

**ROBERT  
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WATSON**

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

**Robert Alexander Watson**  
**The Expositor's Bible:**  
**The Book of Numbers**

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*The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Numbers:*

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# **Robert A. Watson**

## **The Expositor's Bible:**

### **The Book of Numbers**

#### **I**

#### ***INTRODUCTORY***

To summon from the past and reproduce with any detail the story of Israel's life in the desert is now impossible. The outlines alone remain, severe, careless of almost everything that does not bear on religion. Neither from Exodus nor from Numbers can we gather those touches that would enable us to reconstruct the incidents of a single day as it passed in the camp or on the march. The tribes move from one "wilderness" to another. The hardship of the time of wandering appears unrelieved, for throughout the history the doings of God, not the achievements or sufferings of the people, are the great theme. The patriotism of the Book of Numbers is of a kind that reminds us continually of the prophecies. Resentment against the distrustful and rebellious, like that which Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah express, is felt in almost every portion of the narrative. At the same time the difference between Numbers and the books of the prophets is

wide and striking. Here the style is simple, often stern, with little emotion, scarcely any rhetoric. The legislative purpose reacts on the historical, and makes the spirit of the book severe. Seldom does the writer allow himself respite from the grave task of presenting Israel's duties and delinquencies, and exalting the majesty of God. We are made continually to feel the burden with which the affairs of the people are charged; and yet the book is no poem: to excite sympathy or lead up to a great climax does not come within the design.

Nevertheless, so far as a book of incident and statute can resemble poetry, there is a parallel between Numbers and a form of literature produced under other skies, other conditions—the Greek drama. The same is true of Exodus and Deuteronomy; but Numbers will be found especially to bear out the comparison. The likeness may be traced in the presentation of a main idea, the relation of various groups of persons carrying out or opposing that main idea, and the Puritanism of form and situation. The Book of Numbers may be called eternal literature more fitly than the *Iliad* and *Æneid* have been called eternal poems; and the keen ethical strain and high religious thought make the movement tragical throughout. Moses the leader is seen with his helpers and opponents, Aaron and Miriam, Joshua and Hobab, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Balak and Balaam. He is brought into extremity; he despairs and appeals passionately to Heaven; in an hour of pride he falls into sin which brings doom upon him. The people, murmuring, craving, suffering, are always a vague

multitude. The tent, the cloud, the incense, the wars, the strain of the wilderness journey, the hope of the land beyond—all have a dim solemnity. The occupying thought is of Jehovah's purpose and the revelation of His character. Moses is the prophet of this Divine mystery, stands for it almost alone, urges it upon Israel, is the means of impressing it by judgments and victories, by priestly law and ceremony, by the very example of his own failure in sudden trial. With a graver and bolder purpose than any embodied in the dramatic masterpieces of Greece, the story of Numbers finds its place not in literature only, but in the development of universal religion, and breathes that Divine inspiration which belongs to the Hebrew and to him alone among those who speak of God and man.

The Divine discipline of human life is an element of the theme, but in contrast to the Greek dramas the books of the exodus are not individualistic. Moses is great, but he is so as the teacher of religion, the servant of Jehovah, the lawgiver of Israel. Jehovah, His religion, His law, are above Moses. The personality of the leader stands clear; yet he is not the hero of the Book of Numbers. The purpose of the history leaves him, when he has done his work, to die on Mount Abarim, and presses on, that Jehovah may be seen as a man of war, that Israel may be brought to its inheritance and begin its new career. The voice of men in the Greek tragedy is, as Mr. Ruskin says, "We trusted in the gods; we thought that wisdom and courage would save us. Our wisdom and courage deceive us to our death." When Moses despairs,

that is not his cry. There is no Fate stronger than God; and He looks far into the future in the discipline He appoints to men, to His people Israel. The remote, the unfulfilled, gleams along the desert. There is a light from the pillar of fire even when the pestilence is abroad, and the graves of the lustful are dug, and the camp is dissolved in tears because Aaron is dead, because Moses has climbed the last mountain and shall never again be seen.

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

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

Dying as well as living men are with God; and this God is the Lord of all. Immense is the difference between the Greek who trusts or dreads many powers above, beneath, and the Hebrew

realising himself, however dimly, as the servant of Jehovah the holy, the eternal. This great idea, seized by Moses, introduced by him into the faith of his people, remained it may be indefinite, yet always present to the thought of Israel with many implications till the time of full revelation came with Christ, and He said: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The wide interval between a people whose religion contained this thought, in whose history it is interwoven, and a people whose religion was polytheistic and natural is seen in the whole strain of their literature and life. Even Plato the luminous finds it impossible to overpass the shadows of pagan interpretations. "In regard to the facts of a future life, a man," said Phædo, "must either learn or find out their nature; or, if he cannot do this, take at any rate the best and least assailable of human words, and, borne on this as on a raft, perform in peril the voyage of life, unless he should be able to accomplish the journey with less risk and danger on a surer vessel—some word Divine." Now Israel had a Divine word; and life was not perilous.

The problem which appears again and again in Moses' relation with the people is that of the theocratic idea as against the grasping at immediate success. At various points, from the start in Egypt onwards, the opportunity of assuming a regal position comes to Moses. He is virtually dictator, and he might be king. But a rare singleness of mind keeps him true to Jehovah's

lordship, which he endeavours to stamp on the conscience of the people and the course of their development. He has often to do so at the greatest risk to himself. He holds back the people in what seems the hour of advance, and it is the will of Jehovah by which they are detained. The Unseen King is their Helper and equally their Rhadamanthine Judge; and on Moses falls the burden of forcing that fact upon their minds.

Israel could never, according to Moses' idea, become a great people in the sense in which the nations of the world were great. Amongst them greatness was sought in despite of morality, in defiance of all that Jehovah commanded. Israel might never be great in wealth, territory, influence, but she was to be true. She existed for Jehovah, while the gods of other nations existed for them, had no part to play without them. Jehovah was not to be overborne either by the will or the needs of His people. He was the self-existent Lord. The Name did not represent a supernatural assistance which could be secured on terms, or by any authorised person. Moses himself, though he entreated Jehovah, did not change Him. His own desire was sometimes thwarted; and he had often to give the oracle with sorrow and disappointment.

Moses is not the priest of the people: the priesthood comes in as a ministering body, necessary for religious ends and ideas, but never governing, never even interpreting. It is singular from this point of view that the so-called Priests' Code should be attributed confidently to a caste ambitious of ruling or practically

enthroned. Wellhausen ridicules the "fine" distinction between hierocracy and theocracy. He affirms that government of God is the same thing as rule of priest; and he may affirm this because he thinks so. The Book of Numbers, as it stands, might have been written to prove that they are not equivalent; and Wellhausen himself shows that they are not by more than one of his conclusions. The theocracy, he says, is in its nature intimately allied to the Roman Catholic Church, which is, in fact, its child; and on the whole he prefers to speak of the Jewish Church rather than the theocracy. But if any modern religious body is to be named as a child of the Hebrew *theocracy*, it must not be one in which the priest intervenes continually between faith and God. Wellhausen says again that "the sacred constitution of Judaism was an artificial product" as contrasted with the broadly human indigenous element, the real idea of man's relation to God; and when a priesthood, as in later Judaism, becomes the governing body, God is, so far, dethroned. Now Moses did not give to Aaron greater power than he himself possessed, and his own power is constantly represented as exercised in submission to Jehovah. A theocracy might be established without a priesthood; in fact, the mediation of the prophet approaches the ideal far more than that of the priest. But in the beginnings of Israel the priesthood was required, received a subordinate place of its own, to which it was throughout rigidly confined. As for priestly government, that, we may say, has no support anywhere in the Pentateuch.

The Book of Numbers, called also "In the wilderness," opens

with the second month of the second year after the exodus, and goes on to the arrival of the tribes in the plains of Moab by the Jordan. As a whole it may be said to carry out the historical and religious ideas of Exodus and Leviticus: and both the history and the legislation flow into three main channels. They go to establish the separateness of Israel as a people, the separateness of the tribe of Levi and the priesthood, and the separateness and authority of Jehovah. The first of these objects is served by the accounts of the census, of the redemption of the first-born, the laws of national atonement and distinctive dress, and generally the Divine discipline of Israel recorded in the course of the book. The second line of purpose may be traced in the careful enumeration of the Levites; the minute allocation of duties connected with the tabernacle to the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites; the special consecration of the Aaronic priesthood; the elaboration of ceremonials requiring priestly service; and various striking incidents, such as the judgment of Korah and his company, and the budding of Aaron's almond twig. Lastly, the institution of some cleansing rites, the sin offering of chap. xix. for example, the details of punishment that fell upon offenders against the law, the precautions enjoined with regard to the ark and the sanctuary, together with the multiplication of sacrifices, went to emphasise the sanctity of worship and the holiness of the unseen King. The book is sacerdotal; it is marked even more by a physical and moral Puritanism, exceedingly stringent at many points.

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

In the following way the religious worth and therefore the inspiration of the ceremonial law may be found. The primitive notion that Jehovah was the exclusive property of Israel, the pledged patron of the nation, tended to impair the sense of His moral purity. An ignorant people inclined to many forms of immorality could not have a right conception of the Divine holiness; and the more it was accepted as a commonplace of faith that Jehovah knew them alone of all the families of the earth, the more was right belief towards Him imperilled. A psalmist who in the name of God reproveth "the wicked" indicates the danger: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Now the priesthood, the sacrifices, all provisions for maintaining the sanctity of the ark and the altar, and all rules of ceremonial cleansing, were means of preventing that fatal error. The Israelites began without the solemn temples and impressive mysteries that made the religion of Egypt venerable.

In the desert and in Canaan, till the time of Solomon, the rude arrangements of semi-civilised life kept religion at an everyday level. The domestic makeshifts and confusion of the early period, the frequent alarms and changes which for centuries the nation had to endure, must have made culture of any kind, even religious culture, almost impossible to the mass of the people. The law in its very complexity and stringency provided a needful safeguard and means of education. Moses had been acquainted with a great sacerdotal system. Not only would it appear to him natural to originate something of a like kind, but he would see no other means of creating in rude times the idea of the Divine holiness. For himself he found inspiration and prophetic power in laying the foundation of the system; and once initiated, its development necessarily followed. With the progress of civilisation the law had to keep pace, meeting the new circumstances and needs of each succeeding period. Certainly the genius of the Pentateuch, and in particular of the Book of Numbers, is not liberating. The tone is that of theocratic rigour. But the reason is quite clear; the development of the law was determined by the necessities and dangers of Israel in the exodus, in the wilderness, and in idolatrous, seductive Canaan.

Opening with an account of the census, the Book of Numbers evidently stood, from the first, quite distinct from the previous books as a composition or compilation. The mustering of the tribes gave an opportunity of passing from one group of documents to another, from one stage of the history to another.

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

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

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

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

incidents of the desert journey.

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

It is beyond our range to discuss the date of the compilation of Numbers as compared with the other Pentateuchal books, or the age of the "Jehovistic" documents as compared with the "Priests' Code." This, however, is of less moment, since it is now becoming clear that attempts to settle these dates can

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

of the great lawgiver's own commission.

It has been said that "the inspired condition would seem to be one which produces a generous indifference to pedantic accuracy in matters of fact, and a supreme absorbing concern about the moral and religious significance of facts." If the former part of this statement were true, the historical books of the Bible, and, we may say, in particular the Book of Numbers, would deserve no attention as history. But nothing is more striking in a survey of our book than the clear unhesitating way in which incidents are set forth, even where moral and religious ends could not be much served by the detail that is freely used. The account of the muster-roll is a case in point. There we find what may be called "pedantic accuracy." The enumeration of each tribe is given separately, and the formula is repeated, "by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of the names from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war." Again, the whole of the seventh chapter, the longest in the book, is taken up with an account of the offerings of the tribes, made at the dedication of the altar. These oblations are presented day after day by the heads of the twelve tribes in order, and each tribe brings precisely the same gifts—"one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering; one golden spoon of ten shekels full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one he-lamb of the first year for a burnt offering; one male of the

goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five he-lambs of the first year." Now the difficulty at once occurs that in the wilderness, according to Exod. xvi., there was no bread, no flour, that manna was the food of the people. In Numb. xi. 6 the complaint of the children of Israel is recorded: "Now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all: we have nought save this manna to look to." In Josh. v. 10 ff. it is stated that, after the passage of the Jordan, "they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn in the self-same day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land." To the compilers of the Book of Numbers the statement that tribe after tribe brought offerings of fine flour mingled with oil, which could only have been obtained from Egypt or from some Arabian valley at a distance, must have been as hard to receive as it is to us. Nevertheless, the assertion is repeated no less than twelve times. What then? Do we impugn the sincerity of the historians? Are we to suppose them careless of the fact? Do we not rather perceive that in the face of what seemed insuperable difficulties they held to what they had before them as authentic records? No writer could be inspired and at the same time indifferent to accuracy. If there is one thing more than another on which we may rely, it is that the authors of these books of Scripture have done their very utmost by careful inquiry and recension

to make their account of what took place in the wilderness full and precise. Absolute sincerity and scrupulous carefulness are essential conditions for dealing successfully with moral and religious themes; and we have all evidence that the compilers had these qualities. But in order to reach historical fact they had to use the same kind of means as we employ; and this qualifying statement, with all that it involves, applies to the whole contents of the book we are to consider. Our dependence with regard to the events recorded is on the truthfulness but not the omniscience of the men, whoever they were, who from traditions, records, scrolls of law, and venerable memoranda compiled this Scripture as we have it. They wrought under the sense of sacred duty, and found through that the inspiration which gives perennial value to their work. With this in view we shall take up the various matters of history and legislation.

Recurring now, for a little, to the spirit of the Book of Numbers, we find in the ethical passages its highest note and power as an inspired writing. The standard of judgment is not by any means that of Christianity. It belongs to an age when moral ideas had often to be enforced with indifference to human life; when, conversely, the plagues and disasters that befell men were always connected with moral offences. It belongs to an age when the malediction of one who claimed supernatural insight was generally believed to carry power with it, and the blessing of God meant earthly prosperity. And the notable fact is that, side by side with these beliefs, righteousness of an exalted kind

is strenuously taught. For example, the reverence for Moses and Aaron, usually so characteristic of the Book of Numbers, is seen falling into the background when the Divine judgment of their fault is recorded; and the earnestness shown is nothing less than sublime. In the course of the legislation Aaron is invested with extraordinary official dignity; and Moses appears at his best in the matter of Eldad and Medad when he says, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them." Yet Numbers records the sentence pronounced upon the brothers: "Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." And more severe is the form of the condemnation recorded in chap. xxvii. 14: "Because ye rebelled against My word in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes." The moral strain of the book is keen in the punishment inflicted on a Sabbath-breaker, in the destination to death of the whole congregation for murmuring against God—a judgment which, at the entreaty of Moses, was not revoked, but only deferred—and again in the condemnation to death of every soul that sins presumptuously. On the other hand, the provision of refuge cities for the unwitting man-slayer shows the Divine righteousness at one with mercy.

It must be confessed the book has another note. In order that Israel might reach and conquer Canaan there had to be war; and

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

## II

# *THE CENSUS AND THE CAMP*

### 1. The Mustering

#### Numbers i. 1-46

From the place of high spiritual knowledge, where through the revelation of God in covenant and law Israel has been constituted His nation and His Church, the tribes must now march with due order and dignity. The sense of a Divine calling and of responsibility to the Highest will react on the whole arrangements made for the ordinary tasks and activities of men. Social aims may unite those who have them in common, and the emergencies of a nation will lay constraint on patriotic souls. But nothing so binds men together as a common vocation to do God's will and maintain His faith. These ideas are to be traced in the whole account of the mustering of the warriors and the organisation of the camp. We review it feeling that the dominating thought of a Divine call to spiritual duty and progress is far from having control of modern Christendom. Under the New Covenant there is a distribution of grace to every one, an endowment of each

according to his faith with priestly and even kingly powers. No chief men swear fealty to Christ on behalf of the tribes that gather to His standard; but each believer devotes himself to the service and receives his own commission. Yet, while the first thought is that of personal honour and liberty, there should follow at once the desire, the determination, to find one's fit place in the camp, in the march, in the war. The unity is imperative, for there is one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling. The commission each receives is not to be a free-lance in the Divine warfare, but to take his right place in the ranks; and that place he must find.

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

ministered in holy things a term of the national constitution.

Now taking the census as intended to impress the personal duties of service in war and contribution for religious ends, we find in it a valuable lesson for all who acknowledge the Divine authority. Not remotely may the command be interpreted thus. Take the sum of them, that they may realise that God takes the sum of them and expects of every man service commensurate with his powers. The claim of Jehovah went side by side with the claim on behalf of the nation, for He was Head of the nation. But God is equally the Head of all who have their life from Him; and this numbering of the Hebrews points to a census which is accurately registered and never falls short of the sum of a people by a single unit. Whoever can fight the battle of righteousness, serve the truth by witness-bearing, aid in relieving one weak, or help religion by personal example and willing gift—every possible servant of God, who is also by the very possession of life and privilege a debtor of God, is numbered in the daily census of His providence. The measure of the ability of each is known. "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." The Divine regard of our lives and estimate of our powers, and the accompanying claim made upon us, are indeed far from being understood; even members of the Church are strangely ignorant of their duty. But is it thought that because no Sinai shrouded in awful smoke towers above us, and now we are encamped at the foot of Calvary, where one great offering was made for our redemption, therefore we are free in any sense from the service

Israel was expected to render? Do any hold themselves relieved from the tithe because they are Christ's freemen, and shirk the warfare because they already enjoy the privileges of the victors? These are the ignorant, whose complacent excuses show that they do not understand the law of Divine religion.

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

of religion is made imperative. Obedience brings its reward: "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Neglect is also punished: the sure result of selfishness is an impoverished life.

The census is described as having been thoroughly organised. Keil and Delitzsch think that the registering may have taken place "according to the classification adopted at Jethro's suggestion for the administration of justice—viz., in thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens." They also defend the total of six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty, which is precisely the same as that reached apparently nine months before. It is an obvious explanation of what appears a perplexing agreement, that the enumeration may have occupied nine months. But the number is certainly large, much larger than the muster-rolls of the Book of Judges would lead us to expect, if we reckon back from them. Nor can any explanation be given that is satisfactory in all respects. We may shrink from interfering with these numerical statements carefully set down thousands of years ago. Yet we feel that the haze of remoteness hangs over this roll of the tribes and all after-reckonings based upon it.

Of the twelve princes named in chap. i. 5-15, as overseers of the census, Nahshon, son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah, has peculiar distinction. His name is found in the genealogy of David given in the Book of Ruth (chap. iv. 20). It also appears in the "book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matt. i.) and the roll of Joseph's ancestry recorded by St. Luke. One after another in

that honourable line which gave the Hebrews their Psalmist and the world its Saviour is but a name to us. Yet the life represented by the name Nahshon, spent mainly in the wilderness, had its part in far-off results; and so had many a life, not even named—the hard lives of brave fathers and burdened mothers in Israel, who, on the weary march through the desert, had their sorrow and pain, their scanty joy and hope. Far away is the endurance of those Hebrew men and women, yet it is related to our own religion, our salvation. The discipline of the wilderness made men of courage, women great in faith. Beneath their feet the Arabian sand burned, above them the sun flamed; they heard alarms of war, and followed the pillar of smoke for their appointed time, looking, even when they knew they looked in vain, for the land beyond of which Jehovah had spoken. Unaware of their nation's destiny, they toiled and suffered to serve a great Divine plan which in the course of the ages came to ripeness. And the thought brings help to ourselves. We too have our desert journey, our duty and hardship, with an outlook not merely personal. It is our privilege, if we will take it so, to aid the Divine plan for the humanity that is to be, the great brotherhood in which Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Like a prince of Judah, or a humble nameless mother in Israel, each may find abiding dignity of life in doing well some allotted part in the great enterprise.

The age of service fixed for the men of the tribes may yield suggestions for our time. It is not of warlike service we have

to think, but of that which depends on spiritual influence and intellectual power. And we may ask whether the limits on one side and the other have any parallel for us. Young men and women, having reached the age of bodily and mental vigour, are to hold themselves enrolled in the ranks of the army of God. There is a time of learning and preparation, when knowledge is to be acquired, when the principles of life are to be grasped, and the soul is to find its inspiration through personal faith. Then there should come that self-consecration by which response is made to the claim of God. Neither should that be premature, nor should it be deferred. When an aimless, irresolute adolescence is followed by years of drifting and experimenting without clear religious purpose, the best opportunity of life is thrown away. And this far too frequently occurs among those on whom parental influence and the finest Christian teaching have been expended. The time arrives when such young men and women should begin to serve the Church and the world; but they are still unprepared because they have not considered the great questions of duty, and seen that they have a part to play on the field of endeavour. It is true, no time can be fixed. The public service of Christ has been begun by some in very early youth; and the results have justified their adventure. From the humble tasks they first undertook they have gone on steadily to places of high responsibility, never once looking back, learning while they taught, gaining faith while they imparted it to others. Each for himself or herself, in this matter of supreme importance, must seek the guidance and realise the

vocation of God. But delay is often indulged, and the twentieth, even the thirtieth year, passes without a single effort in the holy service. One could wish for a Divine conscription, a command laid on every one in youth to be ready at a certain day and hour to take the sword of the Spirit.

On the other side also many need to reconsider. No time was fixed for the end of the services to which the Israelites were summoned. As long as a man could carry arms he was to hold himself ready for the field. Not the increasing cares of his family, not the disinclination which comes with years, was to weigh against the ordinance of Jehovah. But service now, however cheerfully it may be rendered in early manhood and womanhood, is often renounced altogether when knowledge and power are coming to ripeness with the experience of life. Doubtless there are many excuses to be made for heads of households who are leaving their young folk to represent them in religion, and pretty much in everything outside the mere maintaining of existence or the enjoyment of it. The demands of public service all round are sometimes quite out of proportion to the available time and strength. Yet the Christian duty never lapses; and it is a great evil when the balance is wanting between old and young, tried and untried.

## **2. The Tribe of Levi**

### **Numbers i. 47-54**

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

In this order it is implied that, although according to the ideal of the Mosaic law Israel was to be a holy nation, yet the reality fell very far short of it. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 1, 2). Again and again this command of consecration is given. But neither in the wilderness, nor throughout the pre-exilic history, nor after the Babylonian affliction had purged the nation of idolatry, was Israel so holy that access to the sanctuary could be allowed to the men of the tribes. Rather, as time went by, did the need for special consecration of those about the temple become more evident. Although by statute the tribe of Levi was

well provided for, it cannot be said that the life of the Levite was at any time enviable from a worldly point of view; at the best it was a kind of honourable poverty. Something else than mere priest-craft upheld the system which separated the whole tribe; something else made the Levites content with their position. There was a real and imperative sense of need to guard the sanctities of religion, a jealousy for the honour of God, which, originating with Moses and the priesthood, was felt throughout the whole nation.

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

who endeavour to realise the ideal are not to be branded and scorned as schismatics. They should be honoured for their noble effort to reach and use the holy consecration of the Christian.

## 3. The Camp

### Numbers ii

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

eagle. If this tradition is accepted, it will connect the four main ensigns of Israel with the vision of Ezekiel in which the same four figures were united in each of the four living creatures that issued from the fiery cloud.

The picture of the great organised camp and orderly march of Israel is interesting; but it presents a contrast to the disorganised, disorderly condition of human society in every land and every age. While it may be said that there are nations leagued in creed, allied by descent, which form the van; that others, similarly connected more or less, constitute the right and left wings of the advancing host; and the rest, straggling far behind, bring up the rear—this is but a very imaginative representation of the fact. No people advances as with one mind and one heart; no group of nations can be said to have a single standard. Time and destiny urge on the host, and all is to be won by steady resolute endeavour. Yet some are encamped, while others are moving about restlessly or engaged in petty conflicts that have nothing to do with moral gain. There should be unity; but one division is embroiled with another, tribe crosses swords with tribe. The truth is that as Israel came far short of real spiritual organisation and due disposition of its forces to serve a common end, so it is still with the human race. Nor do the schemes that are occasionally tried to some extent promise a remedy for our disorder. For the symbol of our most holy faith is not set in the midst by most of those who aim at social organisation, nor do they dream of seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly. The

description of the camp of Israel has something to teach us still. Without the Divine law there is no progress, without a Divine rallying-point there is no unity. Faith must control, the standard of Christianity must show the way; otherwise the nations will only wander aimlessly, and fight and die in the desert.

# III

## *PRIESTS AND LEVITES*

### **1. The Priesthood**

#### **Numbers iii. 1-10**

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

Yet all Aaron's sons had not been of this quiet disposition. Nadab and Abihu, the two eldest, had sinned presumptuously, and brought on themselves the doom of death. No fewer than five times is their fall referred to in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Whatever that strange fire was which they put in their censers and used before the Lord, the judgment that befell them was signal and impressive. And here reference is made to the fact that they died without issue, as if to mark the barrenness of the sacrilegious. Did it not appear that inherent disqualification for the priesthood, the moral blindness or self-will which was shown in their presumptuous act, had been foreseen by God, who wrote them childless in His book? This race must not be continued. Israel must not begin with priests who desecrate the altar.

Whether the death of those two sons of Aaron came by an unexpected stroke, or was a doom inflicted after judgment in which their father had to acquiesce, the terrible event left a most effectual warning. The order appointed for the incense offering, and all other sacred duties, would thenceforth be rigidly observed. And the incident—revived continually for the priests when they studied the Law—must have had especial significance through their knowledge of the use and meaning of fire in idolatrous worship. The temptation was often felt, against which the fate of Nadab and Abihu set every priest on his guard, to mingle the supposed virtue of other religious symbols with the sanctities of Jehovah. Who can doubt that priests of Israel, secretly tempted by the rites of sun-worship, might have gone

the length of carrying the fire of Baal into Jehovah's temple, if the memory of this doom had not held back the hand? Here also the degradation of the burnt offering by taking flame from a common fire was by implication forbidden. The source of that which is the symbol of Divine purity must be sacredly pure.

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

and ardent speech; and it is not always of a purely religious kind. Those who hear may for a time be deceived by the pretence of unction, by dramatic tones, by alien fire. But the difference is felt when it cannot be defined; and on the spiritual life of the ministrant the effect is simply fatal.

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

all appearance the consecration of Micah's Levite implied little else than the first payment on account of a stipulated hire. The phrase, then, appears to be a mark of history, and carries the mind back to the simple origin of the priestly office.

Eleazar and Ithamar "ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father." So far as the narrative of the Pentateuch gives information, there were originally, and during the whole of the wilderness journey, no other priests than Aaron and his sons. Nadab and Abihu having died, there remained but the two besides their father. Phinehas the son of Eleazar appears in the history, but is not called a priest, nor has he any priestly functions. What he does is indeed quite apart from the holy office. And this early restriction of the number is not only in favour of the Pentateuchal history, but partly explains the fact that in Deuteronomy the priests and Levites are apparently identified. Taking at their very heaviest the duties specially laid on the priests, much must have fallen to the share of their assistants, who had their own consecration as ministers of the sanctuary. It is certain that members of the Levitical families were in course of time admitted to the full status of priests.

The direction is given in ver. 10, "Thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall keep their priesthood; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." This is rigorously exclusive, and seems to contrast with the statements of Deuteronomy, "At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before

the Lord to minister unto Him and to *bless in His name* unto this day" (x. 8); and again, "The priests the Levites, even all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and His inheritance" (xviii. 1); and once more, "Moses wrote the law and delivered it unto the priests, the sons of Levi, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel" (xxx. 9). Throughout Deuteronomy the priests are never called sons of Aaron, nor is Aaron called a priest. Whether the cause of this apparent discrepancy is that Deuteronomy regarded the arrangements for the priestly service in a different light, or that the distinction of priests from Levites fell into abeyance and was afterwards revived, the variation cannot be ignored. In the book of Joshua "the children of Aaron the priest" appear on a few occasions, and certain of the duties of high priest are ascribed to Eleazar. Yet even in Joshua the importance attached to the Aaronic house is far less than in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers; and the expression "the priests the Levites" occurs twice. If we regard the origin of the Aaronic priesthood as belonging to the Mosaic period, then the wars and disturbances of the settlement in Canaan must have entirely disorganised the system originally instituted. In the days of the judges there seems to have been no orderly observance of those laws which gave the priesthood importance. Scattered Levites had to do as they best could what was possible in the way of sacrifice and purification. And this confusion may have begun in the plain of Moab. The

death of Aaron, the personal insignificance of his sons, and still more the death of Moses himself, would place the administration of religious as well as secular affairs on an entirely different footing. Memoranda preserved in Leviticus and Numbers may therefore be more ancient than those of Deuteronomy; and Deuteronomy, describing the state of things before the passage of Jordan, may in regard to the priesthood reflect the conditions of a new development, the course of which did not blend with the original design till after the captivity.

The tribe of Levi is, according to ver. 6 ff., appointed to minister to Aaron, and to keep his charge and that of the congregation before the "tent of meeting," to do the service of the tabernacle. For all the necessary work connected with the sanctuary the Levites are "wholly given unto Aaron on behalf of the children of Israel." It was of course in accordance with the patriarchal idea that each clan should have a hereditary chief. Here, however, an arbitrary rule breaks in. For Aaron was not by primogeniture head of the tribe of Levi. He belonged to a younger family of the tribe. The arrangements made by Moses as the representative of God superseded the succession by birthright. And this is by no means the only case in which a law usually adhered to was broken through. According to the history the high-priesthood did not invariably follow the line of Eleazar. At a certain point a descendant of Ithamar was for some reason raised to the dignity. Samuel, too, became virtually a priest, and rose higher than any high-priest before the captivity, although he

was not even of the tribe of Levi. The law of spiritual endowment in his case set the other aside. And is it not often so? The course of providence brings forward the man who can guide affairs. While his work lasts he is practically supreme. It is useless to question or rebel. Neither in religion nor in government can the appeal to Divine right or to constitutional order alter the fact. Korah need not revolt against Moses; nor may Aaron imagine that he can push himself into the front. And Aaron, as head of the tribe of Levi, and of the religious administration, is safe in his own position so long only as his office is well served. It is to responsibility he is called, rather than to honour. Let him do his duty, otherwise he will surely become merely a name or a figure.

## **2. The First-born**

### **Numbers iii. 11-13, 40-51**

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

It has been questioned whether the number of the first-born, which is 22,273, can in any way be made to agree with the total number of the male Israelites, previously stated at 603,550. Wellhausen is specially contemptuous of a tradition or calculation which, he says, would give an average of forty children to each woman. But the difficulty partly yields if it is kept in view that the Levites were separated for the service of the sanctuary. Naturally it would be the heir-apparent alone of each family group whose liability to this kind of duty fell to be considered. The head of a household was, according to the ancient reckoning, its priest. In Abraham's family no one counted as a first-born but Isaac. Now that a generation of Israelites is growing up sanctified by the covenant, it appears fit that the

presumptive priest should either be devoted to sacerdotal duty, or relieved of it by a Levite as his substitute. Suppose each family had five tents, and suppose further that the children born before the exodus are not reckoned, the number will not be found at all disproportionate. The absolute number remains a difficulty.

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

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

the first-born, is according to our passage laid on the Levites to a certain extent. Not entirely indeed. The whole congregation is still consecrated and must be holy. All are bound by the covenant. The head of each family group will still have to officiate as a priest in celebrating the passover. Certain duties, however, are transferred for the better protection of the sanctities of worship.

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

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

to escape any of the duties or obligations of life Christ has given Himself for us. It is to make us fit for those duties, to bring us fully under those obligations, to purify us that we may serve God with our bodies and spirits which are His.

A passage in Exodus (xiii. 11 f.) must not be overlooked in connection with that presently under consideration. The enactment there is to the effect that when Israel is brought into the land of the Canaanites every first-born of beasts shall be set apart unto the Lord, the firstling of an ass shall be redeemed with a lamb or killed, and all first-born children shall be redeemed. Here the singular point is that the law is deferred, and does not come into operation till the settlement in Canaan. Either this was set aside for the provisions made in Numbers, or these are to be interpreted by it. The difficulties of the former view are greatly increased by the mention of the "shekel of the sanctuary," which seems to imply a settled medium of exchange, hardly possible in the wilderness.

In Numb. viii. 18, 19, the subject of redemption is again touched, and the additions are significant. Now the service of the Levites "in the tent of meeting" is by way of atonement for the children of Israel, "that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary." Atonement is not with blood in this case, but by the service of the living substitute. While the general scope of the Mosaic law requires the shedding of blood in order that the claim of God may be met, this exception must not be forgotten. And in

a sense it is the chief instance of atonement, far transcending in expressiveness those in which animals were slaughtered for propitiation. The whole congregation, threatened with plagues and disasters in approaching God, has protection through the holy service of the Levitical tribe. Here is substitution of a kind which makes a striking point in the symbolism of the Old Testament in its relation to the New. The principle may be seen in patriarchal history. The ten in Sodom, if ten righteous men could have been found, would have saved it, would have been its atonement in a sense, not by their death on its behalf but by their life. And Moses himself, standing alone between God and Israel, prevails by his pleading and saves the nation from its doom. So our Lord says of His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Their holy devotion preserves the mass from moral corruption and spiritual death. Again, "for the elect's sake," the days of tribulation shall be shortened (Matt. xxiv. 22).

The ceremonies appointed for the cleansing and consecration of the Levites, described in viii. 5-26, may be noticed here. They differed considerably from those enjoined for the consecration of priests. Neither were the Levites anointed with sacred oil, for instance, nor were they sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices; nor, again, do they seem to have worn any special dress, even in the tabernacle court. There was, however, an impressive ritual which would produce in their minds a consciousness of separation and devotion to God. The water of expiation, literally of *sin*, was first to be sprinkled upon them, a baptism not

signifying anything like regeneration, but having reference to possible defilements of the flesh. A razor was then to be made to pass over the whole body, and the clothes were to be washed, also to remove actual as well as legal impurity. This cleansing completed, the sacrifices followed. One bullock for a burnt offering, with its accompanying meal offering, and one for a sin offering were provided. The people being assembled towards the door of the tent of meeting, the Levites were placed in front of them to be presented to Jehovah. The princes probably laid their hands on the Levites, so declaring them the representatives of all for their special office. Then Aaron had to offer the sacrifices for the Levites, and the Levites themselves as living sacrifices to Jehovah. The Levites laid their hands on the bullocks, making them their substitutes for the symbolic purpose. Aaron and his sons slew the animals and offered them in the appointed way, burning the one bullock upon the altar, around which its blood had been sprinkled, of the other burning only certain portions called the fat. Then the ceremony of waving was performed, or what was possible in the circumstances, each Levite being passed through the hands of Aaron or one of his sons. So set apart, they were, according to viii. 24, required to wait upon the work of the tent of meeting, each from his twenty-fifth to his fiftieth year. The service had been previously ordered to begin at the thirtieth year (iv. 3). Afterwards the time of ministry was still further extended (1 Chron. xxiii. 24-27).

Such is the account of the symbolic cleansing and the

representative ministry of the Levites; and we see both a parallel and a contrast to what is demanded now for the Christian life of obedience and devotion to God. Purification there must be from all defilement of flesh and spirit. With the change which takes place when by repentance and faith in Christ we enter into the free service of God there must be a definite and earnest purging of the whole nature. "As ye presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification" (Rom. vi. 19). "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry, ... put ye also away all these: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man" (Col. iii. 5, 8, 9). Thus the purity of heart and soul so imperfectly represented by the cleansings of the Levites is set forth as the indispensable preparation of the Christian. And the contrast lies in this, that the purification required by the New Testament law is for all, and is the same for each. Whether one is to serve in the ministry of the Gospel or sweep a room as for God's cause, the same profound purity is needful. All in the Kingdom of God are to be holy, for He is holy.

### **3. Levitical Service**

#### **Numbers iii. 14-39; iv**

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the whole careful ordering of the duties to be discharged by these Levites we see a figure of the service to be rendered to God and men in one aspect of it. Organisation, attention to details, and subordination of those who carry out schemes to the

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

function. The great servants of God might well refuse it or throw aside its shackles.

# IV

## *DEFILEMENT AND PURGATION*

### **Numbers v**

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

a hundred reasons could not approach the sanctuary. He had his portion in God after a sense; yet for a time, it might be for life, the peculiar blessings of holy fellowship were denied him. He could celebrate no feast. He had no share in the great atonement. The precautions and terms to be observed were of such a nature that if the law had been at any time stringently enforced a very large percentage of the people would have been denied access to the altar.

It may appear a strange thing that the precept, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy," was affixed not only to moral duties but with almost the same force to ceremonial duties. We can understand this, however, when we trace the result of the priestly ordinances. They created religious care and feeling; and the end was gained not so much by directing attention, as we now do, to faults of conduct, defects of will, sins of injustice, impurity, intemperance, and the like, but by keeping up a scrupulous attention to matters not, properly speaking, either moral or immoral, not ethical as we say, which were yet declared to be of moment in religion. The moral law did its part. But to make the enforcement of moral statutes, many of which bore on desire and will, the only means of urging the fear of God, would have resulted practically in a very bare and desultory cultus. Among a comparatively rude people like the Israelites it would have been absurd to institute a religion consisting of "morality touched by emotion." For the mass of people still it is equally hopeless. There must be ordinances of prayer, praise, sacrament, and the

duties which reach Godward through the Church. The value of the whole ceremonial system of the Mosaic law is clear from this point of view; and we need not wonder in the least at the nature of many provisions which, without grasp of the principle, we might reckon irksome and useless. The origin of some of the statutes is apparently hygienic; others again reach back to customs and beliefs of a very primitive world. But they are made part of the sacred law in order to enforce the conviction that the judgment of God enters into the whole of life, follows men wherever they go, decides as to their state with relation to Him hour by hour, almost moment by moment. The ceremonial law was a constant and strenuous lesson in regard to the omnipresence of God, and the oversight of human affairs by Him. It created a conscience of God's existence, His control, His superintendence of each life. And for a certain stage of the education of Israel this could be achieved in no other way. The moral and spiritual progress of a people, depending on the recognition of the authority of One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, depends also, of necessity, on the sense of His oversight of human life at every point.

# 1. Exclusion from the Camp

## Numbers v. 1-4

The rigidity of the law which excluded lepers from the camp and afterwards from the cities had its necessity in the presumed nature of their disease. Leprosy was regarded as contagious, and practically incurable by any medical appliances, requiring to be kept in check by strenuous measures. Care for the general health meant hardship to the lepers; but this could not be avoided. From friends and home they were sent forth to live together as best they might, and spend what remained of life in almost hopeless separation. The authority of Moses is attached to the statute of exclusion, and there can be no doubt of its great antiquity. In Leviticus there are detailed enactments regarding the disease, some of which contemplate its decay and provide for the restoration to privilege of those who had been cured. The ceremonies were complicated, and among them were sacrifices to be offered by way of "atonement." The leper was alienated from God, severed from the congregation as one guilty in the eye of the law (Lev. xiv. 12); and there can be no wonder that with this among other facts before him the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the law as having a mere "shadow of the good things to come."

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

It has been affirmed that leprosy was from the first regarded as symbolic of moral disease, and that the legislation was from this point of view. There is, however, no evidence to support the theory. Indeed the conception of moral evil would have been confused rather than helped by any such idea. For although evil habits taint the mind and vice ruins it as leprosy taints and destroys the body; although the infectious nature of sin is fitly indicated by the insidious spread of this disease—one point in which there is no resemblance would make the symbol dangerously misleading. A few here and there were attacked by leprosy, and these with their blotched disfigured bodies were easily distinguished from the healthy. But this was in contrast with the secret moral malady by which all were tainted. The teaching that leprosy is a type of sin would make, not for morality, but for hypocrisy. The symptoms of a bad nature, like the signs of leprosy, would be looked for and found by every man in his neighbour, not in his own heart. The hypocrite would be encouraged in his self-satisfaction because he escaped the judgment of his fellow men. But the disease of sin is endemic,

universal. The whole congregation was by reason of that excluded from the sanctuary of God.

According to the idea which underlies the priest law, leprosy did not typify sin; it meant sin. In no single place, indeed, is this directly affirmed. Yet the belief connecting bodily afflictions and calamities with transgressions implied it, and the fact that guilt offerings had to be made for the leper when he was cleansed. Again, in the cases of Miriam, of Gehazi, and of Uzziah, the punishment of sin was leprosy. Under the conditions of climate which often prevailed, the germs of this disease might rapidly be developed by excitement, especially by the excitement of immoral rashness. Here we may find the connection which the law assumes between leprosy and guilt, and the origin of the statute which made the intervention of the priests necessary. In their poor dwellings beyond camp and city wall the lepers lay under a double reproach. They were not only tainted in body but appeared as sinners above others, men on whom some divine judgment had fallen, as the very name of their disease implied. And not till One came who did not fear to lay His hand on the leprous flesh, whose touch brought healing and life, was the pressure of the moral condemnation taken away. Of many cases of leprosy He would have said, as of the blindness He cured: "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents."

Now is the law to be charged with creating a class of social pariahs? Is there any reason for saying that in some way the legislation should have expressed pity rather than the rigour

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

The lepers banished outside the camp remind us of those who have for no wrong-doing of their own to endure social reproach.

Were sometimes good men and women among the Hebrews, men with kind hearts, good mothers and daughters, attacked by this disease and compelled to betake themselves to the squalid tents of the lepers? That decree of rigorous precaution is outdone by the strange fact that under the providence of God, in His world, the best have often had to undergo opprobrium and cruelty; that Jesus Himself was crucified as a malefactor, bore the curse of him that "hangeth upon a tree." We see great suffering which is not due to moral delinquency; and we see the sting of it taken quite away. The stern ordinances of nature have light thrown upon them from a higher world. "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." For our sakes He was the object of brutal mockery, the sufferer, the sacrifice.

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

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

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

me, I flutter about in the air like an innocent bird." Is it not possible that the *nephesh* meant the effluvium of the dead body, the active element which, springing from corruption, diffused uncleanness through the whole house of death? It seems quite in harmony with other uses of the word, and with the idea of defilement, to interpret "was unclean by the *nephesh*," "sinned by the *nephesh*," as technical expressions carrying this meaning. The passage Numb. xix. 13 is peculiarly instructive—**כָּל־הַנִּגַּע** **כָּל־הַנִּגַּע** **בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת**—"Every one coming in contact with the dead, with the *nephesh* of a man who has died." To translate, "with the corpse of a man who has died," would fix on the language the fault of tautology. In Psalm xvii. 9 *nephesh* has the meaning of *deadly*, that is to say *breathing death*; and the idea here points to the meaning suggested.

The reason given for the banishment of the unclean is the presence of God in the congregation—"That they defile not their camp, in the midst whereof I dwell." All that are unhealthy, and those who have been in contact with death, which is the result of irremediable disease or accident, must be withdrawn from the precincts that belong to the Holy God. Human maladies are in contrast with the Divine health, death is in contrast to the Divine life. Here the whole scope of the legislation regarding defilement has its highest range of suggestion. It was a part of moral education to realise that God was separate from all distortion, wasting, and decay. In glad and deathless power He reigned in the midst of Israel. From the living God man received life which

had to be kept pure and disciplined. Among the Egyptians it was held to be sacrilege when the operator, in the process preparatory to embalming, opened a human body. He who made the incision was driven out of the room by his assistants with abuse and violence. Quite different is the idea of the Mosaic law which makes the holiness belong entirely to God, and requires of men the preservation of the clean life He has given. Every statute suggests that there is a tendency in the creature to fall away from purity and become unfit for fellowship with the Most Holy.

## 2. Atonement for Trespass

### Numbers v. 5-10

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

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

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

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

### **3. The Water of Jealousy**

#### **Numbers v. 11-31**

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

The ordeal to which the wife was to be subjected was twofold. One point was the imprecation of the Divine curse upon herself if she had been guilty. This oath was administered in terms and with ceremonies fitted to produce the most profound impression. She is set "before the Lord"—probably in the court of the sanctuary. Her hair is loose. She has the offering of jealousy in her hand—the tenth part of an ephah of barley-meal. The priest holds a basin of the "water of jealousy." The terms of the curse with its frightful consequences are not only repeated in her

hearing, but written on a scroll which is dropped into the water. The second thing is her drinking of the "water of jealousy," "holy water" mingled with dust from the floor of the sanctuary, and with the terms of the curse. The nature of the ordeal was such that few guilty persons would have braved it. The only thing which appears wanting is a provision for the punishment of the man whose wife had passed the terrible test. Since the punishment of this crime was death, and he made the accusation without cause, his own judgment should have followed. Here, however, deference had to be paid to the notions of the time, as our Lord clearly indicates. The absolute right, the just equality between husband and wife, could not be established. Nor indeed, with all our progress, is it yet secured.

The ordeal of the water of jealousy must have saved many an innocent life from wreck. In one sense it was part of a system designed to maintain a high standard of morality, and in that system it had a place which at the time could not be filled in any other way. The main stress lies on the oath of purgation; and to the present day in certain ecclesiastical courts this is in use for the purpose of bringing to an end processes not otherwise capable of solution. It must be noted that our marriage laws, lax as they are thought to be, do not give to a husband anything like the power or allow divorce with anything like the facility admitted by the Mosaic law as some of the Rabbis interpreted it. And this ordeal was of such a nature that if those in use throughout Europe only a century ago or thereby, in the trial of witches for instance,

be compared with it, we can at once see its superiority. Those barbarous tests, not used by the vulgar alone, but by religious men and Church authorities, made escape from false accusation next to impossible. Here there is absolutely nothing required which could in any sense injure or imperil an innocent woman. She might take her oath, see it written, and drink the water without the least fear or hesitation. The beneficence of the law is strongly marked along with its wisdom. It was a wonderful provision for the time.

# V

## *NAZIRITISM: THE BLESSING OF AARON*

### **Numbers vi**

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

prophet Amos (ii. 11) claims that God had raised up young men to be Nazirites, and he places their influence almost on a level with that of the prophets as a means of blessing to the people. We may believe, therefore, that they helped both morality and religion; and the conditions of their vow seem to have given them fine bodily health and personal appearance.

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

The modern pledge of abstinence bears in various points resemblance to the Nazirite vow. We can easily believe that indulgence in strong drink was one of the principal sins against

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

On the other hand, the pledge of the total abstainer, like the vow of the Nazirite, carries with it a certain moral danger. One who, having come voluntarily under such a pledge, allows himself to break it, suffers a serious loss of spiritual power. The abstainer, like the Nazirite, is his own witness, his own judge. But if his pledge has been sacredly undertaken, solemnly made, any breach of it is an offence to conscience, a denial of obligation

to God which must react on the will and life. It was not by using strong drink that Samson broke his vow of Naziritism, but in a far less serious manner—by allowing his hair to be cut off. Still his case is an instructive parable. The Spirit of the Lord passed from him; he became weak as other men, the prey of his enemies. The man who has come under the bond of total abstinence, especially in a religious way, and breaks it, becomes weaker than others. To confess his fault and resume his resolution may not lift him up again. The will is less capable, the sense of sacredness less imperative and potent.

It is hard to say why the peculiar defilement caused by touching a dead body or being present at a death is that alone on which special attention is fixed in the Nazirite law (vi. 9 ff.). One would have expected the other offence of using wine to be dealt with rather than mere accidents, so to speak. We can see that the law as it stands is one of many that must have preceded the prophetic period. If Amos, for example, had influenced the nature of the legislation regarding Naziritism, it would have been in the direction of making drunkenness rather than ceremonial uncleanness a special point in the statutes. From beginning to end of his prophecy he makes no distinct reference to ceremonial defilement. But injustice, intemperance, disaffection to Jehovah, are constantly and vehemently denounced. Hosea, again, does refer to unclean food, the necessity of eating which would be part of Israel's punishment in exile. But he too, unless in this casual reference, is a moralist—cares nothing, so far

as his language goes, for the contact with dead bodies or any other ceremonial defilement. Judging a Nazirite, he would certainly have regarded sobriety and purity of life as the tests of consecration—drunkenness and neglect of God as the sins that deserved punishment. Hosea's condemnation of Israel is: "They have left off to take heed to Jehovah. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding." In Ezekiel, whose schemes of worship and of priestly work are declared to have been the origin of the Priests' Code, the same tendency is to be found. He has a passage regarding unclean foods, which assumes the existence of statutes on the subject. But as a legislator he is not concerned with ceremonial transgressions, the defilement caused by dead bodies, and the like. Take into account the whole of his prophecy, and it will be seen that the new heart and the right spirit are for Ezekiel the main things, and the worship of the temple he describes is to be that of a people not ceremonially consecrated, but spiritually pure, and so in moral unity with God. He adopts the old forms of worship along with the priesthood, but his desire is to give the ritual an ethical basis and aim.

The statute which applies to the discharge of the Nazirite from his rule (vi. 13-21) is exceedingly detailed, and contains provisions which on the whole seem fitted to deter rather than encourage the vow. The Nazirite could not escape from obligation as he had entered upon it, without priestly intervention and mediation. He had to offer an oblation,—one he-lamb of the first year for a burnt offering; one ewe-lamb of the first

year for a sin offering; and for peace offerings a ram, with a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil; and meal offerings and drink offerings. These had to be presented by the priest in the prescribed manner. In addition to the possible cost of repeated cleansings which might be needful during the period of separation, the expense of those offerings must have been to many in a humble station almost prohibitory. We cannot help concluding that under this law, at whatever time it prevailed, Naziritism became the privilege of the more wealthy. Those who took the vow under the appointed conditions must have formed a kind of puritan aristocracy.

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

To explain this elaborate ritual of discharge it has been affirmed that the idea of the vow "culminated in the sacrificial festival which terminated the consecration, and in this attained

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

One other question still demands consideration: What was meant by the "sin offering" which had to be presented by the Nazirite when he had unintentionally incurred uncleanness, and the sin offering which had to be offered at the time of his discharge—what, in short, was the idea of sin to which this oblation corresponded? The case of the Nazirite is peculiarly instructive, for the point to be considered is seen here entirely free from complications. The Nazirite does not undertake the obligation of his vow as an acknowledgment of wrong he has done, nor does he place himself under any moral disadvantage by assuming it. There is no reason why in becoming a Nazirite or ceasing to be a Nazirite he should appear as a transgressor; rather is he honouring God by what he does. Suppose he has

been present at a death which has unexpectedly taken place—that involves no moral fault by which a man's conscience should be burdened. Deliberately to touch a dead body might, under the law, have brought the sense of wrongdoing; but to be casually in a defiled house could not. Yet an atonement was necessary (vi. 11). It is expressly said that a sin offering and a burnt offering must be presented to "make atonement for him, for that he sinned by reason of the dead." And again, when he has kept the terms of his vow to the last, honouring Jehovah by his devotion, commending morality by his abstinence, maintaining more rigidly than other Israelites the idea of consecration to Jehovah, he cannot be released from his obligation till a sin offering is made for him. There is no moral offence to be expiated. Rather, to judge in an ordinary human way, he has carried obedience farther than his fellow-Israelites.

The whole circumstances show that the sin offering has no reference to moral pollution. The idea is not that of removing a shadow from the conscience, but taking away a taint of the flesh, or, in certain cases, of the mind which has become aware of some occult injury. A clear division was made between the moral and the immoral; and it was assumed that all Israelites were keeping the moral commandments of the law. Then moral persons were divided into those who were clean and those who were unclean; and the ceremonial law alone determined the conditions of undefiled and acceptable life. If the law declared that a sin offering was necessary, it meant not that there had been

immorality, but that some specified or unspecified taint lay upon a man. No doubt there were principles according to which the law was framed. But they might not be apparent; and no man could claim to have them explained. Now with regard to Naziritism, the idea was that of a vivid and pure form of life to which a man might attain if he would discipline himself. And it seems to have been understood that in returning from this to the common life of the race an apology, so to speak, had to be made to Jehovah and to religion. The higher range of life during the term of separation was peculiarly sensitive to invasions of earthly circumstance, and especially of the defilement caused by death; and for anything of this sort there was needed more than apology, more than trespass-offering. The Nazirite going back to ordinary life was regarded in more senses than one as a sinner. The conditions of his vow had been difficult to keep, and, presumably, had been broken. He was all the more under the suspicion of defilement that he had undertaken special obligations of purity. A peculiar form of mysticism is involved here, an effort of humanity to reach transcendental holiness. And the law seemed to give up each experiment with a sigh. In the story of Samson we have only the popular pictorial elements of Naziritism. The statutes convey hints of deeper thought and feeling.

Generally speaking the whole system of purification enjoined by the ceremonial law, the constant succession of cleansings and sacrifices, must have appeared to be arbitrary. But it would be a mistake to suppose that there was no esoteric meaning, no

purpose beyond that of keeping up the sense of religious duty and the need of mediation. Some intangible defilement seems to have been associated with everything mundane, everything human. The aim was to represent sanctity of a transcendent kind, the nature of which no words could express, for which the shedding of blood alone supplied a sufficiently impressive symbol.

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

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"Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee:

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

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

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

It is a striking fact that the distinctive ideas conveyed in the three portions of the blessing—Preservation, Enlightenment, Peace—bear a relation, by no means fanciful, to the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. First are invoked the

providential care and favour of God, as Ruler of the universe, Arbiter among the nations, Source of creaturely life, Upholder of human existence. Israel as a whole, and each individual Israelite as a member of the sacred community, should in terms of the covenant enjoy the guardianship of the Almighty. The idea is expanded in Psalm cxxi.:—

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

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

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

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

Abraham had his own portion in the blessing.

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

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

The second member of the blessing indicates under the figure of the shining of Jehovah's face the revelation of enlightening truth. Here are implied the unfolding of God's character, the kindly disclosure of His will in promise and prophecy, the opening to the minds of men of those high and abiding laws that govern their destiny. There is a forth-shining of the Divine countenance which troubles and dismays the human heart: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." But here is denoted that gracious radiance which came to its fulness in Christ. And of this Divine shining Jacob Boehme writes: "As the sun in the visible world ruleth over evil and good, and with its light and power and all whatsoever itself is, is present everywhere, and penetrates every being, and yet in its image-like [symbolic] form doth not withdraw again to itself with its efflux, but wholly giveth itself into every being, and yet ever remaineth whole, and nothing of its being goeth away therewith: thus also it is to be understood concerning Christ's power and office which ruleth in the inward

spiritual world visibly, and in the outward world invisibly, and throughly penetrateth the faithful man's soul, spirit, and heart.... And as the sun worketh through and through an herb so that the herb becometh solar (or filled with the virtue of the sun, and as it were so converted by the sun that it becometh wholly of the nature of the sun): so Christ ruleth in the resigned will in soul and body over all evil inclinations, over Satan's introduced lust, and generateth the man to be a new heavenly creature and wholly floweth into him."<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup> "Concerning the Holy Baptism," chap. i.

kindness shall I have mercy on thee."

In the third clause of the benediction the peace of God, that calm of mind, conscience, and life which accompanies salvation, is invoked. From the trouble and sorrow and tumult of existence, from the fear of hostile power, from evil influences seen and unseen, the Divine hand will give salvation. It seems indeed to be the meaning that the gracious regard of God is enough. Are His people in affliction and anxiety? Jehovah's look will deliver them. They will feel calmly safe as if a shield were interposed between them and the keen arrows of jealousy and hatred. "In covert of Thy presence shalt Thou hide them from the plottings of man: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." Their tranquillity is described by Isaiah: "In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee ... no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of Me, saith the Lord."

The peace of the human soul is not, however, entirely provided for by the assurance of Divine protection from hostile force. A man is not in perfect tranquillity because he belongs to a nation or a church defended by omnipotence. His own troubles and fears are the main causes of unrest. And the Spirit of God, who cleanses and renews the soul, is the true Peace-giver. "To win true peace a man needs to feel himself directed, pardoned, and

sustained by a supreme power, to feel himself in the right road, at the point where God would have him to be—in order with God and the universe." In his heart the note of harmony must be struck deep and true, in profound reconciliation and unity with God. With this in view the oracles of Ezekiel connect renewal and peace. "I will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live ... I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them ... and I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore."

The protection of God the Father, the grace and truth of the Son, the comfort and peace of the Spirit—were these, then, implied in Israel's religion and included in this blessing of Aaron? Germinally, at least, they were. The strain of unity running through the Old and New Testaments is heard here and in the innumerable passages that may be grouped along with the threefold benediction. The work of Christ, as Revealer and Saviour, did not begin when He appeared in the flesh. As the Divine Word He spoke by every prophet and through the priest to the silent congregations age after age. Nor did the dispensation of the Spirit arise on the world like a new light on that day of Pentecost when the disciples of Christ were gathered in their upper chamber and the tongues of fire were seen. There were those even in the old Hebrew days on whom the Spirit was poured from on high, with whom "judgment dwelt in the wilderness, and righteousness in the fruitful field: and the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of

righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." He who is our peace came in the appointed time to fill with eternal meaning the old benedictions, and set our assurance on the immovable rock of His own sacrifice and power.

# VI

## *SANCTUARY AND PASSOVER*

### **1. The Offerings of the Princes**

#### **Numbers vii**

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

are the generations of the heavens and of the earth in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven." In Numb. ix. 15 the same note of time, "on the day that the tabernacle was reared up," marks the beginning of another reminiscence or tradition. The setting up of the tabernacle and consecration of the altar gave occasion presumably for this manifestation of generosity. But the offerings described could not be provided immediately; they must have taken time to prepare. Golden spoons of ten shekels' weight were not to be found ready-made in the camp; nor were the oil and fine flour to be had at a day's notice. Of course the gifts might have been prepared in anticipation.

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

It is an obvious remark here that spontaneous liberality has in the very form of the narrative the very highest commendation. Nothing could be more fitted to create in the minds of the people respect for the sanctuary and the worship associated with it than this hearty dedication of their wealth by the heads of the tribes. As the people saw the slow processions moving day by day from the different parts of the camp, and joined in raising their hallelujahs of joy and praise, a spirit of generous devotion would be kindled in many hearts. It appears a singular agreement that each prince of a tribe gave precisely the same as his neighbour. But by this arrangement one was not put to shame by the greater liberality of another. Often, as we know, there is in giving, quite as much of human rivalry as of holy generosity. One must not be outdone by his neighbour, would rather surpass his neighbour. Here all appears to be done in the brotherly spirit.

Does the author of Numbers present an ideal for us to keep in view in our dedication of riches to the service of the Gospel? It was in full accord with the symbolic nature of Hebrew religion that believers should enrich the tabernacle and give its services an air of splendour. Almost the only way for the Israelites to honour God in harmony with their separation from others as His people, was that of making glorious the house in which He set His name, the whole arrangements for sacrifice and festival and priestly ministrations. In the temple of Solomon that idea culminated which on this occasion fixed the value and use of the princes' gifts. But under Christianity the service of God is the

service of mankind. When the thought and labour of the disciples of Christ are devoted to the needs of men there is a tribute to the glory of God. "It has been said—it is true—that a better and more honourable offering is made to our Master in ministry to the poor, in extending the knowledge of His name, in the practice of the virtues by which that name is hallowed, than in material gifts to His temple. Assuredly it is so: woe to all who think that any other kind or manner of offering may in any way take the place of these."<sup>3</sup> The decoration of the house used for worship, its stateliness and charm, are secondary to the upbuilding of that temple of which believing men and women are the eternal stones, for basement, pillar, and wall. In the development of Judaism the temple with its costly sacrifices and ministries swallowed up the means and enthusiasm of the people. Israel recognised no duty to the outside world. Even its prophets, because they were not identified with the temple worship, were in the main neglected and left to penury. It is a mistaken use of the teaching of the Old Testament to take across its love of splendour in sanctuary and worship, while the spread of Christian truth abroad and among the poor is scantily provided for.

But the liberality of the leaders of the tribes, and of all who in the times of the old covenant gave freely to the support of religion, stands before us to-day as a noble example. In greater gratitude for a purer faith, a larger hope, we should be more generous. Devoting ourselves first as living sacrifices, holy and

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<sup>3</sup> Ruskin, "Seven Lamps of Architecture."

acceptable to God, we should count it an honour to give in proportion to our ability. One after another, every prince, every father of a family, every servant of the Lord, to the poorest widow, should bring a becoming gift.

The chapter closes with a verse apparently quite detached from the narrative as well as from what follows, which, however, has a singular importance as embodying the law of the oracle. "And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the Voice speaking unto him from above the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim: and he spake unto Him." At first this may seem exceedingly anthropomorphic. It is a human voice that is heard by Moses speaking in response to his inquiries. One is there, in the darkness behind the veil, who converses with the prophet as friend communicates with friend. Yet, on reflection, it will be felt that the statement is marked by a grave idealism and has an air of mystery befitting the circumstances. There is no form or visible manifestation, no angel or being in human likeness, representing God. It is only a Voice that is heard. And that Voice, as proceeding from above the mercy-seat which covered the law, is a revelation of what is in harmony with the righteousness and truth, as well as the compassion, of the Unseen God. The separateness of Jehovah is very strikingly suggested. Here only, in this tent of meeting, apart from the common life of humanity, can the one prophet-mediator receive the sacred oracles. And the veil still separates even Moses from

the mystic Voice. Yet God is so akin to men that He can use their words, make His message intelligible through Moses to those who are not holy enough to hear for themselves, but are capable of responding in obedient faith.

Whatever is elsewhere said in regard to the Divine communications that were given through Moses must be interpreted by this general statement. The revelations to Israel came in the silence and mystery of this place of audience, when the leader of the people had withdrawn from the bustle and strain of his common tasks. He must be in the exalted mood this highest of all offices requires. With patient, earnest soul he must wait for the Word of God. There is nothing sudden, no violent flash of light on the ecstatic mind. All is calm and grave.

## **2. The Candelabrum**

### **Numbers viii. 1-4**

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

across the Holy Place, and illuminate the altar of incense and the table of shewbread.

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

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

The "tent of meeting" may represent to us that chamber or temple of reverent inquiry where the voice of the Eternal is heard, and His glory and holiness are realised by the seeker after God. It is a chamber silent, solemn, and dark, curtained in such gloom, indeed, that some have maintained there is no revelation to be had, no glimpse of Divine life or love. But as the morning sunshine flowed into the Holy Place when the hangings were drawn aside, so from the natural world light may enter the chamber in which fellowship with God is sought. "The

invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." The world is not God, its forces are not in the true sense elemental—do not belong to the being of the Supreme. But it bears witness to the infinite mind, the omnipotent will it cannot fitly represent. In the silence of the tent of meeting, when the light of nature shines through the door that opens to the sunrise, we realise that the inner mystery must be in profound accord with the outer revelation—that He who makes the light of the natural world must be in Himself the light of the spiritual world; that He who maintains order in the great movements and cycles of the material universe, maintains a like order in the changes and evolutions of the immaterial creation.

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

soul, created anew after the plan and likeness of God in Christ,—here is the light. The unseen God is the Father of our spirits. The lamps of purified reason, Christ-born faith and love, holy aspiration, are those which dispel the darkness on our side the veil. The Word and the Spirit give the oil by which those lamps are fed.

Must we say that with the Father, Christ also, who once lived on earth, is in the inner chamber which our gaze cannot penetrate? Even so. A thick curtain is interposed between the earthly and the heavenly. Yet while by the light which shines in his own soul the seeker after God regards the outer chamber—its altar, its shewbread, its walls, and canopy—his thought passes beyond the veil. The altar is fashioned according to a pattern and used according to a law which God has given. It points to prayer, thanksgiving, devotion, that have their place in human life because facts exist out of which they arise—the beneficence, the care, the claims of God. The table of shewbread represents the spiritual provision made for the soul which cannot live but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God. The continuity of the outer chamber with the inner suggests the close union there is between the living soul and the living God—and the veil itself, though it separates, is no jealous and impenetrable wall of division. Every sound on this side can be heard within; and the Voice from the mercy seat, declaring the will of the Father through the enthroned Word, easily reaches the waiting worshipper to guide, comfort, and instruct. By the light of the

lamps kindled in our spiritual nature the things of God are seen; and the lamps themselves are witnesses to God. They burn and shine by laws He has ordained, in virtue of powers that are not fortuitous nor of the earth. The illumination they give on this side the veil proves clearly that within it the Parent Light, glorious, never-fading, shines—transcendent reason, pure and almighty will, unchanging love—the life which animates the universe.

Again, the symbolism of the candlestick has an application suggested by Rev. i. 20. Now, the outer chamber of the tabernacle in which the lamps shine represents the whole world of human life. The temple is vast; it is the temple of the universe. Still the veil exists; it separates the life of men on earth from the life in heaven, with God. Isaiah in his oracles of redemption spoke of a coming revolution which should open the world to Divine light. "He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations." And the light itself, still as proceeding from a Hebrew centre, is described in the second book of the Isaian prophecies: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burneth. And the nations shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory." But the prediction was not fulfilled until the Hebrew merged in the human and He came who, as the Son of Man, is the true light which lighteth every man coming into the world.

Dark was the outer chamber of the great temple when the

Light of life first shone, and the darkness comprehended it not. When the Church was organised, and the apostles of our Lord, bearing the gospel of Divine grace, went through the lands, they addressed a world still under the veil of which Isaiah spoke. But the spiritual enlightenment of mankind proceeded; the lamps of the candlestick, set in their places, showed the new altar, the new table of heavenly bread, a feast spread for all nations, and made the ignorant and earthly aware that they stood within a temple consecrated by the offering of Christ. St. John saw in Asia, amid the gross darkness of its seven great cities, seven lamp-stands with their lights, some increasing, some waning in brightness. The sacred flame was carried from country to country, and in every centre of population a lamp was kindled. There was no seven-branched candelabrum merely, but one of a hundred, of a thousand arms. And all drew their oil from the one sacred source, cast more or less bravely the same Divine illumination on the dark eye of earth.

True, the world had its philosophy and poetry, using, often with no little power, the themes of natural religion. In the outer chamber of the temple the light of nature gleamed on the altar, on the shewbread, on the veil. But interpretation failed, faith in the unseen was mixed with dreams, no real knowledge was gained of what the folds of the curtain hid—the mercy-seat, the holy law that called for pure worship and love of one Living and True God. And then the darkness that fell when the Saviour hung on the cross, the darkness of universal sin and condemnation, was

made so deeply felt that in the shadow of it the true light might be seen, and the lamp of every church might glow, a beacon of Divine mercy shining across the troubled life of man. And the world has responded, will respond, with greater comprehension and joy, as the Gospel is proclaimed with finer spirit, embodied with greater zeal in lives of faith and love. Christ in the truth, Christ in the sacraments, Christ in the words and deeds of those who compose His Church—this is the light. The candlestick of every life, of every body of believers, should be as of beaten gold, no base metal mixed with that which is precious. He who fashions his character as a Christian is to have the Divine idea before him and re-think it; those who build the Church are to seek its purity, strength, and grace. But still the light must come from God, not from man, the light that burned on the altar of the Divine sacrifice and shines from the glorious personality of the risen Lord.

### 3. The Passover

#### Numbers ix. 1-14 <sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup> For chap. viii. 5-26 see p. [39](#).

is, however, no trace of such a difference between the one observance and the other. What was done by the congregation on the fourteenth of Abib was apparently to be done at the "Little Passover" of the following month.

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

Regarding the Passover in the wilderness, difficulties have been raised on the ground that a sufficient number of lambs, males of the first year, could scarcely have been provided, and that the sacrificing of the lambs by Aaron and his two sons within the prescribed time would have been impossible. The second point of difficulty disappears if this Passover was, as we have seen reason to believe, a family festival like that observed on the occasion of the exodus. Again, the number of yearling male lambs required would depend on the number who partook of

the feast. Calculations made on the basis that one lamb sufficed for about fifteen, and that men alone ate the Passover, leave the matter in apparent doubt. Some fifty thousand lambs would still be needed. Keeping by the enumeration of the Israelites given in the muster-roll of Numbers, some writers explain that the desert tribes might supply large numbers of lambs, and that kids also were available. The difficulty, however, remains, and it is one of those which point to the conclusion that the numbers given have somehow been increased in the transcription of the ancient records century after century.

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

journey would probably have returned. The concession is a note of the gracious reasonableness that in many ways distinguished the Hebrew religion; and the Passover observances of Jews at the present day are based on the conviction that what is practicable is accepted by God, though statute and form cannot be kept.

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

Remarkable is the congruity between the view of the law presented by Paul and the fact that the great commemorative feast of Hebraism is attached, not to the legislation of Sinai, but to the rescue from Egyptian bondage. The law kept the Hebrew nation in ward (Gal. iii. 23); "it was added because of

transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. iii. 19); it "came in beside, that the trespass might abound" (Rom. v. 20). The Hebrews were not required to commemorate that ordinance which laid on them a heavy burden and was found, as time went on, to be "unto death" (Rom. vii. 10). And, in like manner, the feast of Christianity does not recall the nativity of our Lord, nor that agony in the garden which showed Him in the depths of human sorrow, but that triumphant act of His soul which carried Him, and humanity with Him, through the shadow of death into the free life of spiritual energy and peace. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the commemoration of a victory by which we are enfranchised. Partaking of it in faith, we realise our rescue from the Egypt of slavery and fear, our unity with Christ and with one another as "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." The wilderness journey lies before us still; but in liberty we press on as the ransomed of the Lord.

Mr. Morley has said, not without reason, that "the modern argument in favour of the supernatural origin of the Christian religion, drawn from its suitableness to our needs and its Divine response to our aspirations," is insufficient to prove it the absolute religion. "The argument," he says, "can never carry us beyond the relativity of religious truth."<sup>5</sup> Christians may not assume that "their aspirations are the absolute measure of those of humanity in every stage." To dispense with faith in

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<sup>5</sup> "Voltaire," by John Morley, ed. 1891, pp. 254, 255.

the historical facts of the life of Christ, His claims, and the significance of His cross, to leave these in the haze of the past as doubtful, incapable of satisfactory proof, and to rest all on the subjective experience which any one may reckon sufficient, is to obliterate the covenant and destroy the unity of the Church. Hence, as the Hebrews had their Passover, and the observance of it gave them coherence as a people and as a religious body, so we have the Supper. No local centre, indeed, is appointed at which alone our symbolic feast can be observed. Wherever a few renew their covenant with God in proclaiming the Lord's death till He come, there the souls of the faithful are nourished and inspired through fellowship with Him who brought spiritual life and liberty to our world.

# VII

## *THE CLOUD AND THE MARCH*

### **1. The Guiding Cloud**

#### **Numbers ix. 15-23**

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

and covers the door of the tent of meeting into which Moses has entered. The targums use the term *Shechinah* to indicate what it was conceived to be—a luminous cloud, the visible manifestation of the Divine presence; and Philo speaks of the fiery appearance of the Deity shining forth from a cloud. But these are glosses on the original descriptions and cannot be altogether harmonised. In one passage only (Isa. iv. 5) do we find a reference which appears to throw any light on the real nature of the symbol. Evidently recalling it, the prophet says, "Jehovah will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." To him the cloud is one of smoke rising from a fire which at night sends up tongues of flame; and the reflection of the bright fire on the overhanging cloud resembles a canopy of glory.

Ewald's view is that the smoke of the altar which went up in a thick column, visible at a great distance by day, ruddy with flame by night, was the origin of the conception. There are various objections to this theory, which the author of it himself finds difficult to reconcile with many of the statements. At the same time the pillar of cloud does not need to be thought of as in any respect a more Divine symbol than others which were associated with the tabernacle. Certainly the ark of the covenant which Bezaleel made according to the instructions of Moses was, far beyond anything else, the sacred centre around which the whole of the worship gathered, the mysterious emblem of Jehovah's character, the guarantee of His presence with Israel. It was from

the space above the mercy-seat, as we have seen, that the Voice proceeded, not from the pillar of cloud. The sanctity of the ark was so great that it was never exposed to the view of the people, nor even of the Levites who were set apart to carry it. The cloud, on the other hand, was seen by all, and had its principal function in showing where the ark was in the camp or on the march.

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

Scarcely any difficulty greater than that connected with the pillar of cloud presents itself to thoughtful modern readers of the Pentateuch. The traditional view, apparently involved in the narrative, is that in this cloud and in this alone Jehovah revealed Himself in the interval between His appearance to Jacob and,

long afterwards, to Joshua in angelic form. Many will maintain that unless the cloud was of supernatural origin the whole relation of the Israelites to their Divine King must fall into shadow. Was not this one of the miracles which made Hebrew history different in kind from that of every other nation? Is it not one of the revelations of the Unseen God on which we must build if we are to have sure faith in the Old Testament economy, and indeed in Christianity itself, as of superhuman revelation? If we are not to interpret literally what is said in Exodus—"The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light"—shall we not practically abandon the whole Divine element in the history of Israel's deliverance and education? Thus the difficulty stands.

Yet, it may be argued, since we have now the revelation of God in the human life of Christ and the gospel of salvation through the ministry of men, what need is there to doubt that, for the guidance of a people from place to place in the wilderness, the wisdom, foresight, and faithfulness of an inspired man were the appointed means? It is admitted that in many things Moses acted for Jehovah, that his mind received in idea, and his intellectual skill expressed in verbal form, the laws and statutes which were to maintain Israel's relation to God as a covenant people. We follow our Lord Himself in saying that Moses gave Israel the law. But the legislation of the Decalogue was far more of the nature of a disclosure of God, and had far higher aims and issues than could be involved in the guidance through the desert. The law

was for the spiritual nature of the Hebrews. It brought them into relation with God as just, pure, true, the sole source of moral life and progress. As the nucleus of the covenant it was symbolic in a sense that fire could never be. It may be asked, then, What need is there to doubt that Moses had his part in this symbol which has so long appeared, more than the other, important as a nexus between heaven and earth? To interpret the words "whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tent," as meaning that it was self-moved, would imply that Moses, though he is called the leader, did not lead but was led like the rest. And this would reduce his office to a point to which no prophet's work is reduced throughout the entire Old Testament. Was he unable to direct the march from Moseroth to Bene-jaakan? An inspired man, on whom, according to the will of God, lay the whole responsibility for Israel's national development, was he unable to determine when the pastures in one region were exhausted and others had to be sought? Then indeed the mediation of his genius would be so minimised that our whole idea of him must be changed. Especially would we have to set aside that prediction applied to Christ: "A prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you, from your brethren, like unto me."

And further, it may be said, the pillar of cloud and fire retains the whole of its value as a symbol when the intervention of Moses is admitted; and this may be proved by the analogy of other emblems. Almost parallel to the cloud, for instance, is the serpent of brass, which became a sign of Jehovah's healing

power, and conveyed new life to those who looked towards it in faith. The fact that this rude image of a serpent was made by human hands did not in the least impair its value as an instrument of deliverance, and the efficacy of that particular symbol was selected by Christ as an illustration of His own redeeming energy which was to be gained through the cross: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." For certain occasions and needs of a people one symbol avails; in other circumstances there must be other signs. The smoke-cloud was not enough when the serpents terrified the host. Elijah in this same desert saw a flashing fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire. Natural symbols, however impressive, do not avail by themselves; and when God by His prophet says, "This cloud, this fire, symbolise My presence," and the people believe, is it not sufficient? The Divine Friend is assuredly there. The symbol is not God; it represents a fact, impresses a fact which altogether apart from the symbol would still hold good.

In the course of the passage (ix. 17-23) the manner of the guidance given by means of the cloud is carefully detailed. Sometimes the tribes remained encamped for many days, sometimes only from evening to morning. "Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried on the tabernacle, abiding thereon, the children of Israel remained encamped, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed." Here is emphasised the authority which lay in "the commandment of the Lord *by the hand of Moses*" (ver. 23). For

Israel, as for every nation that is not lost in the desert of the centuries, and every society that is not on the way to confusion, there must be wise guidance and cordial submission thereto. We are not, however, saved now, as the Israelites were, by a great movement of society, or even of the Church. Individually we must see the signal of the Divine will, and march where it points the way. And in a sense there are no rests of many days. Each morning the cloud moves forward; each morning we must strike our tents. Our march is in the way of thought, of moral and spiritual progress; and if we live in any real sense, we shall press on along that way. The indication of duty, the guidance in thought which we are to follow, impose a Divine obligation none the less that they are communicated through the instrumentality of men. For every group of travellers, associated in worship, duty, and aim, there is some spiritual authority pointing the direction to be followed. As individuals we have our separate calling, our responsibility to Christ, with which nothing is to interfere. But the unity of Christians in the faith and work of the kingdom of God must be kept; and for this one like Moses is needed, or at least a consensus of judgment, a clear expression of the corporate wisdom. The standard must be carried forward, and where it moves on to quiet pasturage or grim conflict the faithful are to advance.

"Ye armies of the living God,  
His sacramental host,

Where hallowed footsteps never trod  
Take your appointed post.

"Follow the cross; the ark of peace  
Accompany your path."

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

## **2. The Silver Trumpets**

### **Numbers x. 1-10**

An air of antique simplicity is felt in the legislation regarding the two trumpets of silver, yet we are not in any way hindered from connecting the statute with the idea of claiming human art for Divine service. Instrumental music was of course rudimentary in the wilderness; but, such as it was, Jehovah was to control the use of it through the priests; and the developed idea is found in the account of the dedication of the temple of Solomon, as recorded in 2 Chron. v., where we are told that besides the Levites, who had cymbals, psalteries, and harps, a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets took part in the music.

There is no need to question the early use of these instruments; nevertheless, the legislation in our passage assumes the settlement in Canaan, and times when defensive war became necessary and the observance of the sacred feasts fell into a fixed order. The statute is instructive as to the meaning of the formula "The Lord spake unto Moses," and not less as to the gradual accretion of particulars around an ancient nucleus. We cannot set aside the sincere record, though it may seem to make Jehovah speak on matters of small importance. But interpretation must spring from a right understanding of the purpose suggested to

the mind of Moses. Uses found for the trumpets in the course of years are simply extensions of the germinal idea of reserving for sacred use those instruments and the art they represented. It was well that whatever fear or exhilaration the sounding of them caused should be controlled by those who were responsible to God for the moral inspiration of the people.

According to the statute, the two trumpets, which were of very simple make, and capable of only a few notes, had their use first in calling assemblies. A long peal blown on one trumpet summoned the princes who were the heads of the thousands of Israel: a long peal on both trumpets called the whole congregation to the "tent of meeting." There were occasions when these assemblies were required not for deliberation, but to hear in detail the instructions and orders of the leader. At other times the convocations were for prayer or thanksgiving; or, again, the people had to hear solemn reproofs and sentences of punishment. We may imagine that with varying sound, joyful or mournful, the trumpets were made to convey some indication of the purpose for which the assembly was called.

A sacred obligation lay on the Israelites to obey the summons, whether for joy or sorrow. They heard in the trumpet-blast the very voice of God. And upon us, bound to His service by a more solemn and gracious covenant, rests an obligation even more commanding. The unity of the tribes of Israel, and their fellowship in the obedience and worship of Jehovah, could never be of half so much importance as the unity of Christians

in declaring their faith and fulfilling their vocation. To come together at the call of recurring opportunity, that we may confess Christ and hear His word anew, is essential to our spiritual life. Those who hear the call should know its urgency and promptly respond, lest in the midst of the holiest light there come to be a shadow of deep darkness, the midnight gloom of paganism and death.

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

Taking vv. 5, 6, along with the passage beginning at ver. 14, we have an ideal picture of the order of movement. One peal, sharply rung out from the trumpets, would signify that the eastern camp, embracing the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, should advance. Then the tabernacle was to be taken down, and the Levites of the families of Gershon and Merari were to set forward with the various parts of the tent and its enclosure. Next two alarms gave the signal to the southern camp, that of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. The Levites of the family of Kohath followed, bearing the ark, the altar of incense, the great altar, the table of shewbread, and other furniture of the sanctuary. The third and fourth camps, of which Ephraim and Benjamin were the heads,

brought up the rear. In these movements the trumpets would be of much use. But it is quite clear that the real difficulty was not to set the divisions in motion each at a fit time. The camps were not composed only of men under military discipline. The women and children, the old and feeble, had to be cared for. The flocks and herds also had to be kept in hand. We cannot suppose that there was any orderly procession; rather was each camp a straggling multitude, with its own delays and interruptions.

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