed that if they tried they would be helped, and helped accordingly they were. So too in the present case. Joshua knew that he and the host could not have crossed the Jordan as it then was by any contrivance in his power; but he knew that it was God's command, and he was sure that He would provide the means. He felt as if God and the people were in partnership, each equally interested in the result, and equally desirous to bring it about. Whatever it was necessary for God to do he was assured would be done, provided he and the people entered into the Divine plan, and threw all their energies into the work. Not a word of remonstrance did Joshua offer, not a word of explanation of the Divine plan did he ask; he acted as a servant should;

"His not to make reply,
His not to reason why;"

his only to trust and obey.

This faith in Divine power qualifying feeble mortals for the hardest tasks has originated some of the noblest enterprises in the history of the world. It was a Divine voice Columbus seemed to hear bidding him cross the wild Atlantic, for he desired to bring the natives of the distant shores beyond it into the pale of the Church; and it was his faith that sustained him when his crew became mutinous and his life was not safe for an hour. It was a Divine voice Livingstone seemed to hear bidding him cross Africa, strike up into the heart of the continent, examine its structure, and throw it open from shore to shore; and never was there a faith stronger or steadier than that which bore him on through fever and famine, through pain and sickness, through disappointment and anguish, and, even when the cold hand of death was on him, would not let him rest until his work was done.

Often in the spiritual warfare it is useful to apply this principle. Are we called to believe? Are we called to make ourselves a new heart and a new spirit? Are we summoned to fight, to wrestle, to overcome? Certainly we are. But is not this to tantalize us by ordering us to do what we cannot do? Is not this like telling a sick man to get well, or a decrepit old creature to skip and frisk like a child? It would be so if the principle of partnership between God and us did not come into play. Faith says, God is my partner in this matter. Partners even in an ordinary business put their resources together, each doing what his special abilities fit him for. In the partnership which faith establishes between God

and you, the resources of the infinite Partner become available for the needs of the finite. It is God's part to give orders, it is your part to execute them, and it is God's part to strengthen you so to do. It is this that makes the command reasonable, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Faith rejoices in the partnership, and goes forward in the confidence that the strength of the Almighty will help its weakness, not by one sudden leap, but by that steady growth in grace that makes the path of the just like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

It was a great thing for God to announce that He was now in the act of turning His old, old promise into reality, – that the land pledged to Abraham centuries ago was now at length to become the possession of his descendants. But the gift could be of no avail unless it was actually appropriated. God gave the people the right to the land; but their own energy, made effectual through His grace, could alone secure the possession. In a remarkable way they were made to feel that, while the land was God's gift, the appropriation and enjoyment of the gift must come through their own exertions. Just as in a higher sphere we know that our salvation is wholly the gift of God; and yet the getting hold of this gift, the getting linked to Christ, the entrance as it were into the marriage covenant with Him involves the active exertion of our own will and energy, and the gift never can be ours if we fail thus to appropriate it.

As soon as God mentions the land, He expatiates on its amplitude and its boundaries. It was designed to be both a comfortable and an ample possession. In point of extent it was a spacious region, – "from the wilderness and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea, towards the going down of the sun." And it was not merely bits or corners of this land that were to be theirs, they were not designed to share it with other occupants, but "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, to you have I given it, as I spake unto Moses." It was in no meagre or stingy spirit that God was now to fulfil His ancient promise, but in a way corresponding to the essential bountifulness of His nature. For it is a delightful truth that God's heart is large and liberal, and that He delights in large and bountiful gifts. Has He not made this plain to all in the arrangements of nature? What more lavish than the gift of light, ever streaming from the sun in silver showers? What more abundant than the fresh air that, like an inexhaustible ocean, encompasses our globe, or the rivers that carry their fresh and fertilizing treasures unweariedly through every meadow? What more productive than the vegetable soil that under favourable conditions teems with fruits and flowers and the elements of food for the use and enjoyment of man?

And when we turn to God's provision in grace we find glorious proofs of the same abundance and generosity. We see this symbolized by the activity and generosity of our Lord, as He

went about "preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." We understand the spiritual reality of which this was the symbol, when we call to mind the Divine generosity that receives the vilest sinners; the efficacy of the blood that cleanses from all sin, the power of the Spirit that sanctifies soul, body, and spirit; the wisdom of the providence that makes all things work together for good; the glory of the love that makes us now "sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And once more it appears in the glory and amplitude of the inheritance, of which the land of Canaan was but the type, prepared of God's infinite bounty for all who are His children by faith. Our Father's house is both large and well furnished; it is a house of many mansions; and the inheritance which He has promised is incorruptible and undefiled and fadeth not away.

It is a grand truth, of which we never can make too much, this bountifulness of God, and the delight which He has in being bountiful. It is emphatically a truth for faith to apprehend and enjoy, because appearances are so often against it. Appearances were fearfully against it while the Israelites were groaning in their Egyptian bondage, and hardly less so, despite the manna and the water from the rock, during the forty years' wandering in the desert. But that was a period of correction and of training, and in such circumstances lavish bounty was out of the question.

The most bountiful man on earth could not pour out all the

liberality of his heart on the inmates of a hospital for the sick; he may give all that sick men need, but he must wait till they are well before he can give full scope to his generosity. While we are in the body we are like patients in a hospital, and the kindest feelings from God toward us must often take the form of bitter medicines, painful operations, close restraint, stinted diet, and it may be silence and darkness. But wait till we are well, and then we shall see what God hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him! Wait till we go over Jordan and take possession of the land! Two things will be seen in the clearest light – the supreme bountifulness of God, and the sinfulness of that impatient and suspicious spirit to which we are so prone. What a humiliation, if humiliation be possible in heaven, to discover that all the time when we were fretting and grumbling, God was working out His plans of supreme beneficence and love, waiting only till we should come of age to make us heirs of the universe!

It is natural to ask why, if the boundaries of the promised land were so extensive, if they reached so far on the north-east as the Euphrates, and if they extended from Lebanon on the north to the confines of Egypt on the south, there should have been any difficulty about the two and a half tribes occupying the land east of the Jordan, where only by a special permission they obtained their settlement. For it is plain from the narrative that it was contrary to God's first intention, so to speak, that they should settle there, and that the land west of the Jordan was that to which the promise was held specially to apply. It will hardly do to say,

as some have said, that the extension of the land to the Euphrates was a figure of speech, a poetical fringe or ornament as it were, intended to show that places adjacent to the land of Israel would share in some degree the radiance of its light and the influence of the Divine presence among its people. For the promise of God was really of the nature of a charter, and figures of poetry are not suitable in charters. It is rather to be understood that, in the *final* purpose of God, the possession included the whole of the ample domain contained within the specified boundaries, but that at first it would be confined within a narrower space. If the people should prove faithful to the covenant, the wider dominion would one day be conferred on them; but they were to start and get consolidated in a narrower territory. And the narrower space was that which had already been consecrated by the residence of the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The country west of Jordan was the land of *their* pilgrimage; and even when Lot and Abraham had to separate, it was not proposed that either should cross the river. The little strip lying between the Jordan and the sea was judged most suitable for the preparatory stage of Israel's history; but had the nation served God with fidelity, their country would have been extended – as in the days of David and Solomon it really was – to the dimensions of an empire. The rule afterwards announced was to be virtually brought into operation – "To him that hath shall be given." Hence the view taken of the settlement of the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan. It was not illegitimate; it was not inconsistent with the covenant made

with the fathers; but it was for the time inexpedient, seeing that it exposed them to risks, both material and spiritual, which it would have been better for them to avoid.

One geographical expression, in the delimitation of the country, demands a brief explanation. While the country is defined as embracing the whole territory from Lebanon to the Euphrates, it is also defined as consisting in that direction of "all the land of the Hittites." But were not the Hittites one of the seven nations whose land was promised to Abraham and the fathers, and not even the first in the enumeration of these? Why should this great north-eastern section of the promised domain be designated "the land of the Hittites"?

The time was when it was a charge against the accuracy of the Scripture record that it ascribed to the Hittites this extensive dominion. That time has passed away, inasmuch as, within quite recent years, the discovery has been made that in those distant times a great Hittite empire did exist in the very region specified, between Lebanon and the Euphrates. The discovery is based on twofold data: references in the Egyptian and other monuments to a powerful people, called the Khita (Hittites), with whom even the great kings of Egypt had long and bloody wars; and inscriptions in the Hittite language, found in Hamah, Aleppo, and other places in Syria. There is still much obscurity resting on the history of this people. That the Hittites proper prevailed so extensively has been doubted by some; a Hittite confederacy has been supposed, and sometimes a Hittite aristocracy exercising

control over a great empire. The only point which it is necessary to dwell on here is, that in representing the tract between Lebanon and Euphrates as equivalent to "all the land of the Hittites," the author of the Book of Joshua made a statement which has been abundantly verified by recent research.³

To encourage and animate Joshua to undertake the work and position of Moses it is very graciously promised – "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." The invariable success promised was a greater boon than the greatest conquerors had been able to secure. Uniform success is a thing hardly known to captains of great expeditions, even though in the end they may prevail. But the promise to Joshua is, that all his enemies shall flee before him. None of his battles shall be even neutral, his opponents must always give way.⁴ No son of Anak shall be able to oppose his onward march; no giant, like Og King of Bashan, shall terrify either him or his troops. He will "onward still to victory go," – the Lord of hosts ever with him, the God of Jacob ever his defence.

And this was no vague, indefinite assurance. It was sharply defined by a well-known example in the immediate past – "As

³ See "The Empire of the Hittites." By William Wright, D.D., F.R.G.S. London, 1886.

⁴ The promise is not inconsistent with the fact that Joshua's troops were defeated by the men of Ai. In such promises there is an implied condition of steadfast regard to God's will on the part of those who receive them, and this condition was violated at Ai, not by Joshua, indeed, but by one of his people.

I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." In what a remarkable variety of dangers and trials God was with Moses! Now he had to confront the grandest monarch on earth, supported by the strongest armies, and upheld by what claimed to be the mightiest gods. Again he had to deal with an apostate people, mad upon idols, and afterwards with an excited mob, ready to stone him. Anon he had to overcome the forces of nature and bend them to his purposes; to call water from the rock, to sweeten the bitter fountain, to heal the fiery bite, to cure his sister's leprous body, to bring down bread from heaven, and people the air with flocks of birds. Moreover, he had to be the messenger of the covenant between God and Israel, to unfold God's law in its length and breadth and in all its variety of application, and to obtain from the people a hearty compliance – "All that the Lord hath said unto us, that will we do." What a marvellous work Moses did! What a testimony his life presented to the reality of the Divine presence and guidance, and what a solid and indefeasible ground of trust God gave to Joshua when He said, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

And this is crowned with the further assurance, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," – an assurance which is extended in the Epistle to the Hebrews to all who believe. We are so apt to view these promises as just beautiful expressions that we need to pause and think what they really mean. A promise of Divine presence, Divine protection and guidance and blessing all the days of our life, is surely a treasure of inexpressible value. It is

no slight matter to realize that this is in God's heart – that He has a constant, unvarying feeling of love toward us, and readiness to help; but we must believe this in order to get the benefit of it; and, moreover, He must be left to determine the time, the manner, and the form in which His help is to come. Alas for the unbelief, the suspicion, the fear that is so prone to eat out the spirit of trust, and in our trials and difficulties make us tremble as if we were alone! What a profound peace, what calm enjoyment and blessed hope fall to the lot of those who can believe in a God ever near, and in His unfailing faithfulness and love! Was it not the secret alike of David's calmness, of our Lord's serenity, and of the cheerful composure of many a martyr and many a common man and woman who have gone through life undisturbed and happy, that they could say – "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved"? God grant us all that, like Abraham, we may "stagger not at the promise of God through unbelief but that being strong in faith we may give glory to God, and believe that what He hath promised He is able also to perform."

CHAPTER V

JOSHUA'S ENCOURAGEMENT

Joshua i. 6-9

God has promised to be with Joshua, but Joshua must strive to act like one in partnership with God. And that He may do so, God has just two things to press on him: in the first place, to be strong and of a good courage; and in the second place, to make the book of the law his continual study and guide. In this way he shall be able to achieve the specific purpose to which he is called, to divide the land for an inheritance to the people, as God hath sworn to their fathers; and likewise, more generally, to fulfil the conditions of a successful life – "then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

First, Joshua must be strong and very courageous. But are strength and courage really within our own power? Is strength not absolutely a Divine gift, and as dependent on God in its ordinary degrees as it was in the case of Samson in its highest degree? No doubt in a sense it is so; and yet the amount even of our bodily strength is not wholly beyond our own control. As bodily strength is undoubtedly weakened by careless living, by excess of eating and drinking, by all irregular habits, by the breathing of foul air,

by indolence and self-indulgence of every kind, so undoubtedly it is increased and promoted by attention to the simple laws of health, by activity and exercise, by sleep and sabbatic rest, by the moderate use of wholesome food, as well as by abstinence from hurtful drinks and drugs. And surely the duty of being strong, in so far as such things can give strength, is of far more importance than many think; for if we can thus maintain and increase our strength we shall be able to serve both God and man much better and longer than we could otherwise have done. On the other hand, the feebleness and fitfulness and querulousness often due to preventable illness must increase the trouble which we give to others, and lessen the beneficent activity and the brightening influence of our own lives.

But in Joshua's case it was no doubt strength and courage of soul that was mainly meant. Even that is not wholly independent of the ordinary conditions of the body. On the other hand, there are no doubt memorable cases where the elasticity and power of the spirit have been in the very inverse ratio to the strength of the body. By cheerful views of life and duty, natural depression has been counteracted, and the soul filled with hope and joy. "The joy of the Lord," said Nehemiah, "is the strength of His people." Fellowship with God, as our reconciled God and Father in Christ, is a source of perpetual strength. Who does not know the strengthening and animating influence of the presence even of a friend, when we find his fresh and joyous temperament playing on us in some season of depression? The radiance of his

face, the cheeriness of his voice, the elasticity of his movements seem to infuse new hope and courage into the jaded soul. When he is gone, we try to shake off the despondent feeling that has seized us, and gird ourselves anew for the battle of life. And if such an effect can be produced by fellowship with a fellow-creature, how much more by fellowship with the infinite God! – especially when it is His work we are trying to do, and when we have all His promises of help to rest on. "God is near thee, therefore cheer thee" is a perpetual solace and stimulus to the Christian soul.

But even men who are full of Christian courage need props and bulwarks in the hour of trial. Ezra and Nehemiah were bold, but they had ways of stimulating their courage, which they sometimes needed to fall back on, and they could find allies in unlikely quarters. Ezra could draw courage even from his shame, and Nehemiah from his very pride. "I was ashamed," said Ezra, "to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way;" therefore he determined to face the danger with no help but the unseen help of God. And when Nehemiah's life was in danger from the cunning devices of the enemy, and his friends advised him to hide himself, he repelled the advice with high-minded scorn – "Should such a man as I flee?"

But there is no source of courage like that which flows from the consciousness of serving God, and the consequent assurance that He will sustain and help His servants. Brief ejaculatory

prayers, constantly dropping from their lips, often bring the courage which is needed. "Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands," was Nehemiah's habitual exclamation when faintness of heart came over him. No doubt it was Joshua's too, as it has always been of the best of God's servants. Again and again, amid the murderous threats of cannibals in the New Hebrides, the missionary Paton must have sunk into despair but for his firm belief in the protection of God.

The other counsel to Joshua was to follow in all things the instructions of Moses, and for this end, not to let "the book of the law depart out of his mouth, but to meditate on it day and night, that he might observe to do all that was written therein."

For Joshua was called to be the executor of Moses, as it were, not to start on an independent career of his own; and that particular call he most humbly and cheerfully accepted. Instead of breaking with the past, he was delighted to build on it as his foundation, and carry it out to its predestined issues. It was no part of his work to improve on what Moses had done; he was simply to accept it and carry it out. He had his brief, he had his instructions, and these it was his one business to fulfil. No puritan ever accepted God's revelation with more profound and unquestioning reverence than Joshua accepted the law of Moses. No Oliver Cromwell or General Gordon ever recognised more absolutely his duty to carry out the plan of another, and, undisturbed himself, leave the issue in His hands. He was to be a very incarnation of Moses, and was so to meditate on his law

day and night that his mind should be saturated with its contents.

This, indeed, was a necessity for Joshua, because he required to have a clear perception of the great purpose of God regarding Israel. Why had God taken the unusual course of entering into covenant with a single family out of the mass of mankind? A purpose deliberately formed and clung to for more than four hundred years must be a grand object in the Divine mind. It was Joshua's part to keep the people in mind of the solemnity and grandeur of their mission and to call them to a corresponding mode of life. What can more effectually give dignity and self-respect to men than to find that they have a part in the grand purposes of God? To find that God is not asleep; that He has neither given up the world to chance nor bound it with a chain of irreversible law, but that He calls us to be fellow-workers with Him in a great plan which shall in the end tend gloriously to advance the highest welfare of man?

This habit of meditation on the law which Joshua was instructed to practise was of great value to one who was to lead a busy life. No mere cursory perusal of a book of law can secure the ends for which it is given. The memory is treacherous, the heart is careless, and the power of worldly objects to withdraw attention is proverbial. We must be continually in contact with the Book of God. The practice enjoined on Joshua has kept its ground among a limited class during all the intervening generations. In every age of the Church it has been impressed on all devout and earnest hearts that there can be no spiritual

prosperity and progress without daily meditation on the Word of God. It would be hard to believe in the genuine Christianity of any one who did not make a practice morning and evening of bringing his soul into contact with some portion of that Word. And wherever an eminent degree of piety has been reached, we shall find that an eminently close study of the Word has been practised. Where the habit is perfunctory, the tendency is to omit the meditation and to be content with the reading. Even in pious families there is a risk that the reading of the Scriptures morning and evening may push the duty of meditation aside, though even then we are not to despise the benefit that arises from the familiarity gained with their contents.

But, on the other hand, the instances are numberless of men attaining to great intimacy with the Divine will and to a large conformity to it, through meditation on the Scriptures. To many the daily portion comes fresh as the manna gathered each morning at the door of Israel's camp. Think of men like George Müller of Bristol reading the Bible from beginning to end as many as a hundred times, and finding it more fresh and interesting at each successive perusal. Think of Livingstone reading it right on four times when detained at Manyuema, and Stanley three times during his Emin expedition. What resources must be in it, what hidden freshness, what power to feed and revive the soul! The sad thing is that the practice is so rare. Listen to the prophet-like rebuke of Edward Irving to the generation of his time: "Who feels the sublime dignity there is in a fresh

saying descended from the porch of heaven? Who feels the awful weight there is in the least iota that hath dropped from the lips of God? Who feels the thrilling fear or trembling hope there is in words whereon the eternal destinies of himself do hang? Who feels the swelling tide of gratitude within his breast for redemption and salvation, instead of flat despair and everlasting retribution?.. This book, the offspring of the Divine mind and the perfection of heavenly wisdom is permitted to lie from day to day, perhaps from week to week, unheeded and unperused; never welcome to our happy, healthy, and energetic moods; admitted, if admitted at all, in seasons of weakness, feeblemindedness, and disabling sorrow... Oh, if books had but tongues to speak their wrongs, then might this book exclaim, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I came from the love and embrace of God, and mute nature, to whom I brought no boon, did me rightful homage... I set open to you the gates of salvation and the way of eternal life, heretofore unknown... But ye requited me with no welcome, ye held no festivity on my arrival; ye sequester me from happiness and heroism, closeting me with sickness and infirmity; ye make not of me, nor use me as your guide to wisdom and prudence, but press me into your list of duties, and withdraw me to a mere corner of your time, and most of you set me at nought and utterly disregard me... If you had entertained me, I should have possessed you of the peace which I had with God when I was with Him and was daily His delight rejoicing always before Him... Because I have called and ye refused... I also will laugh

at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh."⁵

It is no excuse for neglecting this habitual reading of the Book of God that He places us now more under the action of principles than the discipline of details. For the glory of principles is that they have a bearing on every detail of our life. "Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him." What could be more comprehensive than this principle of action – a principle that extends to "whatsoever we do"? There is not a moment of our waking life, not an action great or small we ever perform where the influence of this wide precept ought not to be felt. And how can it become thus pervasive unless we make it a subject of continual meditation?

In the case of Joshua, all the strenuous exhortations to him to be strong and of a good courage, and to meditate on the Divine law as given by Moses by day and by night, were designed to qualify him for his great work – "to divide the land for an inheritance to the people as God had sworn to their fathers." First of all, the land had to be conquered; and there is no difficulty in seeing how necessary it was for one who had this task on hand to be strong and of a good courage, and to meditate on God's law. Then the land had to be divided, and the people settled in their new life, and Joshua had to initiate them, as it were, in that life; he had to bind on their consciences the conditions on which the land was to be enjoyed, and start them in the performance of the

⁵ "For the Oracles of God: four Orations." Pp. 3-6.

duties, moral, social and religious, which the Divine constitution required. Here lay the most difficult part of his task. To conquer the country required but the talent of a military commander; to divide the country was pretty much an affair of trigonometry; but to settle them in a higher sense, to create a moral affinity between them and their God, to turn their hearts to the covenant of their fathers, to wean them from their old idolatries and establish them in such habits of obedience and trust that the doing of God's will would become to them a second nature, – here was the difficulty for Joshua. They had not only to be planted physically in groups over the country, but they had to be married to it morally, otherwise they had no security of tenure, but were liable to summary eviction. It was no land of rest for idolaters; all depended on the character they attained; loyalty to God was the one condition of a happy settlement; let them begin to trifle with the claims of Jehovah, punishment and suffering, to be followed finally by dispersion and captivity, was the inevitable result.

It was thus that Joshua had to justify his name, – to show that he was worthy to be called by the name of Jesus. The work of Jesus may be said to have been symbolized both by that of Moses and that of Joshua. Moses symbolized the Redeemer in rescuing the people from Egypt and their miserable bondage there; as "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." Joshua symbolized Him as He renews our hearts and makes us "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." For there are conditions moral and spiritual essential to our dwelling in

the heavenly Canaan. "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? and who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." The atmosphere of heaven is too pure to be breathed by the unregenerate and unsanctified. There must be an adaptation between the character of the inhabitant and the place of his habitation. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Thus we see the connection between Joshua's devotion to the book of the law, and success in the great work of his life – "then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." No doubt he would have the appearance of success if he simply cleared out the inhabitants who were so degraded by sin that God was compelled to sweep them off, and settled His people in their room. But that, after all, was but a small matter unless accompanied by something more. It would not secure the people from at last sharing the fate of the old inhabitants; so far at least that though they should not be exterminated, yet they would be scattered over the face of the globe. How could Joshua get rid of these ominous words in the song of Moses to which they had so lately listened? – "They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed to devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not... And He said, I will hide My

face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." But even if in the end of the day it should come to this, nevertheless Joshua might so move and impress the people for the time being, that in the immediate future all would be well, and the dreaded consummation would be put off to a distant day.

And so at all times, in dealing with human beings, we can obtain no adequate and satisfying success unless their hearts are turned to God. Your children may be great scholars, or successful merchants, or distinguished authors, or brilliant artists, or even statesmen; what does it come to if they are dead to God, and have no living fellowship with Jesus Christ? Your congregation may be large and influential, and wealthy, and liberal; what if they are worldly, proud, and contentious? We must aim at far deeper effects, effects not to be found without the Spirit of God. The more we labour in this spirit, the more shall our way be made prosperous, the better shall be our success. "For them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

CHAPTER VI

JOSHUA'S CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE

Joshua i. 10-18

God has spoken to Joshua; it is now Joshua's part to speak to the people. The crossing of the Jordan must be set about at once, and in earnest, and all the risks and responsibilities involved in that step firmly and fearlessly encountered.

And in the steps taken by Joshua for this purpose we see, what we so often see, how the natural must be exhausted before the supernatural is brought in. Thus, in communicating with the people through the *shoterim*, or officers, the first order which he gives is to "command the people to prepare them victuals." "Victuals" denotes the natural products of the country, and is evidently used in opposition to "manna." In another passage we read that "the manna ceased on the very morning after they had eaten of the old corn of the land" (chap. v. 12). This may have been a considerable time before, for the conquest of Sihon and Og would give the people possession of ample stores of food out of the old corn of the land. The manna was a provision for the desert only, where few or no natural supplies of food could be found. But the very day when natural stores become available,

the manna is discontinued. One cannot but contrast the carefully limited use of the supernatural in Scripture with its arbitrary and unstinted employment in mythical or fictional writings. Often in such cases it is brought in with a wanton profusion, simply to excite wonder, sometimes to gratify the love of the grotesque, not because natural means could not have accomplished what was sought, but through sheer love of revelling in the supernatural. In Scripture the natural is never superseded when it is capable of either helping or accomplishing the end. The east wind helps to dry the Red Sea, although the rod of Moses has to be stretched out for the completion of the work. The angel of God knocks Peter's chains from his limbs and opens the prison gates for him, but leaves him to find his way thereafter as best he can. So now. It is now in the power of the people to prepare them victuals, and though God might easily feed them as He has fed them miraculously for forty years, He leaves them to find food for themselves. In all cases the co-operation of the Divine and the human is carried out with an instructive combination of generosity and economy; man is never to be idle; alike in the affairs of the temporal and the spiritual life, the Divine energy always stimulates to activity, never lulls to sleep.

A little explanation is needed respecting the time when Joshua said the Jordan must be crossed – "within three days." If the narrative of the first two chapters be taken in chronological order, more than three days must have elapsed between the issuing of this order and the crossing of the river, because it is expressly

stated that the two spies who were sent to examine Jericho hid themselves for three days in the mountains, and thereafter recrossed the Jordan and returned to Joshua (ii. 22). But it is quite in accordance with the practice of Scripture narrative to introduce an episode out of its chronological place so that it may not break up the main record. It is now generally held that the spies were sent on before Joshua issued this order to the people, because it is not likely that he would have committed himself to a particular day before he got the information which he expected the spies to bring. In any case, it is plain that no needless delay was allowed. Half a week more and Jordan would be crossed, although the means of crossing it had not yet been made apparent; and then the people would be actually in their own inheritance, within the very country which in the dim ages of the past had been promised to their fathers.

Yes, the people generally; but already an arrangement had been made for the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the river. How, then, were they to act in the present crisis? That had been determined between them and Moses when they got leave to occupy the lands of Sihon and Og, on account of their suitability for their abundant flocks and herds. It had been arranged then that, leaving their cattle and their children, a portion of the men likewise, the rest would cross the river with their brethren and take their share of the toils and risks of the conquest of Western Canaan. All that Joshua needs to do now is to remind them of this arrangement. Happily

there was no reluctance on their part to fulfil it. There was no going back from their word, even though they might have found a loophole of escape. They might have said that as the conquest of Sihon and Og had been accomplished so easily, so the conquest of the western tribes would be equally simple. Or they might have said that the nine tribes and a half could furnish quite a large enough army to dispossess the Canaanites. Or they might have discovered that their wives and children were exposed to dangers they had not apprehended, and that it would be necessary for the entire body of the men to remain and protect them. But they fell back on no such after thought. They kept their word at no small cost of toil and danger, and furnished thereby a perpetual lesson for those who, having made a promise under pressure, are tempted to resile from it when the pressure is removed. Fidelity to engagements is a noble quality, just as laxity in regard to them is a miserable sin. Even Pagan Rome could boast of a Regulus who kept his oath by returning to Carthage, though it was to encounter a miserable death. In the fifteenth psalm it is a feature in the portrait of the man who is to abide in God's tabernacle and dwell in His holy hill, that he "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

One arrangement was made by these transjordanic tribes that was perfectly reasonable – a portion of the men remained to guard their families and their property. The number that passed over was forty thousand (Josh. iv. 13), whereas the entire number of men capable of bearing arms (dividing Manasseh into two)

was a hundred and ten thousand (Num. xxvi. 7, 18, and 34). But the contingent actually sent was amply sufficient to redeem the promise, and, consisting probably of picked men, was no doubt a very efficient portion of the force. The actual fighting force of the other tribes would probably be in the same proportion to the whole; and there, too, a section would have to be left to guard the women, children, and flocks, so that in point of fact the labours and dangers of the conquest were about equally divided between all the tribes.

Here, then, was an edifying spectacle: those who had been first provided for did not forget those who had not yet obtained any settlement; but held themselves bound to assist their brethren until they should be as comfortably settled as themselves.

It was a grand testimony against selfishness, a grand assertion of brotherhood, a beautiful manifestation of loyalty and public spirit; and, we may add, an instructive exhibition of the working of the method by which God's providence seeks to provide for the dissemination of many blessings among the children of men. It was an act of socialism, without the drawbacks which most forms of socialism involve.

God has allowed many differences in the lots of mankind, bestowing on some ample means, for which they toiled not neither did they spin; bestowing, often on the same individuals, a higher position in life, with corresponding social influence; setting some nations in the van of the world's march, bestowing on some churches very special advantages and means of

influence; and it is a great question that arises – what obligations rest on these favoured individuals and communities? Does God lay any duty on them toward the rest of mankind?

The inquiry in its full scope is too wide for our limits; let us restrict ourselves to the element in respect of which the transjordanic tribes had the advantage of the others – the element of time. What do those who have received their benefits early owe to those who are behind them in time?

The question leads us first to the family constitution, but there is really no question here. The obligations of parents to their children are the obligations of those who have already got their settlement to those who have not; of those who have already got means, and strength, and experience, and wisdom to those who have not yet had time to acquire them. It is only the vilest of our race that refuse to own their obligations here, and this only after their nature has been perverted and demonized by vice. To all others it is an obligation which amply repays itself. The affection between parent and child in every well-ordered house sweetens the toil that often falls so heavily on the elders; while the pleasure of seeing their children filling stations of respectability and usefulness, and the enjoyment of their affection, even after they have gone out into the world, amply repay their past labours, and greatly enrich the joys of life.

We advance to the relation of the rich to the poor, especially of those who are born to riches to those who are born to obscurity and toil. Had the providence of God no purpose in this

arrangement? You who come into the world amid luxury and splendour, who have never been required to work for a single comfort, who have the means of gratifying expensive tastes, and who grudge no expenditure on the objects of your fancy: – was it meant that you were to sustain no relation of help and sympathy to the poor, especially your neighbors, your tenants, or your workpeople? Do you fulfil the obligations of life when, pouring into your coffers the fruits of other men's toil, you hurry off to the resorts of wealth and fashion, intent only on your own enjoyment, and without a thought of the toiling multitude you leave at home? Is it right of you to leave deserving people to fall peradventure into starvation and despair, without so much as turning a finger to prevent it? What are you doing for the widows and orphans? Selfish and sinful beings! let these old Hebrews read you a lesson of condemnation! They could not selfishly enjoy their comfortable homes till they had done their part on behalf of their brethren, for wherever there is a brotherly heart a poor brother's welfare is as dear as one's own.

Then there is the case of nations, and pre-eminently of our own. Some races attain to civilization, and order, and good government sooner than others. They have all the benefit of settled institutions and enlightened opinion, of discoveries in the arts and sciences, and of the manifold comforts and blessings with which life is thus enriched, while other nations are sunk in barbarism and convulsed by disorder. But how much more prone are such nations to claim the rights of superiority than to play

the part of the elder brother! We are thankful for the great good that has been done in India, and in other countries controlled by the older nations. But even in the case of India, how many have gone there not to benefit the natives, but with the hope of enriching themselves. How ready have many been to indulge their own vices at the cost of the natives, and how little has it pained them to see them becoming the slaves of new vices that have sunk them lower than before. Our Indian opium traffic, and our drink traffic generally among native races – what is their testimony to our brotherly feeling? What are we to think of the white traders among the South Sea islands, stealing and robbing and murdering their feebler fellow-creatures? What are we to think of the traffic in slaves, and the inconceivable brutalities with which it is carried on? Or what are we to think of our traders at home, sending out in almost uncountable profusion the rum, and the gin, and the other drinks by which the poor weak natives are at once enticed, enslaved, and destroyed? Is there any development in selfishness that has ever been heard of more heartless and horrible? Why can't they let them alone, if they will not try to benefit them? What can come to any man in the end but the well-merited punishment of those who out of sheer greed have made miserable savages tenfold more the children of hell than before?

We pass over the case of the early settlers in colonies, because there is hardly any obligation more generally recognised than that of such settlers to lend a helping hand to new arrivals. We go on to the case of Churches. The light of saving truth has come to some

lands before others. We in this country have had our Christianity for centuries, and in these recent years have had so lively a dispensation of the gospel of Christ that many have felt more than ever His power to forgive, to comfort, to lift us up and bless us. Have we no duty to those parts of the earth which are still in the shadow of death? If we are not actually settled in the Promised Land, we are as good as settled, because we have the Divine promise, and we believe in that promise. But what of those who are yet "without Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"? Have we no responsibility for them? Have we no interest in that Divine plan which seeks to use those who first receive the light as instruments of imparting it to the rest? Infidels object that Christianity cannot be of God, because if Christianity furnishes the only Divine remedy for sin it would have been diffused as widely as the evil for which it is the cure. Our reply is, that God's plan is to give the light first to some, and to charge them to give it freely and cordially to others. We say, moreover, that this plan is a wholesome one for those who are called to work it, because it draws out and strengthens what is best and noblest in them, and because it tends to form very loving bonds between those who give and those who get the benefit. But what if the first recipients of the light fold their hands, content to have got the blessing themselves, and decline to do their part in sending it to the rest? Surely there is here no ordinary combination of sins! Indolence and selfishness at the

root, and, with these, a want of all public spirit and beneficent activity; and, moreover, not mere neglect but contempt of the Divine plan by which God has sought the universal diffusion of the blessing. Again we say, look to these men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. They were not the *élite* of the race of Israel. Their fathers, at least in the case of Reuben and Dan, were not among the more honoured of the sons of Jacob. And yet they had the grace to think of their brethren, when so many among us are utterly careless of ours. And not only to think of them, but to go over the Jordan and fight for them, possibly die for them; nor would they think of returning to the comfort of their homes till they had seen their brethren in the west settled in theirs.

And this readiness of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to fulfil the engagement under which they had come to Moses, was not the only gratifying occurrence which Joshua met with on announcing the impending crossing of the Jordan. For the whole people declared very cordially their acceptance of Joshua as their leader, vowed to him the most explicit fidelity, declared their purpose to pay him the same honour as they had paid to Moses, and denounced a sentence of death against any one that would not hearken to his words in all that he commanded them.

Joshua, in fact, obtained from them a promise of loyalty beyond what they had ever given to Moses till close on his death. It was the great trial of Moses that the people so habitually complained of him and worried him, embittering his life by

ascribing to him even the natural hardships of the wilderness, as well as the troubles that sprang directly from their sins. It is the unwillingness of his people to trust him, after all he has sacrificed for them, that gives such a pathetic interest to the life of Moses, and makes him, more than perhaps any other Old Testament prophet, so striking an example of unrequited affection. After crossing the Red Sea, all the marvels of that deliverance from Pharaoh of which he had been the instrument are swallowed up and forgotten by the little inconveniences of the journey. And afterwards, when they are doomed to the forty years' wandering, they are ready enough to blame him for it, forgetting how he fell down before God and pled for them when God threatened to destroy them. Moreover, his enactments against the idolatry they loved so well made him anything but popular, to say nothing of the burdensome ceremonial which he enjoined them to observe. The time of real loyalty to Moses was just the little period before his death, when he led them against Sihon and Og, and a great stretch of fertile and beautiful land fell into their hands. Moses had just gained the greatest victory of his life, he had just become master of the hearts of his people, when he was called away. For Moses at last did gain the people's hearts, and those to whom Joshua appealed could say without irony or sarcasm, "According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee."

In point of fact a great change had been effected on the people at last. Moses had laboured, and Joshua now entered

into his labours. The same thing has often occurred in history, and notably in our own. In civil life how much do we owe to the noble champions of freedom of other days, through whose patriotism, courage, and self-denial the hard fight was fought and the victory won that enables us to sit under our vine and under our fig tree. In ecclesiastical life was it not the blood of the martyrs and the struggles of those of whom the world was not worthy, who wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth, that won for us the freedom and the peace in which we now rejoice? What blessings we owe to those that have gone before us! And how can we better discharge our obligations to them than by hastening to the aid of those who have but emerged from the period of struggle and suffering, like the Christians of Madagascar or of Uganda, whose fearful sufferings and awful deaths under the merciless rule of heathen kings made Christendom stand aghast, and drew a wail of anguish from her bosom?

The unanimity of the people in their loyalty to Joshua is a touching sight. So far as appears there was not one discordant note in that harmonious burst of loyalty. No Korah, Dathan, or Abiram rose up to decline his rule and embarrass him in his new position. It is a beautiful sight, the united loyalty of a great nation. Nothing more beautiful has ever been known in the long reign of Queen Victoria than the crowding of her people in hundreds of thousands to witness her procession to St. Paul's on that morning when she went to return thanks for the rescue of

her eldest son from the very jaws of death. Not one discordant note was uttered, not one disloyal feeling was known; the vast multitude were animated by the spirit of sympathy and affection for one who had tried to do her duty as a queen and as a mother. It was a sight not unlike to this that was seen in the streets of New York at the centennial celebration of the inauguration of George Washington as first President of the United States. One was thrilled by the thought that not only the multitude that thronged the streets, but the representatives of the whole nation, gathered in their churches throughout the land, were animated by a common sentiment of gratitude to the man whose wisdom and courage had laid the foundation of all the prosperity and blessing of the last hundred years. Are not such scenes the pattern of that spirit of loyalty which the entire race of man owes to Him who by His blood redeemed the world, and whose rule and influence, if the world would but accept of it, are so beneficent and so blessed? Yet how far are we from such a state! How few are the hearts that throb with true loyalty to the Saviour, and whose most fervent aspiration for the world is, that it would only throw down its weapons of rebellion, and give to him its hearty allegiance! Strange that the Old Testament Joshua should have got at once what eighteen hundred years have failed to bring to the New Testament Jesus! God hasten the day of universal light and universal love, when He shall reign from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth!

"One song employs all nations, and all cry
'Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us!'
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till nation after nation taught the strain
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosanna round."

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIES IN JERICHO

Joshua ii

It was not long ere Joshua found an occasion not only for the exercise of that courage to which he had been so emphatically called both by God and the people, but for calling on others to practise the same manly virtue. For the duty which he laid on the two spies – detectives we should now call them – to enter Jericho and bring a report of its condition, was perhaps the most perilous to which it was possible for men to be called. It was like sending them into a den of lions, and expecting them to return safe and sound. Evidently he was happy in finding two men ready for the duty and the risk. Young men they are called further on (vi. 23), and it is quite likely that they were leading men in their tribes. No doubt they might disguise themselves, they might divest themselves of anything in dress that was characteristically Hebrew, they might put on the clothes of neighbouring peasants, and carry a basket of produce for sale in the city; and as for language, they might be able to use the Canaanite dialect and imitate the Canaanite accent. But if they did try any such disguise, they must have known that it would be of doubtful

efficacy; the officials of Jericho could not fail to be keenly on the watch, and no disguise could hide the Hebrew features, or divest them wholly of the air of foreigners. Nevertheless the two men had courage for the risky enterprise. Doubtless it was the courage that sprang from faith; it was in God's service they went, and God's protection would not fail them. To be able to find agents so willing and so suitable was a proof to Joshua that God had already begun to fulfil His promises.

Joshua had been a spy himself, and it was natural enough that he should think of the same mode of reconnoitring the country, now that they were again on the eve of making the entrance into it which they should have made nearly forty years before. There is no reason to think that in taking this step Joshua acted presumptuously, proceeding on his own counsel when he should have sought counsel of God. For Joshua might rightly infer that he ought to take this course inasmuch as it had been followed before with God's approval in the case of the twelve. Its purpose was twofold – to obtain information and confirmation. Information as to the actual condition and spirit of the Canaanites, as to the view they took of the approaching invasion of the Israelites, and the impression that had been made on them by all the remarkable things that had happened in the desert; and confirmation, – new proof for his own people that God was with them, fresh encouragement to go up bravely to the attack, and fresh assurance that not one word would ever fail them of all the things which the Lord had promised.

We follow the two men as they leave Shittim, so named from the masses of bright acacia which shed their glory over the plain; then cross the river at "the fords," which, flooded though they were, were still practicable for swimmers; enter the gates of Jericho, and move along the streets. In such a city as Jericho, and among such an immoral people as the Canaanites, it was not strange that they should fall in with a woman of Rahab's occupation, and should receive an invitation to her house. Some commentators have tried to make out that she was not so bad as she is represented, but only an innkeeper; but the meaning of the word both here and as translated in Heb. xi. and James ii. is beyond contradiction. Others have supposed that she was one of the harlot-priestesses of Ashtoreth, but in that case she would have had her dwelling in the precincts of a temple, not in an out-of-the-way place on the walls of the city. We are to remember that in the degraded condition of public opinion in Canaan, as indeed much later in the case of the Hetairai of Athens, her occupation was not regarded as disgraceful, neither did it banish her from her family, nor break up the bonds of interest and affection between them, as it must do in every moral community.⁶ It was not accompanied with that self-contempt

⁶ It is somewhat remarkable that the present village of Riha, at or near the site of the ancient Jericho, is noted for its licentiousness. The men, it is said, wink at the infidelity of the women, a trait of character singularly at variance with the customs of the Bedouin. "At our encampment over 'Ain Terâbeh (says Robinson) the night before we reached this place, we overheard our Arabs asking the Khatib for a paper or written charm to protect them from the women of Jericho; and from their conversation

and self-loathing which in other circumstances are its fruits. We may quite easily understand how the spies might enter her house simply for the purpose of getting the information they desired, as modern detectives when tracking out crime so often find it necessary to win the confidence and worm out the secrets of members of the same wretched class. But the emissaries of Joshua were in too serious peril, in too devout a mood, and in too high-strung a state of nerve to be at the mercy of any Delilah that might wish to lure them to careless pleasure. Their faith, their honour, their patriotism, and their regard to their leader Joshua, all demanded the extremest circumspection and self-control; they were, like Peter, walking on the sea; unless they kept their eye on their Divine protector, their courage and presence of mind would fail them, they would be at the mercy of their foes.

Whether disguised or not, the two men had evidently been noticed and suspected when they entered the city, which they seem to have done in the dusk of evening. But, happily for them, the streets of Jericho were not patrolled by policemen ready to pounce on suspicious persons, and run them in for judicial examination. The king or burgomaster of the place seems to have been the only person with whom it lay to deal with them. Whoever had detected them, after following them to Rahab's house, had then to resort to the king's residence and give their

it seemed that illicit intercourse between the latter and strangers that come here is regarded as a matter of course. Strange that the inhabitants of the valley should have retained this character from the earliest ages; and that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah should still flourish upon the same accursed soil." – "Researches in Palestine," i. 553.

information to him. Rahab had an inkling of what was likely to follow, and being determined to save the men, she hid them on the roof of the house, and covered them with stalks of flax, stored there for domestic use. When, after some interval, the king's messengers came, commanding her to bring them forth since they were Israelites come to search the city, she was ready with her plausible tale. Two men had indeed come to her, but she could not tell who they were, – it was no business of hers to be inquisitive about them; the men had left just before the gates were shut, and doubtless, if they were alert and pursued after them, they would overtake them, for they could not be far off. The king's messengers had not half the wit of the woman; they took her at her word, made no search of her house, but set out on the wild-goose chase on which she had sent them. Sense and spirit failed them alike.

We are not prepared for the remarkable development of her faith that followed. This first Canaanite across the Jordan with whom the Israelites met was no ordinary person. Rays of Divine light had entered that unhallowed soul, not to be driven back, not to be hidden under a bushel, but to be welcomed, and ultimately improved and followed. Our minds are carried forward to what was so impressive in the days of our Lord, when the publicans and the harlots entered into the kingdom before the scribes and the pharisees. We are called to admire the riches of the grace of God, who does not scorn the moral leper, but many a time lays His hand upon him, and says "I will, be thou clean." "They

shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the first place, Rahab made a most explicit confession of her faith, not only in Jehovah as the God of the Hebrews, but in Him as the one only God of heaven and earth. It would have been nothing had she been willing to give to the Hebrew God a place, a high place, or even the highest place among the gods. Her faith went much further. "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath." This is an exclusive faith – Baal and Ashtoreth are nowhere. What a remarkable conviction to take hold of such a mind! All the traditions of her youth, all the opinions of her neighbours, all the terrors of her priests set at nought, swept clean off the board, in face of the overwhelming evidence of the sole Godhead of Jehovah!

Again, she explained the reason for this faith. "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed." The woman has had an eye to see and an ear to hear. She has not gazed in stupid amazement on the marvellous tokens of Divine power displayed before the world, nor accepted the sophistry of sceptics referring all these marvels to accidental thunderstorms and earthquakes and high winds. She knew better than to suppose that a nation of

slaves by their own resources could have eluded all the might of Pharaoh, subsisted for forty years in the wilderness, and annihilated the forces of such renowned potentates as Sihon and Og. She was no philosopher, and could not have reasoned on the doctrine of causation, but her common sense taught her that you cannot have extraordinary effects without corresponding causes. It is one of the great weaknesses of modern unbelief that with all its pretensions to philosophy, it is constantly accepting effects without an adequate cause. Jesus Christ, though He revolutionized the world, though He founded an empire to which that of the Cæsars is not for a moment to be compared, though all that were about Him admitted His supernatural power and person, after all, was nothing but a man. The gospel that has brought peace and joy to so many weary hearts, that has transformed the slaves of sin into children of heaven, that has turned cannibals into saints, and fashioned so many an angelic character out of the rude blocks of humanity, is but a cunningly devised fable. What contempt for such sophistries, such vain explanations of facts patent to all would this poor woman have shown! How does she rebuke the many that keep pottering in poor natural explanations of plain supernatural facts, instead of manfully admitting that it is the Arm of God that has been revealed, and the Voice of God that has spoken!

Further, Rahab informed the spies that when they heard these things the inhabitants of the land had become faint, their hearts melted, and there remained no more courage in them because of

the Israelites. For they felt that the tremendous Power that had desolated Egypt and dried up the sea, that had crushed Sihon King of the Amorites and Og King of Bashan like nuts under the feet of a giant, was now close upon themselves. What could they do to arrest the march of such a power, and avert the ruin which it was sure to inflict? They had neither resource nor refuge – their hearts melted in them. It is when Divine Power draws near to men, or when men draw near to Divine Power that they get the right measure of its dimensions and the right sense of their own impotence. Caligula could scoff at the gods at a distance, but in any calamity no man was more prostrate with terror. It is easy for the atheist or the agnostic to assume a bold front when God is far off, but woe betide him when He draws near in war, in pestilence, or in death!

If we ask, How could Rahab have such a faith and yet be a harlot? or how could she have such faith in God and yet utter that tissue of falsehoods about the spies with which she deluded the messengers of the king? we answer that light comes but gradually and slowly to persons like Rahab. The conscience is but gradually enlightened. How many men have been slaveholders after they were Christians! Worse than that, did not the godly John Newton, one of the two authors of the Olney hymns, continue for some time in the slave trade, conveying cargoes of his fellow-creatures stolen from their homes, before he awoke to a sense of its infamy? Are there no persons among us calling themselves Christians engaged in traffic that brings awful destruction to

the bodies and souls of their fellow-men? That Rahab should have continued as she was after she threw in her lot with God's people is inconceivable; but there can be no doubt how she was living when she first comes into Bible history. And as to her falsehoods, though some have excused lying when practised in order to save life, we do not vindicate her on that ground. All falsehood, especially what is spoken to those who have a right to trust us, must be offensive to the God of truth, and the nearer men get to the Divine image, through the growing closeness of their Divine fellowship, the more do they recoil from it. Rahab was yet in the outermost circle of the Church, just touching the boundary; the nearer she got to the centre the more would she recoil alike from the foulness and the falseness of her early years.

We have to notice further in Rahab a determination to throw in her lot with the people of God. In spirit she had ceased to be a Canaanite and become an Israelite. She showed this by taking the side of the spies against the king, and exposing herself to certain and awful punishment if it had been found out that they were in her house. And her confidential conversation with them before she sent them away, her cordial recognition of their God, her expression of assurance that the land would be theirs, and her request for the protection of herself and her relations when the Israelites should become masters of Jericho, all indicated one who desired to renounce the fellowship of her own people and cast in her lot with the children of God. That she was wholly blameless in the way in which she went about this, in favouring

the spies against her own nation in this underhand way, we will not affirm; but one cannot look for a high sense of honour in such a woman. Still, whatever may be said against her, the fact of her remarkable faith remains conspicuous and beyond dispute, all the more striking, too, that she is the last person in whom we should have expected to find anything of the kind. That faith beyond doubt was destined to expand and fructify in her heart, giving birth to virtues and graces that made her after life a great contrast to what it had been. No doubt the words of the Apostle might afterwards have been applied to her – "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of the Lord."

And yet, though her faith may at this time have been but as a grain of mustard seed, we see two effects of it that are not to be despised. One was her protection of the Lord's people, as represented by the spies; the other was her concern for her own relations. Father, mother, brothers, and sisters and all that they had, were dear to her, and she took measures for their safety when the destruction of Jericho should come. She exacted an oath of the two spies, and asked a pledge of them, that they would all be spared when the crisis of the city arrived. And the men passed their oath and arranged for the protection of the family. No doubt it may be said that it was only their temporal welfare about which she expressed concern, and for which she made provision. But what more could she have been expected to do at that moment? What more could the two spies have

engaged to secure? It was plain enough that if they were ever to obtain further benefit from fellowship with God's people, their lives must be preserved in the first instance from the universal destruction which was impending. Her anxiety for her family, like her anxiety for herself, may even then have begun to extend beyond things seen and temporal, and a fair vision of peace and joy may have begun to flit across her fancy at the thought of the vile and degrading idolatry of the Canaanites being displaced in them by the service of a God of holiness and of love. But neither was she far enough advanced to be able as yet to give expression to this hope, nor were the spies the persons to whom it would naturally have been communicated. The usual order in the Christian life is, that as anxiety about ourselves begins in a sense of personal danger and a desire for deliverance therefrom, so spiritual anxiety about the objects of our affection has usually the same beginning. But as it would be a miserable thing for the new life to stand still as soon as our personal safety was secured, so it would be a wretched affection that sought nothing more on behalf of our dearest friends. When, by accepting Christ, we get the blessing of personal safety, we only reach a height from which we see how many other things we need. We become ashamed of our unholy passions, our selfish hearts, our godless ways, and we aspire, with an ardour which the world cannot understand, to purity and unselfishness and consecration to God. For our friends we desire the same; we feel for them as for ourselves, that the bondage and pollution of sin are degrading, and that there can be

neither peace, nor happiness, nor real dignity for the soul until it is created anew after the image of God.

Some commentators have laid considerable stress on the line of scarlet thread that was to be displayed in the window by which the spies had been let down, as a token and remembrance that that house was to be spared when the victorious army should enter Jericho. In that scarlet thread they have seen an emblem of atonement, an emblem of the blood of Christ by which sinners are redeemed. To us it seems more likely that, in fixing on this as the pledge of safety, the spies had in view the blood sprinkled on the lintels and door posts of the Hebrew houses in Egypt by which the destroying angel was guided to pass them by. The scarlet rope had some resemblance to blood, and for this reason its special purpose might be more readily apprehended. Obviously the spies had no time to go into elaborate explanations at the moment. It is to be observed that, as the window looked to the outside of the city, the cord would be observed by the Israelites and the house recognised as they marched round and round, according to the instructions of Joshua. Not a man of all the host but would see it again and again, as they performed their singular march, and would mark the position of the house so carefully that its inmates, gathered together like the family of Noah in the ark, would be preserved in perfect safety.

The stratagem of Rahab, and the mode of flight which she recommended to the spies, fruits of woman's ready wit and intuitive judgment, were both successful. She reminds us of the

self-possession of Jael, or of Abigail, the wife of Nabal. In the dark, the spies escaped to the mountain, – the rugged rampart which bounded the valley of the Jordan on the west. Hiding in its sequestered crevices for three days, till the pursuit of the Jerichonians was over, they stole out under cover of darkness, recrossed the Jordan, told Joshua of their stirring and strange adventure, and wound up with the remark that the hearts of the people of the country were melting because of them. How often is this true, though unbelief cannot see it! When Jesus told His disciples that He beheld Satan fall as lightning from heaven, He taught us that those who set themselves against Him and His cause are fallen powers, no longer flushed with victory and hope, but defeated and dejected, and consciously unable to overcome the heaven-aided forces that are against them. Well for all Christian philanthropists and missionaries of the Cross, and brave assailants of lust and greed and vice and error, to bear this in mind! The cause of darkness never can triumph in the end, it has no power to rally and rush against the truth; if only the servants of Christ would be strong and of a good courage, they too would find that the boldest champions of the world do faint because of them.

When the spies return to Joshua and tell him all that has befallen them, he accepts their adventure as a token for good. They have not given him any hint how Jericho is to be taken; but, what is better, they have shown him that the outstretched arm of God has been seen by the heathen, and that the inhabitants of

the country are paralysed on account of it. The two spies were a great contrast to the ten that accompanied Joshua and Caleb so long before: the ten declared the land unassailable; the two looked on it as already conquered – "The Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land." Children of Israel, you must not be outdone in faith by a harlot; believe that God is with you, go up, and possess the land!

CHAPTER VIII

JORDAN REACHED

Joshua iii. 1-7

The host of Israel had been encamped for some time at Shittim on the east side of the river Jordan. It is well to understand the geographical position. The Jordan has its rise beyond the northern boundary of Palestine in three sources, the most interesting and beautiful of the three being one in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi. The three streamlets unite in the little lake now called Huleh, but Merom in Bible times. Issuing from Merom in a single stream the Jordan flows on to the lake of Galilee or Gennesareth, and from thence, in a singularly winding course, to the Dead Sea. Its course between the lake of Galilee and the Dead Sea is through a kind of ravine within a ravine; the outer ravine is the valley or plain of Jordan, now called by the Arabs El Ghor, which is about six miles in width at its northern part, and considerably more at its southern, where the Israelites now were. Within this "El Ghor" is a narrower ravine about three-quarters of a mile in width, in the inner part of which flows the river, its breadth varying from twenty to sixty yards. Some travellers say that the Jordan does not now rise so high as

formerly, but others tell us they have seen it overflowing its banks at the corresponding season. But "the plain" is not fertilized by the rising waters: hence the reason why the banks of the river are not studded with towns as in Egypt. It is quite possible, however, that in the days of Abraham and Lot artificial irrigation was made use of: hence the description given of it then that it was "like the land of Egypt" (Gen. xiii. 10). If it be remarked as strange that Jordan should have overflowed his banks "in time of harvest" (Josh. iii. 15) when usually rain does not fall in Palestine, it is to be remembered that all the sources of the Jordan are fountains, and that fountains do not usually feel the effects of the rain until some time after it has fallen. The harvest referred to is the barley harvest, and near Jericho that harvest must have occurred earlier than throughout the country on account of the greater heat.

The host of Israel lay encamped at Shittim, or Abel Shittim, "the meadow or moist place of the acacias," somewhere in the Arboth-Moab or fields of Moab. The exact spot is unknown, but it was near the foot of the Moabite mountains, where the streams, coming down from the heights on their way to the Jordan, caused a luxuriant growth of acacias, such as are still found in some of the adjacent parts. Sunk as this part of the plain is far below the level of the Mediterranean, and enclosed by the mountains behind it as by the walls of a furnace, it possesses an almost tropical climate which, though agreeable enough in winter and early spring, would have been unbearable to the Israelites in the

height of summer. It was while Israel "abode in Shittim," during the lifetime of Moses, that they were seduced by the Moabites to join in the idolatrous revels of Baal-peor and punished with the plague. The acacia groves gave facilities for the unhallowed revelling. That chastisement had brought them into a better spirit, and now they were prepared for better things.

The Jordan was not crossed then by bridges nor by ferry boats; the only way of crossing was by fords. The ford nearest to Jericho, now called El Mashra'a, is well known; it was the ford the Israelites would have used had the river been fordable; and perhaps the tradition is correct that there the crossing actually took place. When the spies crossed and recrossed the river it must have been by swimming, as it was too deep for wading at the time; but though this mode of crossing was possible for individuals, it was manifestly out of the question for a host. That the Israelites could by no possibility cross at that season must have been the forlorn hope of the people of Jericho; possibly they smiled at the folly of Joshua in choosing such a time of the year, and asked in derision, How is he ever to get over?

The appointed day for leaving Shittim has come, and Joshua, determined to lose no time, rises "early in the morning." Nor is it without a purpose that so often in the Old Testament narrative, when men of might commence some great undertaking, we are told that it was early in the morning. In all hot climates work in the open air, if done at all, must be done early in the morning or in the evening. But, besides this, morning is the appropriate time

for men of great energy and decision to be astir; and it readily connects itself with the New Testament text – "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The benefits of an early start for all kinds of successful work are in the proverbs of all nations; and we may add that few have reached a high position in the Christian life who could not say, in the spirit of the hymn, "early in the morning my song shall rise to thee." Nor can it easily be understood how under other conditions the precept could be fulfilled – "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

From Shittim to the banks of the Jordan is an easy journey of a few miles, the road being all over level ground, so that the march was probably finished before the sun had risen high. However strong their faith, it could not be without a certain tremor of heart that the people would behold the swollen river, and mark the walls and towers of Jericho a few miles beyond. Three days are to be allowed, if not for physical, certainly for moral and spiritual preparation for the crossing of the river. The three days are probably the same as those adverted to before (chap. i. 3), just as the order to select twelve men to set up twelve stones (chap. iii. 12) is probably the same as that more fully detailed in chap. iv. 2. The host is assembled in orderly array on the east bank of the Jordan, when the officers pass through to give instructions as to their further procedure. Three such instructions are given.

First, they are to follow the ark. Whenever they see the priests that bear it in motion, they are to move from their places

and follow it. There was no longer the pillar of fire to guide them – that was a wilderness-symbol of God's presence, now superseded by a more permanent symbol – the ark. Both symbols represented the same great truth – the gracious presence and guidance of God, and both called the people to the same duty and privilege, and to the same assurance of absolute safety so long as they followed the Lord. Familiar sights are apt to lose their significance, and the people must have become so familiar with the wilderness-pillar that they would hardly think what it meant. Now a different symbol is brought forward. The ark carried in solemn procession by the priests is now the appointed token of God's guidance, and therefore the object to be unhesitatingly followed. A blessed truth for all time was clearly shadowed forth. Follow God implicitly and unhesitatingly in every time of danger, and you are safe. Set aside the counsels of casuistry, of fear, and of worldly wisdom; find out God's will and follow it through good report and through evil report, and you will be right. It was thus that Joshua and Caleb did, and counselled the people to do, when they came back from exploring the land; and now these two were reaping the benefit; while the generation, that would have been comfortably settled in the land if they had done the same, had perished in the wilderness on account of their unbelief.

Secondly, a span of two thousand cubits was to be left between the people and the ark. Some have thought that this was designed as a token of reverence; but this is not the reason assigned. Had it been designed as a token of reverence, it would have

been prescribed long before, as soon as the ark was constructed, and began to be carried with the host through the wilderness. The intention was, "that ye may know the way by which you must go" (ver. 4). If this arrangement had not been made, the course of the ark through the flat plains of the Jordan would not have been visible to the mass of the host, but only to those in the immediate neighbourhood, and the people would have been liable to straggle and fall into confusion, if not to diverge altogether. In all cases, when we are looking out for Divine guidance, it is of supreme importance that there be nothing in the way to obscure the object or to distort our vision. Alas, how often is this direction disregarded! How often do we allow our prejudices, or our wishes, or our worldly interests to come between us and the Divine direction we profess to desire! At some turn of our life we feel that we ought not to take a decisive step without asking guidance from above. But our own wishes bear strongly in a particular direction, and we are only too prone to conclude that God is in favour of our plan. We do not act honestly; we lay stress on all that is in favour of what we like; we think little of considerations of the opposite kind. And when we announce our decision, if the matter concern others, we are at pains to tell them that we have made it matter of prayer. But why make it matter of prayer if we do so with prejudiced minds? It is only when our eye is single that the whole body is full of light. This clear space of two thousand cubits between the people and the ark deserves to be remembered. Let us have a like clear space

morally between us and God when we go to ask His counsel, lest peradventure we not only mistake His directions, but bring disaster on ourselves and dishonour on His name.

Thirdly, the people were instructed, – "Sanctify yourselves, for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." It is an instinct of our nature that when we are to meet with some one of superior worldly rank preparation must be made for the meeting. When Joseph was summoned into the presence of Pharaoh, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon, "he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh." The poorest subject of the realm would try to wear his best and to look his best in the presence of his sovereign. But while "man looketh on the outward appearance the Lord looketh on the heart." And our very instincts teach us, that the heart needs to be prepared when God is drawing near. It is not in our ordinary careless mood that we ought to stand before Him who "sets our iniquities before Him, our secret sins in the light of His countenance." Grant that we can neither atone for our sin, nor cleanse our hearts without His grace; nevertheless, in God's presence everything that is possible ought to be done to remove the abominable thing which He hates, so that He may not be affronted and offended by its presence. Most appropriate, therefore, was Joshua's counsel, – "Sanctify yourselves, for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." He will surpass all that your eyes have seen since that night, much to be remembered, when He divided the sea. He will give you a token of His love and care that will amaze

you, much though you have seen of it in the wilderness, and in the country of Sihon and Og. Expect great things, prepare for great things; and let the chief of your preparations be to sanctify yourselves, for "the foolish shall not stand in His sight, and He hateth all workers of iniquity."

Next day (compare ver. 5, "to-morrow," and ver. 7, "this day") Joshua turns to the priests and bids them "take up the ark of the covenant." The priests obey; "they take up the ark, and go before the people."

Shall we take notice of the assertion of some that all those parts of the narrative which refer to priests and religious service were introduced by a writer bent on glorifying the priesthood? Or must we repel the insinuation that the introduction of the ark, and the miraculous effects ascribed to its presence, are mere myths? If they are mere myths, they are certainly myths of a very peculiar kind. Twice only in this book is the ark associated with miraculous events – at the crossing of the Jordan and at the taking of Jericho. If these were myths, why was the myth confined to these two occasions? When mythical writers find a remarkable talisman they introduce it at all sorts of times. Why was the ark not brought to the siege of Ai? Why was it absent from the battles of Bethoron and Merom? Why was its presence restricted to the Jordan and Jericho, unless it was God's purpose to inspire confidence at first through the visible symbol of His presence, but leave the people afterwards to infer His presence by faith?

The taking of the ark by the priests was a decisive step.

There could be no resiling now from the course entered on. The priests with the ark must advance, and it will be seen whether Joshua has been uttering words without foundation, or whether he has been speaking in the name of God. Shall mere natural forces be brought into play, or shall the supernatural might of heaven come to the conflict, and show that God is faithful to His promise?

Let us put ourselves in Joshua's position. We do not know in what manner the communications were carried on between him and Jehovah of which we have the record under the words "the Lord spake unto Joshua." Was it by an audible voice? Or was it by impressions on Joshua's mind of a kind that could not have originated with himself, but that were plainly the result of Divine influence? In any case, they were such as to convey to Joshua a very clear knowledge of the Divine will. Yet even in the best of men nature is not so thoroughly subdued in such circumstances but that the shadow of anxiety and fear is liable to flit across them. They crave something like a personal pledge that all will go well. Hence the seasonableness of the assurance now given to Joshua – "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." How full and manifold the assurance! First, I will magnify thee. I will endue thee with supernatural might, and that will give you authority and weight, corresponding to the position in which you stand. Further, this shall be but the beginning of a process which will be renewed as often as there is occasion for

it. "This day I will *begin*

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