F. J. A. Hort
Oct. 30 1888

THE HALLOWING OF CRITICISM.

THE HALLOWING OF CRITICISM:

Nine Sermons on Elijah Preached in Rochester Cathedral,

WITH AN ESSAY READ AT THE CHURCH CONGRESS, MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 2ND, 1888.

BY THE

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TO

MY WIFE,

WHO, IN MORE SENSES THAN ONE,

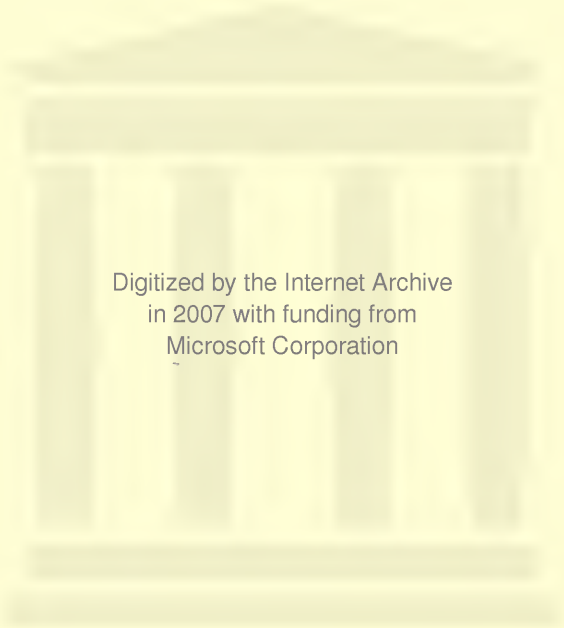
HAS TRAVELLED WITH ME IN THE PSALMISTS'

AND ELIJAH'S LAND,

THIS BOOK, WHICH IS HER OWN,

IS

DEDICATED.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PREFACE.

THE history of this little book is as follows. Finding myself transferred for three months from studious Oxford to the cathedral city of a busy, practical diocese, I had to consider how I could make some small distinctive contribution to Church work. The best way appeared to be to attempt a (to me) fresh experiment in preaching. It was evident that Old Testament subjects were by no means adequately represented or accurately explained in ordinary Anglican sermons, and it seemed to me (as it has doubtless done to others) that a reform might well be initiated by cathedral preachers. If any additional justification be needed, I have only to refer to the present Dean of Westminster's expository

lectures on Ecclesiastes and Job. The present course of sermons, it is true, is not purely expository; it also touches from time to time on historical criticism. I hope, however, that the tone is not less popular than that of Dean Bradley's excellent work. The subject is, no doubt, a familiar one; and it may have been too bold to touch it. Stanley's predecessor at Oxford (W. W. Shirley, Professor of Ecclesiastical History, so favourably known by his Wycliffe researches) printed four university sermons on Elijah; these I have not seen. That accomplished and catholic-minded New Testament scholar Professor Milligan, of Aberdeen, has also published an interesting and instructive work—"Elijah: his Life and Times"—in the series called "Men of the Bible" (Nisbet and Co.); several parts of this book I have read (as some footnotes will show) with sympathy, though not without regret that it is not more pronouncedly critical. For myself the subject had a special attraction,

owing to my recent return from a tour in Palestine with my wife and our friends Canons Driver and Were; and I only wish that we could have had a nearer view of Elijah's Mount Carmel. I had no thought of publishing this course; but finding that I had only twenty minutes to deal with a certain great subject at the Manchester Church Congress, it occurred to me that these sermons might help to illustrate my ideas.

The subject referred to may be briefly described as the Hallowing of Criticism. The Scriptures must in future, as many think, be expounded by preachers and teachers with some reference to the results of criticism; and the question becomes an urgent one how this can be done so as not to injure, but, if possible, even to promote, the higher or religious life. The Church Congress paper itself is appended to the sermons. It might have been fitly supplemented by an essay on the relations of Old Testament criticism to the Christian

faith which I was called upon to read at the Church Congress at Reading in 1883. This, however, is already printed as the introductory chapter to a work called "Job and Solomon; or, The Wisdom of the Old Testament" (1886).

ROCHESTER,
September 14th, 1888.

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"*And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah.*"—LUKE i. 17 (R.V.).

I.

ELIJAH—HIS CHARACTER AND FIRST APPEARANCE.

THE story of Elijah is one of those dramatic portions of the Old Testament to which we all come back with delight. I suppose that there has been no period in which men have been so able and willing to do full justice to the imaginative side of that sacred literature as the present. This seems to me a great advantage. Turn over the pages of commentaries and sermons, dry, and dead, and buried, of fifty years ago. Can you help being struck by a fearful poverty of imagination on the part of the writers? Good men, no doubt, but not able to help this generation. It is, of course, not enough to regard the narratives of Joseph, Balaam, Jonah, Elijah, and Elisha,

simply as stories; but stories they certainly are, stories of the highest and noblest type, from the point of view of art as well as from that of morality and religion. Some people are used to disparage those stories which have a tendency or purpose. But did not the great classic masters always write with a purpose? I do not say, a conscious purpose; that is, were not their lives filled with high ideas and noble aims, to which they could not help giving expression in their works of art? Just so it was with the story-tellers—the prose-poets—of Israel. They—at least those whose works have been preserved in the sacred Canon—arranged and ornamented the wild growths of popular tradition in such a way as to promote sound morality and religion at a time when all the rest of the world, especially of the Eastern world, was comparatively dark. Their works are not, like some romances of our own day, mosaics of fascinating description, clever portraiture, and ethical or theological controversy; they are stories perfumed with the natural fragrance of realized ideas and constantly

present purposes. This is why they are so true to nature, that persons who are devoid of a sense for literature often suppose them to be true to fact. True to fact! Who goes to the artist for hard, dry facts? Why, even the historians of antiquity thought it no part of their duty to give the mere prose of life. How much less can the unconscious artists of the imaginative East have described their heroes with relentless photographic accuracy! There are indeed facts for him who will dig for them as for hid treasures, and there are ideas which derive a fresh lustre from those facts; but there is also pure, unalloyed pleasure which ever springs anew to the imaginative reader from these truly inspired stories.

I have chosen the story of Elijah, in preference to the others which I mentioned, as the subject of a course of sermons because to-day is the Feast of St. John the Baptist, of whom Elijah is repeatedly represented in the New Testament as the type. You know that fine passage in an admirable, though far from perfect, romance of our own day, "Daniel

Deronda," in which a kind of modern Jewish prophet says to the hero of the story, with intense conviction, "You will be my life; it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance; it has been gathering for ages. The generations are crowding on my narrow life as on a bridge: what has been and what is to be are meeting there; and the bridge is breaking. But I have found you. You have come in time." This is just what Elijah, had he been permitted to revisit the earth, would have said to John the Baptist, in whom the soul of that ancient prophet was, as it were, born again, to accomplish that great work of making a righteous nation which Elijah began, but was not destined, and indeed was neither by nature nor by grace prepared, to bring to completion. There is not merely poetic, but deep historic, truth in the saying that Elijah was a type[1]—and, since it is "God only wise" who directs history, a Divinely

[1] Comp. footnote on Sermon VII. The sermon was preached on St. John Baptist's Day. The question may perhaps be hazarded, Does the ministry of the Baptist

appointed type—of that greatest of woman-born in the ages before the Christ Johanan or John, the kinsman or forerunner of the Saviour.

But how Elijah was the type of the Baptist, we shall only see at the end of our brief study of his life. Would that we had the story of that grand personage in its earliest form, and not shortened so as to fit the Book of Kings, and altered by the addition of fragments from later biographies! How abruptly, for instance, Elijah is introduced by the story-teller! Without a word of preliminary information respecting him, we are told that *Elijah the Tishbite*,

exhaust the fulfilment of the prophecy in Malachi (iv. 5, 6) to which Luke i. 17 and similar passages refer? Is it not probable that each "great and dreadful day of Jehovah" has been preceded by some Elijah-like preacher of repentance, and that the greatest of these days will be heralded by the most powerful of all Elijah's successors? Theodoret and other Greek fathers anticipate a literal fulfilment of Mal. iv. 5, 6. Possibly Malachi himself may have done so, being unable in the waning light of Hebrew prophecy to foresee the revival of the gift. But the Spirit of prophecy, as represented by our Lord, meant otherwise. (The Jewish belief is that Elijah will come three days before the Messiah.)

who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, etc. We have to illustrate the story-teller's parenthesis from other parts of the Old Testament and from travel. Gilead, the home of Elijah, differed widely both in scenery and in population from the west side of the Jordan. The summits are in parts rugged and desolate; and one can understand the poetic fancy of another inspired story-teller, who in Genesis xxxi. (at the end of what has been called the Hebrew *Comedy of Errors*[1]) represents Jacob as gathering stones and making a heap, called Gal-'êd,[2] or "cairn of witness." To his original hearers or readers he certainly meant more than he says, and sportively glanced at those great mountain-

[1] This is one of the few references in Ewald's works to modern literature, which are so specially interesting when they do occur.

[2] "Gal-'êd" is evidently a variation upon "Gil'ad" ("hard," "rugged"). The narrator would not have called the memorial of stones Gal-'êd if the name had not been in his opinion equally applicable to "Mount Gilead." In fact, the heap of stones must be imagined upon one of the hills of Gilead, surely not Jebel Osh'a (which is too far south), but one of the mountains of Ajlan. At present

walls, called Gilead (*i.e.*, "rough," "rugged"), any one of which might well be called a "cairn of witness," a boundary-heap, to the peoples on the opposite sides. The slopes, however, are clothed with magnificent woods; and in the picturesque ravines there are numerous large caves, which still supply a simple shelter to Arab families, just as they did perhaps in olden times to companies of Jehovah's prophets (1 Kings xviii. 13). This was the land to nourish wild and warlike natures, such, for instance, as Jephthah, the judge, or those heroes of Gad, in David's life, who swam the Jordan in time of flood, *whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were as swift as the roes upon the mountains* (1 Chron. xii. 8), or as the Bedouins of our own day, who suddenly cross the traveller's path, go with him for a short space, and then as suddenly disappear.[1] Elijah the Tishbite was in out-

the old name of Gilead clings to a chain of mountains to the south of the Zerḳa (Jabbok), called Jebel Jil'ad.

[1] The comparison is Stanley's; but no traveller can help making it for himself.

ward seeming something like these Bedouins. We are told that he was "a hairy man," or, as the margin of the Revised Version has it, "a man with a garment of hair;" *i.e.*, a garment made of goat's or camel's hair. This garment or mantle plays a great part in the story of Elijah's life. Sometimes he would strip it off, and roll it up like a staff in his hand; at other times he would wrap his face in it. Evidently it was neither a token of poverty nor of humiliation. It was not voluntarily assumed as an ascetic dress, as apparently it was by John the Baptist, but the national garb of his race. But though it was not voluntarily assumed, it was of Elijah's own free will that he retained it. He might have joined the bands of prophets on the other side of the stream, and who lived in many respects like ordinary men. But no, civilization was corrupt, and Elijah would not be indebted to it even for his dress. He preferred the solitudes of the wilderness to the palaces of nobles, and returned to them with gladness. In an instant he appeared before

Ahab, and after he had delivered his message, in an instant he was gone. And so we read in a passage from the story of Elijah, which has been severed, as we saw, from the earlier context, *And Elijah the Tishbite said unto Ahab, By the life of Jehovah, Israel's God, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*

We must not attempt to read later revelations into these words. Elijah does not mean to say that Jehovah is the only living God in opposition to Baal and Baal's consort, but simply that Jehovah lives, and that this to Ahab, who was himself a worshipper of Jehovah, is to be the guarantee of the truth of Elijah's oracle, just as Joseph says to his brethren, *Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely ye are spies.* No; Elijah does not deny that Baal may be the god of Tyre, and may have some power to help or to injure his Tyrian worshippers. What he does declare is that Jehovah, being the God of Israel, can and will withhold His blessing from the soil if His worshippers with-

hold their full homage. The worship of Baal, introduced through Jezebel, was not intended to contradict the Divinity of Jehovah; it was a religious act of gratitude to the supernatural power through whom, as Ahab thought, the friendship of Tyre had been secured. A war with Tyre would have meant to Ahab a war of Jehovah against Baal; a friendship with Tyre meant a friendship on the part of Baal to Jehovah. But to Elijah, as well as to Moses, Jehovah is a jealous God, who will not brook the divided allegiance of His worshippers. We must not be unjust to Ahab, though it is perfectly right to take Elijah's side against him in the great struggle. Israel was now just beginning to come into closer relations with other kingdoms. According to the feeling of antiquity, it was impossible to have friendship with other nations unless a friendly recognition—in short, worship—was extended to the gods of those nations. Ahab was not an irreligious man; but he was, first and foremost, the guardian of the political interests of his people. Could Israel stand

alone? King Ahab thought not. I am not sure whether Elijah saw the political issue as clearly as Ahab; nor does it much matter. *He* was right, and Ahab was wrong. Prophetic intuition was sounder than political calculation. Israel's mission was religious, not political; *that* at least Elijah saw, however little he could reason upon it. Welcome, political ruin, so long as the deposit of pure religion be safe! So thought and said Jeremiah; and so, if he could have reflected upon it, would Elijah too doubtless have thought.

This prophet is not so much a teacher as a religious hero. Like John the Baptist, he is a "witness"—a witness to facts, quite apart from theories about the facts. And in this is he not like—I will not say *all*, but the majority of Christian ministers? Not in bold and original speculation on Divine things, not even first in exhortation, or warning, or encouragement, but in a simple presentation of facts, lie at once their chief sphere of action and their strength. They are the servants of God

and of His Christ, before whom they stand. They have to witness of those things which they have both heard and seen, viz., the facts of the life of Jesus upon earth and in heaven, in His humiliation and in His glorification; they are the heralds of what Jesus was, of what Jesus is, and of what Jesus will be. And to do this properly requires some degree of the heroic temper of an Elijah. It is true that our Master tells us that, if He were lifted up, He would draw all men unto Him; but the drawing is not always immediate, or at least it is often counteracted by an opposite influence which translates itself into open opposition or quiet indifference to the messenger and his testimony. And the only sufficient source of strength can be the thought which is expressed in these striking words: *The life of Jehovah, before whom I stand.*

The prophet's address to Ahab may seem a threatening one; and no doubt the most prominent feature in his character is sternness. But there is more than mere threatening in the prophecy, *There shall not be dew nor rain*

these years, but according to my word. Elijah loved his people with a love resembling that of our stern Puritan forefathers for England. He loved not what Israel was, but what Israel would become. He speaks indeed as if the giving and withholding of rain were dependent on his temper and inclination, but this is not really his meaning. He knows how those "kindly fruits of the earth" the corn, and the wine, and the oil, which are the riches of Palestine, and supply sustenance and refreshment to its population, depend on the dew and the sea-mist (which is the same in Hebrew as "dew") during the rainless summer months, and on the early and the latter rain afterwards. He knows that God made seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, and has no desire to be a troubler of Israel. As soon as the people are morally prepared for the blessing of rain, Elijah sets himself to obtain it. But it is not *he* to whom they are indebted for it, but Jehovah. It is not without a great effort of prayer—the "fervent prayer" of which St. James speaks—on the part of the prophet that

the heavens become black with clouds, beneficent rain falls. One angel must rise to heaven with his prayers that another may descend with the answer. We shall see later on that Elijah has his softer side. *And the word of Jehovah came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and hide thee.*

But why does Elijah flee? Is he afraid of Ahab's vengeance? No, not afraid; no true prophet ever was afraid in the hour of danger; but God has other work for Elijah to do, and hides him, as (you remember) He did Jeremiah from the bloodthirsty Jehoiakim. *He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, and in his quiver hath he hid me;* these words of the "Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah (xlix. 2) might well have been uttered by Elijah. It is probable, however, that this was not the first time that the prophet had sought a hiding-place. I said that the opening words of chapter xvii. are clearly a fragment of a longer narrative. A later section of the Elijah-story contains allusions to facts which must, it would seem, have been related by the original story-tellers

before the threatening prophecy of the three years' drought. The greatest of modern interpreters of the Old Testament has endeavoured to give the substance of the lost portion of the narrative thus :—

"A crime of unexampled heinousness, which Ahab made no attempt to prevent, has been committed by Jezebel. She has not only introduced the worship of Baal, but also destroyed the altars of Jehovah, and murdered the prophets whom she has so long persecuted (1 Kings xix. 10). Only one of them is left—Elijah; but he has received from Jehovah, on his consecration long ago to the prophetic office, the promise that no man shall have power to harm him, and that he need fear no one save Jehovah; and so in the midst of all the persecutions, while others have hid themselves, he has publicly displayed his constant zeal for Jehovah, unmolested and borne about, as it were, by Jehovah's wind (1 Kings xviii. 12). But now the great blow has been struck; the altars of Jehovah are all overthrown, His prophets are all slain; and, as though the

whole creation were compelled to mourn such horrors, Jehovah commands the rain not to fall in blessing upon the land. Deep and dreadful stillness broods over all. The prophets of Baal cannot draw from their idol-deity the least alleviation of their distress; and Elijah has already received from Jehovah the command to hide himself so soon as he has told the king the stern truth."[1]

The spirit leads him first into the wilderness to a torrent-valley called Cherith. It would require a painter's hand to bring that sublime but desolate landscape adequately before you. Another Sunday I will at least try what words can do, trusting to your own imagination to supply the colouring. I know that the very deepest truths of our religion, those which concern the largest number of persons, can be detached from the scenes of their original revelation. And yet to an instructed member of the Church it ought to be no slight boon to be enabled to realize those inspired narratives of the Bible which are so singularly full of suggestive-

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," iv., 104.

ness. I hope some time or other to show you in what sense I use the words "inspired narratives"—a true and deep as well as Biblical sense, though not of course that of the orthodoxy of the last generation. But now I must pass from the historic scenery of the first part of Elijah's story to the inner and informing purpose.

The life of this prophet is an expressive picture of great and everlasting truths. Do not think that Elijah is superhuman; no; he is really much less superhuman than Abraham and some of the other figures of prehistoric Hebrew antiquity. Elijah the Tishbite is the perfectly human embodiment of the most essential part of the ideal of the Christian minister. So indeed is John the Baptist. Of both we may truly say that they were sent to *bear witness of the light* (John i. 7)—that is, to reveal God in a truer manner than was possible for the popular religious teachers of the day. Their function was not to bring forth such "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" as we find in the Apostolic Epistles; they were not

sent to theorize about the supernatural facts, but to make them known. And in this are they not like the Christian minister?

To "stand before Jehovah" (Elijah's favourite expression) is one of the regular Old Testament phrases for the ministration of priests; you will see this from Deut. x. 8, Ps. cxxxiv. 1, Heb. x. 11. Now mark the lofty privilege of a true prophet. He is not only a "spokesman" of Jehovah, but a priest—and a priest[1] in a more secret sanctuary than those who sacrifice, for Jehovah *wakeneth* his ear *morning by morning* (Isa. l. 4). None can enter that sanctuary but two—Jehovah and the prophet; wherever the prophet's work calls him, there is his God ready with counsel and help. How, then, could he dream of fleeing from the presence of Jehovah (Jonah i. 3)? It is his glory and his strength to "stand before Jehovah, the God of Israel." And does not the same privilege belong to the Christian minister? He is

[1] Priest, *kōhēn*=one who stands to administer an office (not the word, however, used by Elijah); prophet, *nābī*=spokesman.

no sacrificing priest; but he is, for all that, a true priest. He is always "standing before" his Master, ready for the faintest hint of the Divine will. He goes about his duty, not as a hireling, but as one who has the Master-workman (Prov. viii. 30) by his side. He subordinates his own personality entirely to that of Him who alone gives him at once his work and his strength. And for Him he witnesses of facts—of the facts which the Gospel and the Church have handed down to him, and of those also which he knows from his own inner experience. Whether his witness will be accepted or not by the non-Christian or half-Christian world is not a matter which concerns him so deeply as to disturb his peace of mind. Like Elijah, he leaves the issue in the hands of One who turns a king's heart as a gardener turns his watercourses (Prov. xxi. 1). His hope is not in himself, but in the self-attesting power of revelation so soon as it is apprehended by the heart. The Spirit is the great Preacher; it is the Spirit and the Bride who say, Come (Rev. xxii. 17). Paul may have

planted, and Apollos have watered ; it was God who gave the increase (1 Cor. iii. 6).[1]

The life of Jehovah, before whom I stand. The thought expressed in these words belongs to all of us. We stand before God, as His priests and prophets; we are called to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Our life as Christians should be upward-looking. We need not say, *Oh that I knew where I might find him* (Job xxiii. 3)! He loves to dwell in the lowly and contrite heart. "If with all your hearts ye truly seek Him, ye shall ever surely find Him,"[2] and shall solve the spiritual enigma so dear to the psalmists; viz., how it is possible to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life.

[1] Professor Milligan will notice that I have adopted his own view of the "witness" of Elijah. "Theology," he remarks, "as distinguished from the facts that underlie it, ought to be free; and theological speculation upon these facts is not for the world at all." Two of the above Bible-references are from p. 16 of his book.

[2] The Sunday morning anthem (from Mendelssohn) began with these words.

II.

ELIJAH AT CHERITH AND ZAREPHATH.

"*And Elias the prophet stood up as fire, and his word was burning as a torch.*"—Ecclus. xlviii. 1.

II.

ELIJAH AT CHERITH AND ZAREPHATH.

WE looked up at the heroic form of Elijah the Gileadite last Sunday afternoon, and saw that his true character was that of a courageous witness to unpalatable facts. He might have said, like our Lord, *For this cause was I born, and for this cause came I into the world: that I should bear witness unto the truth.* We saw, too, that his great source of strength was the thought expressed in his favourite phrase, *The life of Jehovah, before whom I stand.* I hope that we also agreed that Christian ministers, and in their several degrees the members of the Church in general, are witnesses to the essential facts of religion—those which concern God and His Christ, and

those which concern, not merely this man and that man, but the whole human race. There are essential and there are non-essential facts and truths; both require their witnesses; but the primary duty alike of clergy and of laity is to witness to those facts and truths which are essential or fundamental. This witnessing requires something of the heroic temper of Elijah, which can only be obtained by the conviction that our opportunities of work and of witnessing are assigned to us by God, that He ever liveth, and is not far from any one of us. If He brings us into a pre-ordained peril, He will also provide for us a preordained way of escape. He will hide us, as He hid Elijah and Jeremiah, under the shadow of His wings. *There shall no evil befall thee, nor any plague come nigh thy dwelling*, till thine own work in the world and God's work in thy soul are complete. There are mysteries in the lives of God's witnesses. Urijah falls by the sword of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah is spared; whole bands of prophets of the Lord are cut off by Jezebel,

Elijah escapes: he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness—to a *wâdy*, or narrow gorge, with a torrent-stream flowing through it, called Cherith, and described by the inspired story-teller as opposite the Jordan. You come to it (if I am not mistaken[1]) on the wonderful road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Few mountain gorges in Western lands can compare with it. It is one of the most stupendous chasms in what a Hebrew poet calls the ancient mountains, itself only less ancient, so narrow that you can scarcely measure twenty yards across at the bottom, so deep that you can only just see, by peering over the cliff, the slender torrent-stream which winds along amidst canes and rank rushes to the river Jordan. Dark and dismal is that wâdy, where the sun scarcely penetrates, and the torrent but slowly dries up. On each side rise lofty, perpendicular walls of rock, bare, treeless, and also lifeless, save that the wild pigeon makes its nest *in the clefts of the rock* (Cant. ii. 14), and that

[1] The view here adopted is *not* impossible, and certainly contributes to picturesqueness of exposition.

"over the caves by the deep pools the African kingfisher flutters."[1] Surely this is just the place where Elijah would feel safe from his persecutor; if Christian hermits found a refuge with the wild goats, a hunted prophet, especially a Gileadite, could do so too. Perhaps you wonder what Elijah did there. Had he been a poet, he would have composed hymns, just as another ascetic (Stephen of Mar Saba), living on the top of a similarly wild and sublime mountain solitude, within sight of the Dead Sea, wrote the lovely Greek hymn, known to all of us in its English adaptation, which begins with the verse,—

> "Art thou weary? art thou languid?
> Art thou sore distrest?
> Come to me, saith One, and coming,
> Be at rest."

But Elijah was not, so far as we know, a poet, nor an educated man. His sole occupation must have been thinking upon God. He was a religious genius. He had not indeed the tender

[1] I have filled out my own impressions from Conder's excellent book "Tent Work in Palestine" (ii. 22).

mysticism of St. Stephen of Mar Saba; but he knew Jehovah personally as a gracious Master, as a living God, not of course in the full sense of Jeremiah, but in a sense most humiliating to the worshippers of Baal. He knew, too, that feverish activity was not essential to the service of God, or, in words which may have been suggested to Milton by Elijah's fine expression *Jehovah, before whom I stand,* "they also serve who only stand and wait." And if human friends were wanting, yet was not Elijah, like our Lord in the temptation, with the wild beasts?—those free, non-human, but not unintelligent beings with whom ascetics and members of religious orders have so often been on terms of familiar friendship. Was Elijah friendless? No, indeed; the wildest of birds put off their wildness to pleasure him. *The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.* "Arabians," we should rather render it, said the devout philosopher Leibnitz, giving way to the rationalism of the seventeenth century. Oh, no, thou most sagacious thinker; this is not the

way to reconcile reason and faith. Take the letter of the record in its natural meaning; but learn to distinguish between prose and poetry. Few thinking men will admit that the verse which I have read expresses a fact; but no one formed upon Shakespeare and Milton will deny that it is the highest poetry, full charged, as such poetry always is, with spiritual meaning. Why do we teach our boys and girls Shakespeare and Milton? Is it because they need amusement? No, but because poetry is the symbolic, and if not always the only adequate expression, yet the most universally interesting expression, of the highest and grandest truth; because, to speak popularly, "poetry is truth in its Sunday clothes."

At each step that we take in the story of Elijah we are enveloped in a golden atmosphere of mingled fact and poetry; this is an elementary lesson of Bible-study. Some Bible-stories are pure facts; others, and those the most delightful, are mingled fact and poetry; this variety to a thoughtful student is a part of the

charm of the Biblical literature. The amount of poetry in a Bible-story depends on the age when it was written. If the life of Jeremiah (which we studied last summer) had been written in more poetic times, we cannot doubt that what the pious prose-writer describes by the phrase *The Lord hid him* (Jer. xxxvi. 26) would have been painted to the imagination somewhat as the prose-poet in Kings paints in words the deliverance of Elijah. There is no doubt as to what the latter means. He would have us realize how well off Elijah was through his implicit reliance on Him *who feedeth even the young ravens which call upon him.* Isaiah declares (xi. 6) that a day is coming when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and a little child shall lead them.* The Book of Proverbs tells us about the ravens which make their home in torrent-valleys, and are as cruel as the young vultures (Prov. xxx. 17); there it stops. Most unlikely were these fierce birds to be kind to Elijah. Yet in this beautiful story they become the prophet's foragers, and deny

themselves to keep him alive. Isaiah's golden age has begun to dawn literally? No. Faith loves poetry, and laughs at impossibilities.[1] In the dismal wâdy of Cherith, in the hideous den of Babylonian lions, and in the equally peril-girt abodes of our Central African missionaries, if the Lord will, the believer is safe. He can turn the heart of a savage African despot, can stop the mouths of roaring lions, can send ravens to Elijah with *bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.* Prose and poetry alike are claimed as their heritage by the inspired writers.

There was once a great man—his name is precious in the history of England—who wrote a "Defense of Poetrie." It is only in the West that such "Defences" are needed; Poetry, like its sister Religion, has its native home in the East. I too stand here to defend poetry to-day—the poetry of the greatest of Eastern books, the Old Testament; and I defend it on many grounds, but especially upon this: that we in

[1] Compare the fine passage Job v. 19—23, especially verses 22 and 23.

England are getting too old in sentiment, and, I think, even in our religious sentiment; and we need to refresh ourselves at the fountains of natural feeling, and above all by entering more deeply into the spirit of those glorious Scriptures which come down from the time when the world was young. Pleasure and spiritual profit may in an equal degree be derived from them. Take the story of Elijah. We have seen how, through the imagination, it commends to us that heroic faith which can remove mountains of difficulty. But *though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* So the poet-teacher brings Elijah back to the haunts of men—of men not of his own faith and race—and shows us how he gained, if not perfect Christian charity, yet a greatly increased sympathy with his fellows. The thin line of moisture in the wâdy of Cherith vanished at last; the torrent-stream dried up; and it would, you might think, have been only consistent if water as well as flesh had been supernaturally supplied. But no; the servant of God, who has warned

his neighbours of the consequences of their sin, is bound himself to suffer with them, that he may not fall into a callous indifference. Yes; he is bound to suffer, but God cannot leave him to die in that bare wilderness. And so from Cherith, in the south, this poetic biographer brings his hero to the far north of Palestine—to Zarephath. There is nothing arbitrary in this. The place which he mentions lies at the base of the Lebanon mountains, the streams springing from which would in a dry season continue to flow when the brooks of Palestine had dried up. They were not now copious enough to spread life and freshness in the fields, but by careful management (for the Easterns were not always improvident, as they are now) supplied at least a scanty drink to the industrious population. And now see how wonderfully God deals, how He brings the most unlikely persons face to face. *There were many widows in his own country, but unto none of them was Elijah sent, but unto a widow of the Sidonian city Zarephath* (Luke iv. 25). God picked out a single individual, and drew Elijah from his

rocky retreat to meet her; and this favoured person was—a worshipper of Baal. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Jesus asks water of a heretical Samaritan, Elijah of a still more misbelieving Phœnician. Just so (as you remember) in our Indian mutiny many a poor idolater gave food and shelter to pale-faced English fugitives. Elijah is to be taught that even a bad religion cannot wholly extinguish the heavenly light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And not only for the Jews, but for us, was this lovely story (true, as I hope, not only to poetry, but to fact) put down in Elijah's biography. It is a lesson for us not to shut ourselves up from those whom God has not yet taught much of the truth, but who may yet have learned the elementary lessons of doing justly and loving mercy, which are, according to the prophet Micah, two-thirds of the whole duty of man. Gladly does the poor widow fetch water for the thirsty traveller, and gladly would she also give him bread, but she is poor, and has only a little meal left, and is getting sticks for a fire,

to make one of the large but thin cakes of bread still common in Syria, that she and her child may live a day longer upon it. Then the wellspring of pity gushed forth in the prophet's heart, like that fountain of sweetest water (En-gedi) which still brightens the bare, parched shore of the great Salt Sea. Could God be less pitiful than man? And now it was possible for a fresh revelation to enter the prophet's mind. Remember this: that the supernatural is not the violation of the natural. Nature can by God's power and wisdom be so changed as to admit of what, for want of a better word, we call the supernatural. God has been teaching us this by science and philosophy all through this century; and the lesson is confirmed in some slight degree by the Divine education of Elijah. The prophet could not receive the revelation till he was naturally prepared for it. The voice of pity within him gathered more and more distinctness till it became the "still small voice" of a Divine oracle. In subsequent times the prophets were also poets; and the later writer who composed

Elijah's life, himself doubtless a lover of poetry and of prophecy, could not help expressing the substance of the oracle in a poetical form: *Thus saith Jehovah, Israel's God: The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the land. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of Jehovah which he spake by Elijah.* So then the day was fixed for the blessed dropping of what Mohammed so beautifully calls God's compassion; that is, the rain. Thenceforth Elijah's life is spent in looking for this long-delayed but now assured blessing. But of course not merely in expectation. We cannot help supposing (for the coast was very largely occupied by the Phœnicians) that he sometimes ventured southwards by the coast-road to Carmel. The ascent of this beautiful ridge is easy from the sea, and its wild gorges are so narrow that an Egyptian writer says that the soldiers of Pharaoh could only slip through one by one. Here then Elijah could find a retreat for days together as secure as in the

wâdy of Cherith. He could not always have stayed at Zarephath, among Baal-worshippers; this would have been as painful to him as for an English missionary to live alone, without Christian society, in an unevangelized Indian city. He must surely have sought communion with God sometimes where our Lord sought it—in the wooded solitudes of the hills. While at Zarephath, he doubtless groaned in spirit, like St. Paul "when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry," and not to a noble idolatry, like that of Athens, but to a most debasing, though comparatively stately, one. His comfort must have lain first in thinking upon God (Psalm xlii. 7), and next in the hope that he might be morally and spiritually helpful to the poor widow. This hope was not groundless; for she saw how high and noble his religion was, she admitted that Jehovah was not only a true, but also a holy God, who hated sin, and who therefore hated and would punish *her sin.* The very first time that she met Elijah, she assured him of her deep poverty by using the formula *By the life*

of thy God Jehovah; at another time she addresses him as a *man of God*, and as a prophet of Jehovah, *whose word in his mouth was truth.* How touching is the simple and genuine expression, which I will now read, of a sense of sin not inferior, at least in reality, to that of the Psalmist's!—*And it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?* What this means will be clear from Isa. lxii. 5: *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that are the Lord's remembrancers* (as the margin of your Bibles puts it), *keep not silence.* The "watchmen" are the prophets, and part of their duty is to "remind Jehovah" of something from which He must have turned away His eyes. This poor Phœnician woman knew well that she had committed some sin (at any rate, she knew

like the Psalmist, that she had "errors" and "secret faults," unknown even to herself), and she thought that Elijah had come on purpose to find out these sins and tell God of them that they might be punished. But Elijah proves to her—at any rate, this is what the story proves to us—that affliction is not always sent to the afflicted one as a punishment, but that the glory of God—that is, His combined graciousness and righteousness—may be made manifest. Neither Elijah nor his hostess knew that the life beyond the grave is a life of conscious, happy immortality; that a mother can safely trust the child of her love to a yet more loving heavenly Father. And so even Elijah feels driven to expostulate with his God: *Hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn by slaying her son?* How indulgent the true God is to the poor conceptions which we form of Him! He answers Elijah's piercing cry by restoring the child to life, because it would have shocked the prophet's faith in the Divine goodness if this kind and God-fearing woman had had

such a sore trouble during his sojourn with her. On the other hand, God does not always answer *our* earnest prayers for a sick child, because we are in less danger of misinterpreting Him, knowing as we do the wide compass of His love. Elijah lived up to the light that he had, and trusted God with an implicit trust. Let us, my brothers, live up to the light that we have, looking upward for more. Let us be ever seeking for a deeper conception of God, through the teachings of the records of revelation, through the leadings of our spiritual experience, and through the discoveries of physical and historical science, God's special gifts to this age. Let us endeavour, like that hero of faith whom we are studying, to realize that which we know to be true; and let us trust God as he did, but with far more comprehension, both for our children, and friends, and neighbours, and for those in heathen lands, upon whom the same light faintly shines which shines upon us. Most of us, I suppose, have some leisure. Can there be a better occupation for a part

of it than to think what it is that we ought to mean by the word "God"? Can there be a nobler ideal of practice than to harmonize thoughts and actions with this conception, and so become true Christian Theists, prophets and witnesses of life eternal? For *this is life eternal: to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* Oh, let not the religious men and women of this generation put from them the key of knowledge; but let them use it freely to unlock the treasuries of new-found truth. Let them, however, always remember that truth unhallowed is truth but half known, and that the highest use of knowledge is to deepen our conception of God and to promote the spread of all that is in the widest sense Christian both in our own land and throughout God's world.

III.

ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL.

"*And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?*"—1 KINGS xviii. 17 (R.V.).

III.

ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL.

IN Western climes it is difficult to realize the preciousness of a draught of water. The Palestine traveller knows it a little better when he finds that he cannot halt till he has reached a village with a good spring. The native population know it better still. Since the days of Abraham they have called a "fountain" and an "eye" by the same name; what the face would be without the eye, that, according to them, would be a landscape without a fountain. But what if the fountains and the streams, which they feed, dry up? A passage which we read last week in that fine book[1]—the work at once of a poet and of a

[1] Job vi. is the second evening lesson for July 2nd.

holy man—the Book of Job may throw some light upon this :—

My brethren (he complains) *have been treacherous as a winter stream,*

As the beds of winter streams which pass away;

Which were (*once*) *turbid with ice,*

And the snow as it fell hid itself in them;

But now that they feel the glow, they vanish,

When it is hot, they disappear from their place.

Caravans bend thither their course;

They go up into the desert, and perish (Job vi. 15—18).

The last two lines describe, with the simplicity and directness of the highest genius, the fate of a caravan which miscalculates the duration of the winter streams. I need not remark that the Syrian and Arabian deserts are not entirely like the great sandy desert of Africa; that they are varied by patches of fertile country, which are watered, not only by fountains, but by winter streams. *Caravans bend thither their course;* but in an exceptional season they may

go up into the desert, and perish, because the streams have dried up too soon. But Palestine is not a desert land; it is only here and there that a long stretch of country occurs without a good fountain. Comparing it with the desert of Sinai, the Book of Deuteronomy describes it in viii. 7, most beautifully and truly, as *a land of streams of water* (that is, streams too full of water to dry up quickly), *of fountains, and of floods* (like those at the fountainhead of Jordan, so vividly described in Psalm xlii.), *which spring forth in the valleys and in the hills.* Few countries can be more fertile than Palestine was in the time of Christ; and even before this, its natural riches must have been considerable. The drawback in the early period was that this wonderful productiveness was dependent on the regularity of the seasons. Before the Roman times and the greater development of agriculture, droughts were common in Palestine. The prophet Joel gives a striking picture of one of them, which may be applied to the still more terrible drought in the reign of Ahab: *The seeds rot*

under their clods; the garners are laid desolate · the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered (Joel i. 17, 20). I can never quite sympathize with St. Paul when he says, *Doth God take care for oxen?* but I can join hands across the centuries with this ancient prophet who says, *The beasts of the field pant unto thee,* and with that other who heard the voice of God declaring His pity, not only for the innocent children in Nineveh, but also for its many cattle (Jonah iii. 11). But why was not God moved by the sufferings of the people of Israel? Intense indeed those sufferings must have been. For two years (so we gather from the story in Kings) the sky had been as glowing brass, and the delightful shadow of a cloud all but unknown. The later students of Scripture took the narrator to mean that it had not rained upon the land at all for the space of three years and six months. This view is not binding upon us; the scribes in their worship of the letter lost the key to the meaning of half their Bible. And yet all the time they were using hyperbole themselves freely, just

as St. Paul (a true Eastern, though no mere scribe) speaks of the sailors in his voyage to Italy as having eaten nothing for fourteen days. There may be an exaggeration in the narrative in Kings, but one that can have deceived none of the original readers. Showers may have fallen, and the water have been gathered in cisterns, but the great rains—the former and the latter—had been as good as withheld. It was now the third spring unblessed with what the Psalmist calls *the river of God, which is full of water.* Did God look on unmoved at this dire affliction? *How do the beasts groan!* (to quote from Joel again); *the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.* Has God had no pity on the cattle? *They* surely have not sinned. True, but there is (according to the Old Testament) a Divinely ordained sympathy between nature and man; nature is bound to suffer for man's sin, and to rejoice for man's recovery. Strangely enough, Ahab at last begins to feel distressed and uneasy; but do you think it is for the myriads of his suffering

people? No, but for the horses and mules, many of which have died; and the rest may soon perish, leaving him an impoverished king. Hitherto he and his nobles have been able at great cost to buy the luxuries of corn and water; but now there is a sore famine upon man and upon beast even in the capital city, Samaria. Ahab himself and his horses have been touched by the hand of God, and he hastens to seek a remedy. He determines to make a search in all the wâdys and by all the wells for any grass which may still be left for the perishing cattle. It is a small land over which he rules; and he divides it with his chief courtier, Obadiah, Ahab going one way by himself, and Obadiah another way by himself. There is something very interesting in the character of this Obadiah, but we must not at this point be allured into studying it; we must return to Elijah, but for whom indeed we should never have heard of this notable journey of Ahab and his courtier. *And it came to pass* (we are told) *after many days that the word of Jehovah came to Elijah in the third year, saying,*

Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. Elijah's long waiting-time is over. He on the one hand and Israel on the other have been prepared for the final crisis. The ravens have taught him faith; the poor widow has taught him love; at any rate, the wâdy of Cherith and the Sidonian city were the schools in which he practised himself in those essential qualities. Israel too has been brought down by suffering, and has begun to distrust a god who cannot relieve it in its distress. Longing to help his people, and knowing that this cannot be till Israel of itself turns to its God, Elijah sets forth to meet the man who is the chief cause of its backsliding. On his way, he encounters Obadiah, who is vainly searching, by Ahab's direction, for some retired spots of verdure, and who at once recognizes in that meanly clothed figure the herald of a greater King than his master. *And he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Is it thou, my lord Elijah?* The answer was short and decided: *It is I; go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.* And now see the curiously contrasted

character of Obadiah. He was an adherent of the pure religion of Jehovah; and during a great massacre of Jehovah's prophets by Jezebel (prophets were specially numerous in the northern kingdom) he rescued many of them, at the peril of his life. *Was it not told my lord . . . how I hid an hundred men of Jehovah's prophets by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water?* Has Obadiah changed all at once—changed into a timid, cowardly man, because the prophet has said, *Go, tell thy lord, Elijah is come?* It may be so; even John the Baptist, the Elijah-like preacher of righteousness, the prophet of the Lamb of God, lost heart in the dim dungeon of Machærus, and sent to ask, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* Such things have been; transformations of character are not always for the better; Jeremiahs may become lion-hearted, but lion-hearts sometimes become Jeremiahs. Remember that Obadiah was famine-stricken, and do not blame him if at the prospect of danger his courage fails. He does not presume to check Elijah; indeed, he has no fear for the

prophet. A wild fancy enters his mind that as soon as he has gone from Elijah "the spirit of Jehovah," or perhaps "a wind of Jehovah" (of the God whom Amos so grandly calls "the Creator of the wind"), will carry him away, no one can tell whither. Doubtless Obadiah knows of Elijah's sudden appearances and disappearances; his error lies in ascribing to the prophet a capriciousness and a love of teasing worthier of the fairies of folklore than of an inspired prophet. And so for the third time the narrator puts into Obadiah's mouth the words of fright and astonishment: *And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here; and he will slay me.* The prophet, however, does not waste so many words, for time is pressing. He simply replies, *By the life of Jehovah, the God of hosts, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him to-day.* And now Obadiah lingers no more. He goes to meet Ahab, and tells him; and Ahab goes to meet Elijah.

You remember the last time these two great powers met. It was when, in anger at the

religious resolution forced upon Israel by Ahab, Jehovah's prophet announced the coming of the great three years' drought. Since then the very existence of Israel has been imperilled by the ruin of its crops and pasturage. Can you wonder that Ahab's resentment flames up when he sees Elijah again? We are in the habit of doing Ahab an injustice. Do you suppose a great prose-poet like this would have given Elijah an antagonist utterly unworthy of him? I admit that Ahab had inconsistencies; but at least he died nobly, and at this crisis of his life he is not the weakling he sank into afterwards. Privation has not reduced his courage, nor is he cowed in the least by the lofty bearing of Elijah: *And when Ahab saw Elijah, he said unto him, Is it thou, O troubler of Israel?* You know that striking story in the book of Joshua; Achan has taken an accursed thing, and Israel has been smitten by its enemies. Joshua finds out the transgressor, and brings him to a certain wâdy, or torrent-bed full of stones, and says, *Why hast thou troubled Israel? Jehovah shall trouble thee this*

day. And all Israel stoned him with stones. This shows what Ahab means; viz., that Elijah has brought, not merely a small trouble, but ruin, upon Israel. How nobly does Elijah retort, *I* have not ruined Israel; *but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the covenant of Jehovah; and thou hast followed the Baalim.* This, he says, was the true cause of Israel's calamity: that by introducing a foreign god by the side of Jehovah Ahab had virtually deposed the God who revealed Himself on Mount Sinai. *I am Jehovah thy God,* and *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*—these, the first and second of the sayings in the Decalogue, had become a dead letter in Ahab's reign. It was no defence that Ahab did not profess to be opposed to Jehovah, that he even named his son, the crown prince, "Ahaziah;" that is, "he whom Jehovah takes hold of." Ahab might indeed worship a god called Jehovah; but this was no more the God of Elijah, than the Jehovah of Jehoiakim was the God worshipped by Jeremiah. By placing Jehovah and Baal side by side, Ahab directly fostered the false

belief that Jehovah was of the same class of gods as Baal; that is, a god who reveals himself fully and entirely in the forces of nature, known in the country where he is worshipped—one of those sky-gods who meet us so constantly in the ancient heathen mythologies. The Jehovah of Ahab was, in fact, a heathen god, because he was not a holy God.

I admitted in my first sermon that there was an excuse for Ahab, who looked at religious questions from a political point of view. Elijah did not so regard religion, nor can any one to whom religion is the breath of his life so regard it. That Elijah was the better patriot, there can be no doubt; the only chance for Israel as a nation lay in progressively assimilating the truths involved in the revelation of Sinai. Elijah felt this, if he did not clearly see it; whereas Ahab acted as if he directly denied it. And now they have met face to face, each of them conscious that he represents a great principle. Ahab does not indeed strike us as a weakling; he meets the prophet with a bold front; but it is Elijah who imposes his own

will on the perplexed king. *Now therefore* (he says) *send and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of Asherah* (Baal's consort) *four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.* In a word, Elijah appeals from Ahab to a national assembly; and Ahab, recognizing the republican element in the constitution, allows the appeal. Israel, and not Ahab and Jezebel, shall decide upon the national religion; but first of all there shall be a trial of the supernatural powers of the two classes of prophets. If Baal's prophets can draw down fire from heaven to kindle the sacrifice, Baal shall be the god; that is, Jehovah shall be worshipped only as an Israelitish counterpart and companion of the Tyrian Baal. If, however, Elijah can succeed in doing so, Baal shall be put down, and Jehovah shall be worshipped as Elijah worshipped Him, and His few and strictly moral commandments shall be the rule of daily life.

It was a grand scene—this struggle between opposing religious principles—on the eastern

slopes of the sacred mountain Carmel; but I must not enter upon it to-day. From the first, Elijah knows what the end of the contest must be; but Ahab does not. He still has faith in his sky-god—a faith for which Jezebel, his wife, is not alone responsible, for there has been this heathen tendency in Israel ever since it became a settled nation. The attractiveness of Jezebel's religion, especially to those who were not politicians like Ahab, lay in this: that it gave a more stately form and a more imposing ceremonial to a familiar and much-loved natural religion. Elijah's form of worship was evidently plain even to bareness. He needed no temple, no elaborate ceremonial; an altar and a priest were enough for him, and if need were, a sacrificing priest could be dispensed with. Puritanism was then the only possible religion for a good man. A long education was needed before it was discovered that the strictest morality and the most spiritual theism could be combined with forms of ritual far more elaborate than those of the Tyrian Baal-worship. Whether in all ages and in all

countries they can be combined is a grave question which concerns the churchman as much as the religious philosopher.

Let us see to it that, whether in the matter of ritual we sympathize with Ezra or with Elijah, or perhaps with both, we do not fall behind the first great Puritan in realizing his two special truths—that there is a living God and that our life, physical and spiritual, being derived from Him, is to be a priestly, consecrated life. The theology of the Church is but an expansion of these two great truths. Elijah would, I think, have called them, not truths, but facts. Can we say that they are becoming facts to us?—facts which in the sight of God are transfiguring our lives? Surely if this were the case as it might be, the existence of the supernatural would want no other argument; and theoretic or practical atheism would be as impossible as to deny the power of the tides or the sun. This is why I ask you to regard Elijah, not as a being from another planet, but, to use St. James's words, so happily amended (in the margin of the Revised Version),

as *a man of like nature with ourselves* (James v. 17). For the loving, and reverent, and, so far as our means allow, historical study of the biographies of the Bible is in the highest degree conducive, not only to the expansion and sanctification of the intellect, as I think, but to the reproduction in our own small lives of the noblest types of Bible religion.

IV.

ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL (*continued*).

"*And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God.*"—1 KINGS xix. 39.

IV.

ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL (*continued*).

FRIDAY next[1] is appropriated in the English Church calendar to an Eastern saint called St. Margaret, but there is a greater saint to whom throughout the Eastern Churches the 20th of July is dedicated; viz., Elijah. No saint indeed is more venerated by Orientals, not excepting the Mohammedans, than Elijah, though in a character which perhaps we are not accustomed to ascribe to him—that of benefactor. Many an encomium upon him will be delivered in convent churches next Friday, and great will be the ingenuity shown in establishing the justice of his reputation. One thing at least even we may regard as certain:

[1] July 20th is the Feast of St. Margaret, whose name is so familiar near Rochester Cathedral Precinct.

that Elijah was a great religious patriot. Long has he waited—longer than most of our patriots would have done in the like circumstances; and now the hour has struck. From all quarters the heads of the clans and of the families of the northern tribes repair to the appointed place, for a national assembly has been called. Samaria is not a *sacred* city, like Jerusalem; Ahab therefore is not bound, like Josiah on a similar occasion, to crowd the representatives of the people into the narrow streets of an Eastern city. Carmel was the place chosen by him and by Elijah—one of the most beautiful of mountains, not perhaps in itself, but according to the impressions of all Palestine travellers. Compare it with the romantic hill-country in the Lower Lebanon, and it may disappoint you; but approach it from the south when fresh from the bare brown hills of Judah, and how you will feast your eyes on its purple slopes! Alike from the glorious hill-top above Nazareth, where Jesus, with His keen sense of natural beauty, must so often have sat, and from the broad

green plain of Jezreel, this long, dark ridge, jutting out into the blue Mediterranean, is an attractive object. Not stately, indeed, like the snow-white peaks of distant Hermon, but fair to look upon, with its green, flowery glades, and not only fair, but sacred—sacred to us from its historical associations; sacred to the Israelites because of the hill-worship which they had adopted from the Canaanites, and which in a qualified form Elijah does not disallow. Centuries afterwards the Roman emperor Vespasian found a god still worshipped here, according to the ancient usage, without either temple or statue; and the story of Elijah itself tells us how before the prophet's coming there had been an altar of Jehovah, which Jezebel had caused to be broken down. On the south-eastern extremity of this mountain ridge, looking towards Jezreel, is a terrace of natural rock, surrounded by a low wall; and a short distance from it is a spring, said to be perennial. The wide upland sweep just beneath would afford standing ground to Jezebel's large band of prophets, and those of

the people who had to stay in the plain would have the altars in full view. Nor would Elijah have far to go to perform that dread act of judgment with which this scene of the tragedy of Israel terminates. At the base of Carmel is the torrent Kishon, on the right bank of which is a bare hill, with the only too suggestive name "Hill of the Priests." Few traditional sites have the natural appropriateness of this terrace of rock, still known in the district as "The Place of Burning." Let us then imagine the broken-down altar in the sacred enclosure, and near this on one side a single man, of calm and noble aspect, but strange apparel, and on the other four hundred and fifty excited, eager-looking, well-clothed men, supported by the king himself and a multitude of his expectant subjects. Similar scenes may very often have been witnessed: "Athanasius against the world" has passed into a proverb; but never perhaps has there been such a dramatic scene as that which Israel's prose-poet has described for us.

Elijah knows too well that *except the Jews*

see signs and wonders they will not believe. Yet in case the chastening through which Israel has passed may have spiritualized its character, he comes forward, and makes a short, stirring address.

> "Oh for a sculptor's hand,
> That thou might'st take thy stand,
> Thy wild hair floating on the Eastern breeze!"

This is what he says: *How long halt ye between two opinions?* or rather, *How long will ye go lame upon tottering knees?* that is, be constantly wavering between truth and falsehood, Jehovah and Baal. *If Jehovah be the God, follow him; or if Baal, then follow him.* You see, Elijah refuses that politic compromise which Ahab desired to introduce, according to which Baal and a Jehovah in the likeness of Baal were to be worshipped concurrently or alternately. The only Divinity worth having is the one *true* God, who, being the universal Lord, can assuredly help His worshippers. *But* (we are told) *the people answered him not a word.* They did not care much perhaps for

the queen's Tyrian Baal; but for the very similar Baal of their ancestors, whose worship they had learned from the Canaanites, they cared much. Many a sacrifice had they offered at the numerous local shrines, and many a solemn procession had they joined in, akin to those of the peasantry of Palestine, in the hot, dry spring of this year, seeking with litanies and discordant music to draw down rain from the ungenial skies. But never yet had they joined collectively in a great national sacrifice; never yet had they performed such a great act of faith in Baal as was now contemplated.

Again Elijah opens his lips. Like St. Paul, he disdains the use of rhetoric—the true prophet is no popular preacher. Briefly he reminds the people how much the balance of probabilities is against him. How much less, upon a mechanical view of prophecy, must the supernatural powers of Jehovah's solitary prophet be than those of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal! Do not let us from the height of our supposed spirituality look down upon these unenlightened Israelites.

Think of the great trial by fire by which Savonarola was to have made good his cause against his Franciscan adversaries—Savonarola, the most prophet-like man of the Church of his time; and think of the mechanical test of the validity of prayer proposed not so many years ago by one of our leading scientific professors. No; I fear that for a long while to come spiritual causes will continue to be judged by unspiritual tests; and if God Himself seems to ratify this procedure by the fire from heaven which descended on Elijah's sacrifice, we must remember the principle of accommodation to imperfect capacities which pervades the Old Testament dispensation. I will not blame these unspiritual Israelites; but I think it will soon become clear to us that the results of this great appeal to Heaven are far from corresponding to the external grandeur of the scene.

The God that answereth by fire, let him be the God. Strange argument indeed! for what else could this prove but that Jehovah, and not Baal, is *the glorious God that maketh the thunder*

—that He is a mighty, but not that He is a holy, God? Still in all reformations construction must be preceded by destruction, affirmation by negation, though we must add that destruction must be followed by construction, as we hope to see some day on a grand scale in the Christianization of the sceptical classes of the natives of India. Strange argument, but one that commends itself to the adherents of a nature-religion! Those who wished to do so could still retain their sky-god under the name of Jehovah. *So all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.* You know the rest of the story. Those four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, not all at once, but by relays, go through the mystic ritual by which they hope to force the deity to gratify their wishes. We are told just enough to enable us to guess what took place; we have all of us read of those fanatical dervishes who perpetuate some at least of the strange practices of the old heathen East. The constant repetition of the name of the Deity, the dancing (our story-teller calls it "leaping," or rather "limping"),

the cutting of the flesh with knives and lances, may still be seen in any of the larger Mohammedan cities. The aim of the dervishes is to attain mystic union with God; such, too, I suppose, was the aim of these prophets, but they wished for a union so close that their will could be made God's will—the very opposite of the aim of a servant of the true God. *Their* will was to draw down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. Hour after hour they continued their fanatical performances; *but there was no voice, nor any that answered.* Noontide came, with its scorching ardours, but there was no repose for the overdone prophets; the spectators themselves were doubtless too excited to think of food or rest. What were Elijah's feelings? He will tell us himself. See, he advances; he addresses these howling, dancing dervishes, now perhaps, in the cruel heat, beginning to flag. Does he persuade them to give up their cause, or express pity for their self-imposed sufferings? No; in accents which can be heard far and wide, he calls, *Cry louder, for he is a god* (and therefore a

long way off, and much occupied); *either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.* A grim and bitter humour pervades these words; can you understand it? Is this the Elijah who lived so long with the Baal-worshipping widow woman of Zarephath, and proved so true and kind a friend to her? Poor deluded prophets! Why add to their sufferings by exposing their inutility? Is this the true missionary method?

No, I will not indeed blame Elijah; for he was subject, like ourselves, to the law of historical development. The power to hate what is evil developed far more quickly in the Jewish Church (if I may call it so) than the power to find out "the soul of goodness in things evil"—the power to comprehend and in comprehending to pity and to love. We must not, like the Greek and Syrian preachers on Elijah's day, eulogize the prophet at the expense of truth. Still less must we transfer his methods to our own dealings with religious or moral error. If we do so, we shall be

punished both by failing to gain an influence over others, and by missing some portion of the truth ourselves. If we call Mohammed an impostor, and the Constantinople dervishes foolish fanatics, we shall on the one hand never commend the Gospel to Moslems, and on the other fail to see what constitutes the vital force of Mohammed and of Mohammedan fanaticism. A similar remark applies to our missions to the idolaters. If we ridicule the superstitions of their time-honoured beliefs, we on the one hand increase their prejudice against the Gospel, and on the other fail to understand the beliefs which we oppose. Not so did St. Paul at Athens. *Ye men of Athens*, he cried as he looked up at the Parthenon, *I perceive that in all things ye are full of a religious instinct.*[1] The word "superstitious" never crossed the lips of the Apostle of the Gentiles; and if, in his unchastened zeal, it ever crosses the lips of a messenger of the Cross, he exposes himself to the Saviour's rebuke *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye*

[1] Acts xvii. 22 (ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους).

are of. Nor can I, even in view of the tercentenary of another great struggle between rival religious principles which God, as we think, determined against the spiritual tyranny of Rome, follow Charles Kingsley[1] in applying the words of Elijah to the well-wishers of the Armada. No; it was not on the English side alone that true prayers ascended to the throne of God in July, 1588, and, however much he disapproves of the invocation of saints, a Christian preacher must not indulge in the thought that the patron saint of Spain on St. James's Day treated his worshippers no better than Baal in olden time.

The light began to wane; the sun-god, so it seemed, would soon go down in his chariot of fire. The last despairing cry of Baal's prophets had died away; they had fallen, like the dervishes, into the unconsciousness of collapse. It was time for Jehovah's champion to reappear. With native majesty, he turns to the people on the uplands, and summons them to attend him. Next he repairs the altar

[1] "Westward Ho" (chapter on the Armada).

of Jehovah, made of twelve unhewn stones. Elijah's mission was not to bring in a new dispensation, but to restore the primitive forms of the old. "Like all true reformers, he would connect himself with the past, and not obliterate it." It is a lesson for Christian thinkers and Churchmen. That venerable altar, the stones of which were lying about in the enclosure, had its sacred history and associations. "A Divine wisdom guided Elijah when, instead of building a new altar, he repaired that which had been broken down." I do not say that Elijah can tell us more than half the truth, or that Christian thinkers and Churchmen have not a far more difficult work to do than that of restoring the theology and the Church of long-past centuries without adapting them to the wants of the nineteenth.[1]

The altar was built; but Elijah knew human nature, and wished to guard against the possible imputation of deceit. There always have been false pretenders to the possession

[1] See Milligan, "Elijah," pp. 55, 56. I have ventured to emphasize more the incompleteness of Elijah's message.

of supernatural powers, among whom Baal-worshippers would be only too glad to class Elijah. A large supply of water was brought from the perennial fountain close at hand, and poured upon the altar and into the trench. Now mark the contrast between Elijah's ritual and that of the prophets of Baal. They thought to force their will upon their god by ascetic practices—"that bodily exercise" which, as an epistle says, "profiteth little" (1 Tim. iv. 8). He had made God's will his own, viz., the conversion of His people, and now asks God to do that which He had already willed to do. He asks with an intensity of earnestness, not because he doubts God, but because the spiritual state implied in believing prayer is the true mystic union, without which there can be no miracles. *Behold, we are come unto thee,* say the penitent Israelites in Jeremiah's ideal description (Jer. iii. 23), *for thou art Jehovah our God. Truly in vain is the help that is looked for from the hills, the tumult* (like that of Baal's prophets) *on the mountains; truly in Jehovah our God is the salvation of*

Israel. Elijah's prayer is in the spirit of his great successor: *Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, . . . that this people may know that thou, Jehovah, art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.* The answer was immediate. *The fire of Jehovah fell* (*i.e.*, the lightning) *and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God.*

And now comes Elijah's terrible but necessary act of judgment. He performed it with strictest regard to the merciful provision in the primitive Israelitish law— (Only) *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.* Jezebel had slain all the faithful prophets of Jehovah but one; Elijah retaliated by slaying, not all the Baal-worshippers he could seize, but only the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. No doubt his action was more than this. It was a picture of the true God's hatred of the unholy religion which Jezebel patronised.

The prophets were the perfect embodiment of all that Elijah had set himself to counteract. Therefore he cried to the spectators, who were still under the influence of a great wave of emotional excitement, *Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.* There is a path which leads down from the traditional site of the sacrifice to the torrent Kishon, and which passes round a great, bare height now called "The Hill of the Priests." At the base of this hill, probably the priest-prophets of Baal were judicially slain.

This was how Elijah began to educate his people in righteousness. But what a task lay before him! How absolute must have been his faith in God! We shall see presently that even *his* faith gave way for a short space under the oppressive burden of his mission! Soon afterwards God relieved him by giving him a companion and successor. But at this moment he is the only missionary of Jehovah in a country profoundly corrupted by heathenism; and though he *seems* to have won Israel back to a pure faith, yet the means employed have

not been of a spiritual kind, and so the results cannot but be disappointing.

Next to the greatest of all trial-scenes, there is none in the Bible more exciting to the imagination than that which we have now followed to its close. How it all stands out before the mind! How vastly it excels in tasteful simplicity of form the extravagant Eastern tales which charmed us in youth! But for what cause do I bid you study it? To open to yourselves a fresh source of purest pleasure? Certainly, but for more than this—to strengthen your interest in the greatest of all the religious questions of our day; viz., What shall be the religion of thinking and inquiring men in England and in our Indian empire? The great struggle still goes on, and in the confusion of the strife we cannot see which way the battle is going. We on the Christian side must have Elijah's absolute faith in our unseen Leader, but also St. Paul's wisdom in meeting the difficulties of those who are without. Those difficulties, especially in the artisan class, are partly caused by the widespread ignorance of

the origin and true meaning of the books of the Old Testament. Your children at any rate cannot help learning what these difficulties are; will you not try to bring them up, not in a less reverent, but in a far freer and more historical, habit of mind towards these books than was formerly possible? If you will only do so, be sure that even in your lifetime you will have your reward; the Bible will be more, and not less, honoured, and Christ will be more, and not less, clearly seen as not merely the fairest flower upon the stem of Israel, but the only balm in Gilead for the sins and woes of suffering humanity. *Strengthen ye* therefore *the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say unto them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong; fear not.*

V.

THE BREAKING UP OF THE DROUGHT.

"*Are there any among the vanities of the nations that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou Jehovah our God, that we might wait upon thee*[1]*? for thou hast made all these things.*"—JER. xiv. 22.

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[1] I cannot follow the Authorised Version (unrevised in the Revised Version). The prophet does not record a resolution of his people to "wait upon" Jehovah, but reverently reminds them of the fact that, since He is Israel's protecting God, Israel has a right to look to Him for succour.

V.

THE BREAKING UP OF THE DROUGHT.

THE reign of the king who cut up and burned Jeremiah's roll is the period which most nearly corresponds in the second part of Israel's history to the reign of Ahab in the first. It was really as much a trial-time for Judah as that great day in Ahab's reign was for the old northern kingdom. Jehoiakim was in antagonism to Jeremiah, just as Ahab was to Elijah; both these kings advocated a fundamentally false conception of religion. But note this difference between the cases: Elijah succeeded in bringing his people over to the side of the true Jehovah, but Jeremiah did not. I do not say that Jeremiah's work was a failure; but it seemed to be a failure, whereas Elijah's seemed to be a success. It

has not been often observed that in both cases the trial of the opposing religions was accompanied by a drought. The prophet Jeremiah describes with painful realism the sufferings consequent upon this irregularity of the seasons in the beginning of his fourteenth chapter, after which he records two intercessory prayers of his own in behalf of his people; the words of the text are the conclusion of his second prayer. Alas! both times he prayed in vain; one of the greatest privileges of his office was denied him; not even a Moses or a Samuel could any longer pray effectually for Israel. The darkest view of the people's guilt was correct; and God's judgments, of which this drought was the first, must continue to come upon Israel to the bitter end. So the prophet himself tells us.

Now see the contrast in the northern kingdom in Ahab's reign. We heard the national decision at the close of the great trial—*Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God.* Those deadly enemies of the true religion—the prophets of Baal—have ceased to breathe.

Ahab and Elijah stand side by side—with what different feelings!—near the torrent Kishon. Then the prophet, who throughout his career treats Ahab with all the respect he can, turns to his companion, and says, *Get thee up, eat and drink* (*i.e.*, perhaps ascend Carmel again to the place hard by the altar, where the sacrificial feast has been spread); but do so quickly, *for hark! the noise of a rain-storm!* There is no occasion to suppose that Elijah literally heard some strange sound in the air; he speaks in the style of the later prophets, of the Babylonian Isaiah for instance, who says, *Hark! there is one that crieth, Prepare ye Jehovah's way in the wilderness*, although it will still be some time before the Jewish exiles actually return home. Elijah saw and heard what not the most experienced seaman could. If you want to see into the future, you must not apply to men who have nothing but ordinary experience to augur from. God still works miracles; and men of prayer, like Elijah, can prophesy more truly than unbelievers. There has not been the least change in the atmos-

pheric conditions, and yet Elijah knows that there will be rain. Now imagine that prophet and king have gone up the hill again, while you, with a speed like Elijah's, have gone round to the sea-shore. You gaze towards the plain, and are grieved at its brown, parched aspect; you turn your eyes to the sea (the Mediterranean), which still shimmers under the too radiant sky, and notice a few Sidonian vessels which have ventured farther than usual from the shore. All at once, you observe a strange commotion on board. The sails are being quickly furled, and all those precautions taken which indicate the approach of bad weather. Why is this? It is because the mariners have seen a cloud on the horizon, no larger than a man's hand; and they know that they must quickly seek such shelter as the bay of Hepha (now commonly called Haifa) can afford. The drought is on the point of breaking up, and the inspired story distinctly brings this into connection with Elijah's prayer. Would you like, unseen yourself, to follow the prophet to his oratory? Go then to that

retired hollow just below the summit. There you will find the man whom Ahab thought so proud, crouching down upon the earth, with his face between his knees. He trusts the God before whom in spirit he ever stands, and waits confidently for a message from the great King. He sends his servant to the highest point of the mountain to scan the horizon. Six times the lad has gone, and returned with the impatient words, *There is nothing. But it came to pass at the seventh time that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Make ready thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain-storm hinder thee not. And it came to pass in a little while that the heaven grew black with clouds and wind; and there was a great rain-storm.* There was no time for reflection. It is at least twelve miles from the base of Mount Carmel to Jezreel. Doubtless the chariot-horses flew along in the wind and the rain, but Elijah was swifter than they. A Divine impulse came upon him; and, like one of those runners who

still in the East precede the carriage of a governor, he ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. Does not this illustrate that beautiful saying of one of the Jewish Fathers (Judah ben Tema), "Be bold as a leopard, strong as a lion, light as an eagle, and swift as a roe to perform the will of thy Father which is in heaven"?

Every one knows that fine passage in which Cowper describes the men of prayer as the greatest benefactors of their nation. He expresses one of the deepest lessons of the story of Elijah. "Israel's troubler" was Ahab's name for Elijah, but the sacred story represents him as its one true friend. But can we in all points trust the view which is here commended to us? Let us pause to answer this question, while the king and queen in their summer palace review the situation of affairs, and Elijah, trusting too much in Ahab's conversion, quietly waits in or near Jezreel to concert fresh reforming measures with the king. May we, in short, follow the pious writer, whose work has been incorporated into

one of our Scriptures, in believing first that the three years' drought was a judgment, and next that its termination was due to the effectual prayer of Elijah? As to the first point, I need not recall to you the great change which has been passing for more than a century over the mind of educated society, and which is now practically complete. No one now believes the dreadful things which all but the very greatest religious thinkers believed on the subject of judgments in the seventeenth century. Within the last twenty years many of those who formerly hesitated have come to see that the ark of God is not endangered by being looked at from a changed point of observation. They feel now that the Divine glory is only heightened by a belief in the continuity of the operations of nature, and cease to regard famines or pestilences as death-warrants suddenly sent as judgments for national sins.

But must we, in our reaction against the mistakes and exaggerations of the past, go so far as to deny the disciplinary character of certain events altogether? Granting that God

gives a measure of independence to the forces in nature, does this prevent Him from modifying the action of physical forces in accordance with a plan and a purpose which are far more perfect than the action of any physical forces can be? Is not man himself, who is but God's creature, the possessor, not indeed of absolute, but of relative, freedom? Has he not a real sovereignty over nature, which increases in proportion to his knowledge of the forces and laws of nature? God's knowledge is infinitely greater than man's; must not His power of modifying nature be infinitely greater too? Add to this that there are certain psychological phenomena which recur with such regularity in the whole animal world that we may speak of psychological laws. It is one set of these phenomena which establishes the fact or law of efficacious prayer. For instance, the young of the lower animals express their wants through cries, and our children make known their desires by tears or by words; in each case these articulate or inarticulate prayers are efficacious. Social intercourse, too, is

carried on largely by petition and answer. Now if God be a conscious, living Being, why should not our intercourse with Him be carried on in the same way? And if He be a morally perfect Being, and One who desires the good of His creatures, why should He not, I do not say violate, but modify the action of the physical forces in accordance with His perfect plan for the good of mankind? If so, we may and must regard many of the events which befall us as designed, partly at any rate, to test our relation to God, whether we really love Him. We are told by one of our chief religious authorities that all things work together for good to them that love God, from which two inferences may be drawn: (1) that, if we are truly spiritual, the hardest trials will in the end make us love God more, and (2) that, if we are selfish and sense-bound, our troubles, instead of bringing us nearer to God, may even drive us farther from Him, in fact that they will become, not chastenings, but punishments. Let us then cling to the sister-truths of God's orderliness

and His fatherliness. God has established a beautiful and wonderful, though not perfect, order of things—the Kosmos. This, however, He has been wont to modify, ever since man has existed, in accordance with certain great moral ends for the race, for each nation, and for each individual. The great events of life have as direct a message for us as for the Bible-writers. They are, according to that beautiful Hebrew phrase, which takes in "punishments" and "chastenings" alike, *admonitions*. And whether they be chiefly punishments or chastenings, they are sent, not in wrath, but in love. *For* (as an all but Christian writer in the Apocrypha beautifully says) *thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made, for never wouldest thou have made anything if thou hadst hated it. And how could anything have endured if it had not been thy will, or been preserved if not called by thee? But thou sparest all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls* (Wisdom of Solomon xi. 23—26).

I have frankly told you that, when tested in

the sunlight of free but reverent Christian thought, the ideas implied in the story of Elijah are not always perfect. But to those who upon this or upon any supposed critical ground depreciate or set aside this and similar parts of the Old Testament, or even perhaps the Old Testament itself as a whole, I will as frankly say that they are not rationalists in the good sense of the word, but as unreasonable as they could be. These stories are among the precious heirlooms of the Christian family, and no one with the least sense of history (and history is one of the great feeders of reverence) could wish to part with them. Those very portions of the Bible which are the favourite theme of scoffers ought rather to inspire us with a specially tender interest, because they show how prolonged and painful was the struggle of our spiritual forefathers towards the light. They should fill us with love and sympathy for those who in any part of the world are struggling under disadvantages towards the truth. They should also excite a feeling, not of pride, but of humility, consider-

ing that the Church of our own age is not in point of knowledge more in advance of Elijah than the Church of succeeding centuries will, we may hope and think, be in advance of ours. The wonder is, not that Elijah knew so little, but that, knowing so little, he clung to it so firmly, realized it so intensely, and lived so great a life in the strength of it. Let us follow him in his loyalty to acknowledged truth; follow him in his continual reference of all his acts and words to *Jehovah, before whom I stand;* follow him, lastly, in his cultivation of the habit of prayer.

But some one may ask, Were Elijah's prayers for temporal benefits really effectual? This is the second point for the investigation of which we paused in our biographic study. It is not only Elijah, but every prophet and apostle, and the great Master Himself, who answer, Yes. But then we must remember that Elijah's prayers were directed by a keen spiritual insight into God's purposes. The breaking up of the drought was to all appearance necessary, if Israel was to persevere in good courses. Is

it wonderful then that God, who gave him his spiritual insight, should have honoured his faith by giving him the blessings which were, in fact, necessary at the time for the growth of God's kingdom ?

There was therefore nothing arbitrary, nothing sudden, about it. It was a true miracle, but not in the sense of a violation of the order of nature. There are many wonders which no philosophy has yet cleared up, and perhaps no philosophy ever will; yet, for all that, the more instructed reverence of this age of the Church refuses to admit that there can be a true irregularity either in the moral or in the physical Kosmos. The mysteries of the world are great, but we Christians look forward to a time when Wisdom will in the fullest sense be "justified of all her children."

Certain at least it is even in this dark, lower world that, as St. James says (v. 16), *the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working; i.e.*, it is one of the Divinely appointed forces in the universe, and he instances the case of Elijah, who prayed fer-

vently, and to all appearance changed the course of nature. We may not hold that the continuity of God's works was actually broken; but we must hold Elijah's and St. James's view of prayer, if our spiritual life is to thrive. There are Theists who pray and Theists who do not pray, but the Theism of the one class is a philosophy, that of the other class is a religion. But if we pray at all, let us aim at praying fervently. This may seem a high standard, but we ought not to aim at less; nor ought we, after the first tottering steps in the Christian life, to find fervent prayer difficult. Fine words are not necessary; there may even be prayers, as there are songs, without words—prayers which are not too feeble to be expressed in words, but too deeply felt, as the Psalmist hints to us when he prays, *Hold not thy peace at my tears* (Psalm xxxix. 12). Does any one doubt the efficacy of such prayers? Then let us return to one of our analogies for successful prayer in daily life. One of your children perhaps can only lisp his request; while another cannot do as much as this, but is able

to stretch out his little hand and cry. Does the father attend to these unspoken or ill-spoken prayers in any degree the less? Just so those who are in the "nurture and admonition" of the heavenly Father are heard by Him according as they *can* pray, and not according as they *cannot.* Only their prayers must be earnest and believing, the same in kind, if not in degree, as Elijah's.

Of Elijah's type of prayer, the psalmists are the best teachers. Listen to one of them:—

"*Jehovah, thou art my God: early* (that is, earnestly) *will I seek thee,*

My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh pineth for thee,

In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

And again, "*Jehovah, in the morning shalt thou hear my voice;*

In the morning will I order (my sacrifice) *for thee, and will look out.*"

That is what we mean by earnest and believing prayer

But may we really venture, with the sweet singer of Israel, to *look out* for answer to

prayer? Did not Elijah, did not the Psalmist, live in the heroic ages of faith? No; as I have said, God still works miracles, and still makes common men and women into heroes. Take an instance from the early history of Christian Europe. You know the terror excited by the Huns, those wild barbarians who in the sixth century after Christ penetrated into the very heart of Christian France. Already they had occupied the suburbs of Orleans, and the people who were incapable of bearing arms lay prostrate in prayer. The governor sent a messenger to observe from the rampart. Twice he looked in vain, but the third time he reported a small cloud on the horizon. "It is the aid of God," cried the Bishop of Orleans. It was the dust raised by the advancing squadrons of Christian troops.[1] I quote this from the great, fair-minded, though unbelieving, historian Gibbon, because it is such an exact parallel to the story of Carmel. Only those who pray are not great prophets, but common men and women; and

[1] Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," iv., 232.

the answer to their prayers presents not the least appearance of what men are pleased to call a miracle.[1] Not inferior wonders will be found to happen in many a common life. We *may look out* for answers to our prayers if, like Elijah and the psalmists, we live our lives, not to please ourselves, but as Christian soldiers, whose grand aim is to help forward the kingdom of God. That is the condition of successful prayer—we must not only be fervent, but unselfish; we must subordinate all loves, desires, and hopes to those which have their centre in Jesus Christ. Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and blend all other interests with this, and then you may be certain that your prayers will be answered, always in the spirit and sometimes, or even perhaps often, in the letter.

"He answered all my prayer abundantly,
And crowned the work that to His feet I brought
With blessing more than I had asked or thought—
A blessing undisguised, and fair, and free.

[1] In this respect this story differs from that of the Thundering Legion.

I stood amazed, and whispered, 'Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought?
How wonderful that He for me hath wrought!
How wonderful that He hath answered me!'
O faithless heart! He *said* that He would hear
And answer thy poor prayer, and He *hath* heard
And proved His promise. Wherefore didst thou fear?
Why marvel that thy Lord hath kept His word?
More wonderful if He should fail to bless
Expectant faith and prayer with good success!"[1]

[1] Miss Havergal, "Under the Surface."

VI.

ELIJAH AT HOREB.

"*And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God. And he came thither unto the cave,*[1] *and lodged there; and behold, the word of Jehovah came unto him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?*"
—1 KINGS xix. 8, 9.

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[1] A.V. and R.V., "a cave."

VI.

ELIJAH AT HOREB.

WE left Elijah at Carmel; we find him at Horeb. Both were mountain sanctuaries, the one adopted by Israel from the Canaanites, the other from the Arabian race. Jehovah, in His triumphant progress at the head of His people, had claimed them for His own worship and reconsecrated them to Himself. It was on Carmel that He turned the heart of His people back again; it was on Horeb that He again and again appeared to Moses, and, as we shall see, gave a revelation to Elijah unequalled for its loveliness in the whole of the Old Testament. But how came the prophet of Israel to journey so far from his sphere of duty? The circumstances are these: Elijah was suffering from a spiritual

reaction. The strain of that great day of Carmel had been too intense for him; and when Jezebel, as stern and resolute as himself, came forward as the avenger of blood to her own prophets, he fled for his life, and left her, as it seemed, to restore the old impure worship and fascinate the crowd with its stately ritual. He hurried far beyond the boundary of Israel to Beersheba, where the cultivated land of Judah ceases. There he left his attendant—the Sidonian boy of Zarephath, according to a later legend—and plunged into the desert alone. He was like that noble explorer of Africa [1] who, shocked at the conduct of his Arab escort, preferred to be left behind, resting under a tree, and waiting upon Providence. Or rather he was worse off, for the Italian explorer, in his weakness and loneliness, had at least his parrots and his dogs for company, whereas

[1] Giovanni Miani, the Venetian, who penetrated to within a few miles of Lake Victoria before Speke. I might have pointed to Mungo Park drawing spiritual comfort in circumstances of danger from "the extraordinary beauty of a small moss in fructification" (see his "Travels in Africa," chap. xviii.).

Elijah was too soured by disappointment to care for anything or anybody upon earth, and lay down with the prayer that a life not worth living might be cut short. If God had then been pleased to open his eyes, as He did those of the poor exhausted but patient Hagar, he would have seen the tall bush of broom, miscalled a juniper tree, under which he lay, lighted up by a pink cloud of blossoms, and would have gathered from this gracious provision, not merely for the shelter, but for the delectation, of travellers, a twofold lesson of humility and faith. Truly Elijah needed this lesson, for he was at this moment both proud and unbelieving. Pride there surely was in the thought which he expressed soon afterwards that *he* had been the great reformer, and that if *he* were taken, the work would be dropped, as well as in that which seems to be implied in his present complaint; viz., that he had a right to see more fruit of his labours than those who had gone before him had done of theirs. And was he not unbelieving too? He was sure that he at least had been very

jealous for Jehovah, but he doubted whether God had been jealous enough for Himself. Why could not He who had sent down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice have also consumed Jezebel and every obstinate Baal-worshipper? He was falling into the sin of Job, and criticising the wisdom of One who seeth the end from the beginning. He committed the common error of taking short views, and so became equally unjust to the work of the past and to the prospects of the future. He thought that his fathers had done nothing that had lasted, that his own great labours had come to nothing, and that no one else would take up his mantle and work with still better results. Oh, if there be any one here who is ever tried by similar proud and unbelieving thoughts—and what educated man or woman is not sometimes so tried?—let him remember that Elijah is not a model for imitation.

> "Say not, the struggle nought availeth;
> The labour and the wounds are vain."

This were as foolish as it is treasonable. A

wider range of vision leads to very different conclusions. Historical development, not always, but upon the whole, makes for real progress. Youthful optimism does less violence to facts than the pessimism of old age.

> "For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
> Seem here no painful inch to gain,
> Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
> Comes silent, flooding in, the main."[1]

But why did Elijah travel so far to give vent to his despondency? Were there no secluded spots in Gilead, congenial to pessimistic moods? Some wild ravine in his native hills would have been, one might think, a more natural and more wholesome retreat than the sand hills with which the Arabian desert begins. The truth, however, is that Elijah was on a pilgrimage to Horeb, the "mountain of God," and that this was his first desert station. He had not come here intending this outburst of despondency. The germs of pride and unbelief were indeed already in his mind when he left Jezreel, but he had not yet been tempted to disparage

[1] A. H. Clough.

God's awful gift of life. He had taken up the pilgrim's staff because he believed that on Horeb Jehovah would reveal Himself more fully than on Carmel, as the God of vengeance, and would make known to him a plan for breaking the opposition of Ahab and Jezebel, for sending out His lightnings and tearing them, shooting forth His arrows and consuming them. For a moment he forgot his errand, and lay down, as he thought, to die! He was wrong; but if he was wrong, doubly so are *we* if we ever follow his example. I do not say that there are not moments when hard-pressed Christian soldiers may, with Charles Kingsley, long to receive their discharge and lie down, as he expressed it, in the cool churchyard. But these longings indicate a morbid strain in the character, and are not to be intensified by indulgence. Very different are they from that heavenly aspiration of St. Paul in his imprisonment that he might break up his earthly camp, and be with Christ, and see for himself what that wonderful promise meant, *Where I am, there shall also my servant be.*

There are several remedies for this morbid state of the spiritual life. One medicine is to turn to a psalm and dwell upon one of those phrases of lightning brevity and brilliance which in a moment reveal the one Great Life and Love which directs the course alike of nations and individuals. The forty-second Psalm, for instance, is full of them. But Elijah had not this ever-fresh source of inspiration. Nor can even we afford, in dealing with such morbid experiences in ourselves or in others, to rely entirely on spiritual medicines. Let us see how the great Healer of all infirmities treated His patient. First, He gave him that blessed gift which is one of nature's sacraments, and proves how much God loves us, for, as a sweet psalm says, *he giveth his beloved sleep*. Next, He sent Elijah a more special message of love —one of those kindly Gabriels that stand in the presence of God, who gently roused the sleeper with a touch and bade him arise and eat.

I know not what the literal fact was, nor can I paraphrase poetry. The nature of angels is a thing which could not be revealed to a

human intellect, or described by human speech. There is high religious authority for the view that natural phenomena are but, as John Henry Newman says, "the skirts of the garments, the waving of the robes," of angelic ministrants; but when we seek to go behind these symbolic expressions, we lay ourselves open to carping criticism, and feel that religion is partly poetry, and though not less true, is much less capable of description, than the facts of science or history. How much was objective and how much subjective in the prophet's experience, I know not, nor does any one know. But sure I am that, whenever desponding thoughts come upon us, and life seems too hard to bear, a wise Christian friend will first of all seek to mend our physical condition. If winds and storms may be called "angels" by a psalmist, I see not why some fellow-mortal whom God has enabled by some winged word of counsel or comfort to lead us into the right path may not be gratefully accounted by us God's angel. Our Lord Himself is called in prophecy the "angel of

the covenant," so that to become Christlike is to become angel-like; and each of us in turn may seek to do an angel's part to his neighbour. Is this too high an ambition? Surely not. By nature man was made, according to the Psalmist, only a little lower than the angels; by grace we are lifted above ourselves, and can join angels and archangels, not only in their praises, but in their ministry.

> "To comfort and to bless,
> To find a balm for woe,
> To tend the lone and fatherless,
> Is angels' work below."

Learn, then, of Christ and of Elijah's angel to minister to the bodily as well as to the spiritual wants of the desponding; and learn of both to do so with a touch. Half the ministry and, I may say, half the preaching that is attempted is spoiled by a want of sympathy. When the nerves are unstrung, a rough word or an ungentle touch is intolerable. How hard it is for many, without some schooling in this matter, to visit the poor and the sick.

I do not say that the holy man who wrote this story meant anything but what he seems to mean; but I am sure that, if he were here to-day, he would not disown these interpretations or inferences. The Bible is not a "dead book;" and if you keep your mind open to its manifold suggestions, you will be rewarded by finding out depths below depths, meanings within meanings; and these old stories, and poems, and prophecies will rise again into a life so new and beautiful, that the Bible will nevermore be far from your hand.

Twice, as the story tells us, Elijah arose at that kindly angel's prompting, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God. I do not forget that scoffers are lying in wait to make the most of each great or small inexactitude in the Scriptures. Still we must in fairness note such facts as often as they occur. To us revelation is a heavenly treasure in what, comparatively speaking, must be called earthen vessels; to the scoffer the earthen vessel *is* the revelation

itself. The fault is ours more than his, for how few of us have been taught or have taught ourselves to be free and honest, though tender and reverent, Bible-students! We must have patience even with the scoffer, and explain to him that though the Church is, as our article says, the witness and the keeper, it has never claimed to be the critical expositor, of Holy Writ, and that in dealing with this ancient literature believers and unbelievers alike have often fallen into serious mistakes. It is needful, then, to notice that the mountains of Sinai are not, as the story implies, forty-one days' journey from Beersheba. Accustomed as he was to rapid movements, and refreshed both spiritually and physically, Elijah cannot have spent nearly so much time over his pilgrimage, nor could even a less energetic traveller have done so. What then? The object of the story-teller was not merely to collect facts, but to glorify Elijah and Elijah's God. Even if he had a minute acquaintance with the geography of Sinai (which he probably had not), he would not in this matter have cared

to be too accurate. For the journey across the desert is a poetic symbol. Who does not love the eighty-fourth Psalm, which has even more right to be called the "psalm of life," than Longfellow's poem? There, as you know, the sweet singer says that every true pilgrim is helped on his way by miracles, till, after going from strength to strength, he appears before God in Zion. In poetic language, he expresses a fact of experience. Faith, hope, and love can even heighten physical vitality. Have we not sometimes seen this exemplified in a wonderful way in unexpected recoveries from sickness? Elijah, however, is not sick. Who could be weary, or languid, or sore distressed, approaching Sinai? Air, landscape, and associations all combine to stimulate body and mind in the highest degree; and when you reach the fair and fertile valley in which St. Catherine's convent stands, and see the front of Horeb rising like a wall before you, you comprehend how in the revelation of Sinai Jehovah could be described as at once abundant in goodness and One that will by

no means clear the guilty (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7): the two sides of the Divine character, goodness and severity, seem reflected, the one in the verdant valley, the other in the darkly frowning granite mountain.[1] Half-way up the peak named after Moses (Jebel Musa) is a little garden, with a solitary cypress, a spring, and a tank of water. A few paces off is a cave, the traditional scene of Elijah's vision; and considering that from the earliest times pilgrims, as the book of Exodus seems to show, thronged to Sinai, I see not why it should not be *the cave* spoken of in 1 Kings xix. 9: *And he came thither unto* THE *cave, and lodged there; i.e.,* in the cave well known from the descriptions of Israelitish or other pilgrims.

There is no more sacred spot than this in the world. And yet, strange to say, Elijah did injustice to the noblest of its associations. It may be that the cave in which he now lodged was the very "cleft of the rock" where Moses is said to have been hid while Jehovah

[1] See Robinson, "Biblical Researches," i., 130. The whole section is well worth reading.

passed by when He proclaimed that glorious name from which I quoted just now. Did Elijah forget this, or may we suppose that this tradition had not reached him? At any rate, the prophet's idea of the God of Sinai is of a God of vengeance; and he has several of the psalmists and prophets on his side. He thought only of the terrible accessories of the Law, and imagined that in them God's nature found complete expression. He remembered only

> "The fires that rushed on Sinai down
> In sudden torrents dread,"

and forgot the gentler teaching of his own sojourn at Zarephath. He longed to see God as Moses saw Him, and his wish was comparatively granted. Not, however, before Jehovah had probed the conscience of His prophet, and made him give clear expression to the thoughts and feelings which had been troubling him. *What doest thou here, Elijah?* means, What is that impression of thine own work and of the Divine nature and principles of action which has brought thee hither? Elijah,

you know, had given way in some degree to the temptations of pride and unbelief. He thought too much of his own labours, and he trusted his God too little; he was unfair to the past and hopeless as to the future. There is no reserve in his reply to Jehovah; he says it all out—all that made his heart heavy and his life miserable. One thing, indeed, he does not express; it is the question, Why dost Thou, Jehovah, suffer these things to be? To this unspoken but not unheard question, Jehovah gives no direct answer; but He summons him, as He summoned Job in the great Hebrew drama of Doubt and Faith, to witness those awful phenomena of nature in which God was supposed to be specially manifested. *And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And behold, Jehovah passed by* (as He passed by Moses of old); *and a great and strong wind rent the mountains—i.e.*, a hurricane burst through the massive walls of granite—*and brake in pieces the rocks*, rolling them down in fragments around him. But where was Jehovah? *Jehovah was not in the wind. And*

after the wind an earthquake, so that the foundations of Horeb itself quaked beneath Elijah. But where was Jehovah? *Jehovah was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire*, splintering the rocks into smaller pieces than those which the hurricane had broken off. But where wast Thou, Jehovah? *Jehovah was not* even *in the fire.*

Imagine the scene, if you can. What the wind can be in the mountains, some of us may know. Of the resistless energy of the Divine Being can there be a better symbol? What earthquakes are, and how completely the strongest nerves are shaken by them, we also know very well since the calamity which befell that lovely Italian coast in 1887. What a thunderstorm in the mountains means, we also many of us know, though few can have witnessed one in Sinai itself, where, as we are told, the lightning seems like falling masses of fire.[1] All these phenomena in their highest degree were combined. What were Elijah's feelings? Did he say to the rocks as they

[1] See Ebers, "Durch Gosen zum Sinai," p. 433.

fell around him, Yea, fall on me and hide me from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? No; it is another saying of the seer of Patmos which more nearly expresses his thought: *Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come.* Yes, he was fearless amidst it all, knowing that he bore a charmed life, and smiled at each awful indication that Jehovah his God was near. And yet, as Job said,

> *Lo, he goeth by me, but I see him not;*
> *He passeth me also, but I perceive him not*
> (Job ix. 11).

How strange, how startling, to Elijah! *Bow thy heavens, Jehovah, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke* (Psalm cxliv. 5). Such had been his prayer; and lo, the mountains had been touched, and seemed all cloud and flame; but where was Jehovah? Had He not answered by fire, according to the prayer of Elijah, on Mount Carmel? Not indeed audibly, but no speech was needed then. Now a word

was needed—a revelation, to make clear once for all whether Jehovah would allow Ahab and Jezebel to ruin the spiritual prospects of His own people. Elijah's inmost soul cried out for an assurance from God that the majesty of the moral law should be vindicated, and that darkness should not cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but the voice of revelation was mute. Wait on, prophet of God; and He will make thy darkness to be light. He who answered Job out of the midst of the tempest will find a still nobler way to answer thee, and will make thee a witness and a preacher to all generations of the highest and deepest view of the nature of God.

VII.

ELIJAH AT HOREB (*continued*).

"*And after the earthquake a fire, but Jehovah was not in the fire, and after the fire a gentle, murmuring sound.*"[1]—1 KINGS xix. 12.

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[1] I take *d'māmāh* in the sense of "murmur" or "whisper." There may be a root *d–m*, "to murmur." Or if the literal meaning of *d'māmāh* be "stillness" (as the margin of the Revised Version suggests), we may remember that "silence" in Hebrew has a somewhat wide sense. The Septuagint everywhere renders *d'māmāh* αὔρα; *e.g.*, here, καὶ μετὰ τὸ πῦρ φωνὴ αὔρας λεπτῆς.

VII.

ELIJAH AT HOREB (*continued*).

SUBLIME indeed are the thoughts which flash upon the mind during a thunder-storm in the mountains, when, as at the creation, all the sons of God seem shouting for joy. In entertaining these thoughts the mind itself seems to grow larger, and deep is our debt of gratitude to the poet who in the songs of the archangels in *Faust* has given to some of them such noble expression. There is a great temptation in our time to undivinize nature; that is, to look at nature apart from God. That is inconsistent in a Christian, who deprives himself thereby of an immense pleasure, and God of a part of His glory. The more sublime phenomena of nature are so many eloquent appeals to us from Jehovah to open

our eyes to the greatness, and beauty, and wonderfulness of His universe. And yet it must be admitted that the thoughts which visit the mind during a grand thunderstorm are not those which bring us nearest to God. This is one of the lessons of the story of Elijah, who was familiar enough with the sterner and wilder side of nature, though he may not have seen in it what the eye of the great modern poet saw. Not in the great and strong wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, did the inner voice assure Elijah that he was in personal contact with his God. Then, as he listened for the echo from peak to peak, a solemn quiet fell, broken only to the attentive ear of Elijah by a murmur akin to silence, and beautifully described as "the sound of a gentle whisper." Then at length the inner voice spoke, It is Jehovah; and Elijah wrapped his face in the folds of his mantle, and stepped to the entrance of the cave. I must pause a few moments here, because it is important to understand the outward form of this acted parable.

Throughout antiquity there were two sounds

which more than any others betokened the communication of an oracle: the roaring of thunder and the rustling of trees. We cannot doubt that these sounds meant to Elijah what they meant to other Israelites. An unexpected clap of thunder and the rustling of ancient trees conveyed to those who had the prophetic gift an intimation of the will of God. We know that on Carmel Jehovah spoke to His prophet by a flash of lightning; and we cannot doubt that often, when he stood by some venerated tree, the rustling of its boughs had conveyed to him a message from the Most High. It is true that on this desolate, storm-ravaged mountain-side there can have been no friendly tree to become the sacramental channel of revelation; but nothing prevents us from explaining the "still small sound" of some other variety of nature's music, and the context at once suggests the gentle sound of a breeze, following on the rough storm-wind, such a breeze as is spoken of in Psalm cvii. 29: —

He turned the hurricane into a soft air,
And the waves of the sea were hushed.

And the significance of the story consists largely in this: that the two forms of sacramental symbol are put side by side. The one form was on this occasion deprived of its efficacy in order to do greater honour to the other. Does the pious writer of this story deny that, to those who had the prophetic gift of interpreting nature, there were special messages from heaven in the storm and the earthquake? By no means. At another time Jehovah might have spoken to Elijah, as He spoke to Job, out of the tempest; but upon this occasion the prophet was to be shown that the highest revelations were to be expected, not in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary, not in the most awful, but in the gentlest and most familiar, manifestations of God in nature. And so Jehovah gently whispers His message, "like a father consoling a fretful child" for some lost plaything.

It was an important moment in the history of revelation. Despise it those who can—those who are content to walk on in the old routine, with no eyes beyond the party struggles of the

day, and no ears for any but their own interpretations of the infinite truth. Let those who value the Gospel because it is a historical religion, and worthy of educated men and women, think with interest of the long-past stages through which our spiritual forefathers were led. From this time forward (supposing our narrative to be founded on fact), those stern and awful phenomena ceased to be regarded as the *usual* accessories of revelation. *Jehovah will roar from Zion*, says Amos, *and utter his voice from Jerusalem* (Amos i. 2); but the two most common expressions for a Divine revelation are henceforth "a word" and "a whisper." Very often, where the Authorized Version has simply, "The Lord saith," the Hebrew has "The whisper of Jehovah." The lesson is that not entirely by violence and compulsion, but, so far as is possible, by an appeal to man's better self, the messengers of Jehovah are henceforth to prepare His way. Contrast the Law as given in Exodus in the time of Moses with the Law as enlarged in Deuteronomy in the time of Jeremiah, and you will see the

difference between the two forms of sacramental symbolism brought before us in this acted parable.

But I must not allow myself to extract the spiritual kernel of the narrative before we have completed our study of its outward form. I said designedly, "not entirely by violence and compulsion." For the lesson which the acted parable bore to the prophets of Israel before the Captivity was evidently not the same as it bore to the chastened Jewish Church in Babylon (see Isa. xlii. 2, 3), much less the same as it now bears to each Christian soul. When in awed expectancy the prophet had taken his station at the entrance of the cave, what was it that seemed to strike upon his ear? The very same question which (in what manner the story does not inform us) Elijah's Divine Lord had put to him before the great convulsion of nature. And to this he replies in exactly the same words as before, as if this wondrous exhibition of the majesty of the All-holy One had left his inner senses untouched. Well, perhaps the writer means

that Elijah at least did not take in much of the significance of the parable; the lesson was doubtless too deep, too far-reaching, to be apprehended at the moment. And is not this sometimes the case with us? God brings us into situations the full spiritual significance of which we do not see for years afterwards. At any rate, Jehovah's reply communicates facts which were well adapted to overcome His servant's despondency. Elijah's work would not be dropped when he himself disappeared. He was commissioned to anoint Hazael king over Syria, Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha as his own successor—Hazael to punish Israel by "cutting it short" (2 Kings x. 32), Jehu to give Baal-worship a final and decisive blow, and Elisha to announce the impending doom of Israel as a kingdom in words which were so many stripes, according to that saying of Jehovah in Hosea *I have hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth* (Hos. vi. 5). With that commission Elijah is bound to be satisfied; the "goodly fellowship of the prophets"

is too united for envy or jealousy to find admission. *One soweth, and another reapeth;* and yet both he that soweth and he that reapeth shall in the great harvest-home *rejoice together.* But what of Israel? Is all this lavish expenditure of toil to issue in nothing but rebuke and punishment? No; these are the last words of the Divine oracle: *Yet will I leave me* (not, Yet have I left me) *seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.* Here again we are carried into the region of symbols. Not one hundred and forty-four thousand, the symbolic number of redeemed Israel in the Apocalypse, but seven thousand, will the survivors of the Divine judgment be. Few perhaps, and yet enough to form the nucleus of a regenerate people, for "the kingdom of God is always stronger than it seems." Yes, few, but in the sight of God precious, will those faithful servants be, who have fought the good fight against Baal and kept the true faith of the holy God—that "remnant" of the northern Israelites which

was finally to be united with the "remnant" of Southern Israel spoken of by the great prophet Isaiah. Not much is said here of these seven thousand; but the pious writer of Elijah's story lived, we must think, somewhat later than Hosea, and in Hosea we find a promise that *the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall gather themselves together under one head and come up out of the land of their captivity* (Hos. i. 11). To have developed this happy prospect here would have been a mistake, because Elijah's strength lay, not in bright anticipations of the future, but in the practical treatment of present difficulties. Thus, even in the Old Testament, that saying of St. Paul is true that there is a rich multiplicity in the gifts and operations of the one Divine Spirit (1 Cor. xii. 4—6).

Do you not feel inclined to pity our prophet? "True mysticism," as a French writer says,[1] "has never sounded sweeter chords;" but Elijah cannot hear them. The finest of all the parables in the Old Testament has been acted before

[1] Réville, "Prolegomena to the History of Religion."

him, but a few bare facts are all that it conveys to him. I do not say that the facts were of trifling importance to Elijah, though, being divorced from truths which *we* value so much, they may appear so to us. It was quite worth the prophet's while to make the pilgrimage to Horeb to free his mind from that "perilous stuff" pride and unbelief, and to feel, however imperfectly, the continuity of God's work in all generations. He came to the holy place moaning like a dove; he departed with the aspiring heart of a falcon. How he acquitted himself of his tasks,[1] we are not told; but we may be sure that to interfere in the succession to two thrones must have required the highest moral courage and the most sublime faith. All this is true; and yet when we read the story over again we feel a want of correspondence between the splendid scenery of the revelation and the revelation itself, just as in the story of the youthful Samuel we are conscious of a

[1] 2 Kings viii. 7—15, ix., which assign these tasks to Elisha, evidently belong to the same biography of Elijah as the story of Naboth.

certain fall in the tone of the narrator as he passes from the sweet description of Samuel's childlike openness mingled with surprise to the awful details communicated in the sequel. And so, projecting ourselves, as it were, into the personalities of Elijah and Samuel, we are tempted to complain because they did not see the full significance of such great events in their lives. But we forget that it could not have been otherwise, unless God had chosen to break the fundamental laws of the mind. No human schoolmaster would dream of doing this. If I were to give a page of Plato to a young boy, he might indeed learn it by rote, but he would never understand its subtle and profound philosophy. And there is no evidence that the great Teacher of the prophets has ever chosen to break *these* laws any more than those of the world outside man. It is of the most vital importance that the God whom we conceive in our mind should be free from all appearance of caprice and vacillation. Most earnest are the prophets of the Old Testament on this point. *Thus saith Jehovah: If my*

covenant of day and night stand not, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then will I cast away the sin of Jacob and David my servant (Jer. xxxiii. 25). God cannot break these ordinances ; things may happen that are above nature, but not that are against nature. God never forces His will either upon the sentient or the non-sentient creation. And so it comes to pass that, throughout the Old Testament, revelations are always proportioned to the mental state of the person receiving them.

If these things are so, we cannot wonder at and cannot seriously pity Elijah. Great as he was, he could no more fathom the depths of this heavenly parable than Moses could catch the full meaning of the Decalogue, or Ten Words of God. But why, some one may perhaps ask, was so stimulating an experience granted to Elijah, if his nature was so little fitted to profit by it ? The answer is that he lived in an age of the simplest faith, while men still believed that to an attuned ear the thunder and the breeze conveyed special messages from above.

Not for himself only, but, even more, for the Jewish and Christian Church, Elijah received this parable. It is a mistake, as St. Paul tells us, to suppose that the Old Testament stories were written down merely for historical purposes. They are not merely histories, but symbols; or, let me rather say, in most cases they are not so much histories as symbols. The real historical facts have to be deduced by patient criticism, but the truths which the stories symbolize have continually new applications. *These things*, we read in 1 Cor. x. 11, *happened to our fathers by way of type*[1] (or figure); *and they were written for our admonition, upon whom* (for St. Paul thought that the sands of time were running out) *the ends of the ages are come.*

And what is it that the acted parable of the

[1] A.V., "for ensamples" (margin, "types")—an interesting use of the good old word "ensample" or "sample." The Greek has τυπικῶς, v.l. τύποι, Delitzsch *lih'yōth l'mōfēth* (see Isa. viii. 18; Ezek. xii. 11). A revised version of the Bible for home use would surely render *mōfēth* in the Old Testament and τύπος in the New Testament "type." On this word comp. Max Müller's recent volume of essays.

hurricane, and the earthquake, and the gently whispering breeze conveys to us? *Unto you*, says our Lord, *it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*. God loves to reveal His mysteries, and I think this mystery at least is being revealed to us of this generation with special fulness. One hopes there may have been truth in that saying of a mediæval claimant of the prophetic gift[1] that there would be three ages in the Church—the age of the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Spirit. Surely all true Christians, whatever be the cut of their mantle, do in their hearts honour the Holy Spirit with the earnestness of deepening spiritual needs. Not with rough rebukes, but with sweet persuasions, taught by Christ's own Spirit, do the preachers of our day woo subjects for the King of saints.[2] Do they, in taking this course, disparage the Law? Not more than St. Paul did. When the proud Judaizing

[1] Joachim, Abbot of Flora in the kingdom of Naples. See Milman, "Latin Christianity," v., 254—257.

[2] Need I say that I do not dream of disparaging preachers like Whitefield, the John Baptist of his time, whose stern preaching was doubtless necessary to break the hard rock

Christians accused him of "making void the Law by faith," what was his reply? *Far be it; yea, we establish the law.* And so to us, the modern disciples (as I hope) of no meaner a theologian than St. Paul, the Law, given through Moses and expanded by the Spirit of Christ, remains, and will remain, the moral test and the moral ideal both of nations and of individuals. But we want more than this. The Law can do two things: it can convince us of sin, and it can make us hunger and thirst after righteousness; but it cannot give us strength to perform the mandates. Oh, how many have tried in their own strength to fulfil the Law—tried and failed, because they wanted a Hand to guide them, and the Law, with its *Thou shalt do this*, stood over against them like the stern front of Mount Horeb. How could Moses help them to climb the steep of duty? Why, he even broke the tables of the Law at Israel's first sin; he had no sympathy with weakness—no "Hands

of human nature in the last century? Need I also guard myself against the imputation of ignorance of the true reading of Rev. xv. 3?

stretched out to draw me near." There is only One who *can* help—One who can strengthen our feeble wills, and concentrate our distracted hearts; it is He who, by His intense sympathy (for He was in all points tempted like as we are), identified Himself with the race of man and offered Himself up for it as a spotless sacrifice.

And how does Jesus help us? By giving us a new motive power—even that blessed Spirit whose chosen emblem is the wind—not the destroying storm-wind, but the refreshing breeze. The wind of the Spirit is like a musical instrument, with various stops. Sometimes it is a *rushing, mighty wind*,[1] for without a mighty inspiration how can the Church carry on Christ's work? Sometimes it is toned down to a whisper as of mountain pines, lest it should

[1] Acts ii. 2, ἦχος ὥσπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας. Delitzsch paraphrases, *k'qōl rūakh ṣe'ārāh:* "like the sound of a storm-wind." But the narrator chooses a phrase which may mean either a destructive storm-wind (comp. Ezek. xiii. 13, Sept.), or what we should call a stiff breeze. The Peshitto has *rūhō 'azizīthō:* "a vehement wind;" Van Dyck, *rûḥ in 'aṣifat in:* "a strongly blowing wind."

break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. But oh, be sure there is a distinct articulate message even in that gentle murmur. To those whose ears have been opened it is no vague, meaningless sigh, but, as the familiar, though inaccurate, version gives it, "a still small voice."

Nor is the message the same to-day as yesterday; it is like God's mercies, which are new every morning. Oh, let not the cares of the world close our ears to its heavenly pleadings; but may those beautiful words of the prophet be verified in each of us, *He wakeneth mine ear morning by morning* (Isa. l. 4).

The proud Assyrian monarch said of his generals, *Are not my captains altogether kings* (Isa. x. 8)? The meanest of Christ's soldiers may claim this kingly rank for himself, inasmuch as he ever draws supplies of light and strength from the King of kings. Oh, how grand it is to be, not merely delivered from the death of sin, but inspired with the breath of a new life! And all this comes to us through Jesus our Brother—the image of

the invisible God. No longer, with Elijah, need we pray, *Bow thy heavens, Jehovah; and come down*, for Jehovah has come down, not, as of old, in cloud and flame, but in the vesture of a sweet and gentle human form. We saw Him not, nor heard we that voice which spake as never man spake; but we have the perpetual fulfilment of His most sure promise *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.* Yes; we know that He *has* come to us by the Spirit whom He sent us from the Father. It is the Spirit, and yet it is Jesus, whose "still small voice" we hear saying, *I am with you always;* and to both are the responsive breathings of the devout soul addressed.

> "No sign we ask from heaven above,
> Nor rushing wind nor hovering dove,
> Our loving work content to do
> With things on earth alone in view;
> But we believe, O Lord, that Thou,
> With power Divine, art with us now.'

VIII.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"—1 KINGS xxi. 20.

VIII.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

HOW pathetic it is that Elijah could not himself sound the depths of the great parable which had been acted before him, and so could not carry on the religious reformation of Israel into a new stage. If he could but have recognized the legitimate cravings of the popular mind for a God who was not merely all-mighty, but all-gracious, and, adding to this conception that of God's all-righteousness, had gone about persuading men to receive it, like Him of whom it was said, *He shall not cry, nor clamour, nor make his voice to be heard in the street,* there would have been some hope of the moral and spiritual regeneration even of a downward-moving people. But Elijah, though strong in practice, was weak in spiritual

intuition, and could but prepare the way for a far greater prophet of the northern kingdom—Hosea. One might perhaps have thought that he would now retire into privacy, and wait in perfect peace for that dismissal which only yesterday he had tried to extort by fretful complaints. If the compiler of the Book of Kings had been guided by merely æsthetic considerations, he would have made Elijah do this, and would have followed up the narrative of Horeb by the equally grand closing scene. That he has not done so is to be ascribed to his reluctance to allow any significant tradition respecting the great prophet to pass into oblivion. Two traditional facts in the life of Elijah are therefore interposed between the scene at Horeb and the ascension. One of them is altogether disappointing; I mean the account of Elijah's destruction of the companies sent to him by King Ahaziah. That a spiritual hero like Elijah should end his active career thus is startling in the extreme. At an earlier point one might perhaps admit the relative justification and therefore the possibility of

such a deed; but that from the God who had so patiently educated him to better things he should crave as his last boon the destruction of his fellow-creatures is contrary to psychological probability, and an insult to that higher reason which is the voice of God. Did the compiler of Kings think of these objections when he placed the story where it now stands? Surely not, any more than St. Matthew and St. Mark lay claim to strict accuracy in points of chronology. Did he even mean to insist on its historical character apart from its chronology? Surely not; he is evidently half historian, half preacher, and to this narrative as well as to others we may apply the words of the poet Whittier—

> "The picture-writing of the world's gray seers,
> The myths and parables of the primal years,
> Whose letter kills, by Thee interpreted,
> Take healthful meanings, fitted to our needs."

Let us then take this strange narrative, quite apart from the story of Horeb (itself the grandest of parables), as a symbolic representation of the spirit of the earlier dispensation. We

have our Lord's authority for this. In one of the most striking scenes of the gentle painter-evangelist we find the "sons of thunder"—James and John—wishing to call down fire from heaven to consume some Samaritan heretics. Jesus, however, rebukes them, in words which themselves burn like coals of fire: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them* (Luke ix. 55, 56). I know that there are many who think on critical grounds that this passage does not properly belong to the third Gospel.[1] For myself, I care not. Whoever inserted it in its present place did so with a fine feeling of the spirit of St. Luke and a perfect comprehension of the aim and motives of Jesus, and I see in the insertion a fulfilment of that beautiful promise *The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you* (John xiv. 26, R.V.).

[1] The Revised Version omits it. See, however, its marginal note.

I will not therefore pause on the details of the narrative in 2 Kings i., but pass on to one which, if it were a romance, would deserve to rank with the finest productions of the modern psychological novelist, and, if it is history, supplies valuable material for estimating the social state of Israel under Ahab. From every point of view, the story of Naboth deserves an attentive study—from the æsthetic, from the historical, from the religious. Yes, from the religious point of view it is difficult to over-estimate its importance. It is probably not by him who penned the fine stories of Cherith Zarephath, and Carmel ; but it reveals the same preoccupation with high moral and religious ideas, and contrasts in this respect with the sad story of the destruction of the two captains and their fifties. But let us recall the details of the narrative.

The town of Jezreel stands high, you would scarcely guess how high as you approach it riding across the gently swelling plain of Esdraelon. Looking eastward, however, you see that there is a steep, rocky descent on that

side into the valley of Mount Gilboa, with the remains of winepresses cut in the rock, showing that the slope was once laid out in vineyards. There the vineyard of Naboth must have been, which Ahab coveted. Close by it, we are told, was the royal palace. King Ahab had been dwelling in his other palace at Samaria, but he came to Jezreel to see Naboth with a view to a perfectly fair transference of the vineyard to himself. *Give me thy vineyard*, he said, *that I may have it for a garden of herbs, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard, or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money;* that is, in bars of silver, for there was then no coined money. It was, however, the ancient law of Israel that the land should always remain in the families to which it had been assigned. Only in the case of poverty a temporary alienation of land seems to have been permissible. But Naboth was evidently not so poor as to need to sell his vineyard, and Ahab was therefore to blame for tempting him to do so. But let us be just to Ahab, for he

did not at any rate propose to take the land by force. We read in Isaiah and in Micah of those who *join house to house* and *lay field to field*, and who *violently treat a man and his house, even a man and his heritage* (Isa. v. 8; Micah ii. 2). Things were not so bad as this in the northern kingdom in Ahab's reign.

The scene of the narrative then shifts to the palace in Samaria. The author of this story differs from the earlier biographer of Elijah in that he does not scruple to set Ahab in a somewhat ridiculous light. The king goes back in an ill-temper, and, like a spoiled child, throws himself on his couch at dinner-time, turns away his face, and will eat no bread. Jezebel asks the cause of his sadness. *She* has no scruples; nothing seems unfair against such a confirmed adherent of the law of Jehovah[1] as Naboth. *Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.* Truly that saying

[1] It is not intended to imply that Naboth was acquainted with a written law.

of Isaiah's would have been appropriate in Elijah's lips, *A wilful child is my people's tyrant, and women rule over it* (Isa. iii. 12). So Ahab's imperious consort seizes his pen and his seal, and writes letters in the king's name to the chief men of Jezreel—as David wrote to Joab concerning Uriah the Hittite—directing them, if they wished to please Ahab, to get rid of their obnoxious fellow-citizen Naboth. Not, however, in the coarse way adopted by David and Joab, but with due observance of all constitutional forms. An assembly was to be convened, and Naboth was to be set on high among the people—that is, in one of the most honourable seats—as a respected and influential burgher; and then, after certain religious forms had been gone through—penitential forms, for it was to be a day of public humiliation for some great act of wickedness—suddenly false witnesses were to be brought in (think of Jesus Christ in the high-priest's palace), who were to accuse Naboth of high treason both to Israel's earthly and to its heavenly King, saying, *Naboth hath cursed Jehovah and the*

king. The black deed was consummated. Demoralized by the annual residence of the Court in their midst, these unworthy ministers of justice hastened to comply with what they supposed the king's request. Again one thinks of later times (I believe the writer meant us to do so—in telling the tale of Naboth he was expressing his horror of the judicial murders which he had seen)—one thinks of Isaiah's complaint, *And he looked for judgment, but behold shedding of blood; for righteousness, but behold a cry* (Isa. v. 7). Then they sent to Jezebel (they knew that she was the true *king* of Israel), saying, *Naboth is stoned.* They did not need to tell her that his sons were also stoned, according to the grim custom of Hebrew antiquity.

So the vineyard is forfeited to the crown; and Ahab *goes down* (for Samaria stands higher than Jezreel) to visit his bright and cheerful summer retreat, to which so strangely, as he says to himself, this convenient addition has been made. Can you not fancy him walking up and down, with the air of a landed proprietor,

planning improvements? "It must in future," he says to himself, "be a garden of herbs. Vineyards enough I have. How pleasant it will be to leave the narrow streets of the city and the din of the gossipers or the plaintiffs and defendants in the city gate, and sit under the shade of a fig tree in my own garden!" Suddenly a tall form approaches: he knows it but too well; it is his personified conscience, or, as Ahab would rather say, his evil genius. It is Elijah. In a moment Ahab comes to himself, though not in the sweet filial spirit of the penitent prodigal. He comes to himself so far at least as to recognize that Elijah has good reason to be on his track, but not so far as to thank him for acting like a true friend and disturbing him in his fool's paradise. *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* he cries, his better and his worse self expressing themselves simultaneously. His better self says to him, Thou art Naboth's murderer. As the anointed king, was it not thy duty to see personally to the administration of justice? If thy wife infringed thy prerogative, was it not thy duty

to punish her, and make compensation to Naboth's heirs? Then spoke up his worse self, offering plausible reasons for questioning this. It was not he, but Jezebel, who had planned this bold stroke. If Jezebel had told him that she wished to write letters in his name, he could have stopped her. He feels sure (so sophistical is a man's worse self) that he *would* have done so. For had he not proved how anxious he was to obtain the vineyard by strictly fair means? And then was not Naboth perhaps really guilty? His trial had been perfectly regular. Elijah might say that the witnesses were men of no character, "sons of Belial;" but then Elijah was his personal enemy.

But the prophet remorselessly brushes away the cobwebs of his brain, and gives his support to Ahab's better self. The sinner is cowed, and confesses his guilt, not indeed in words, but in the expressive picture-language of Oriental mourning. *When Ahab heard this* (we are told), *he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and lay in sackcloth, and*

went softly; that is, with slow, measured gait. And this repentance, which, for the time at least, was apparently sincere, was accepted by his God. Not in his days, but in his son's days, did the threatened judgment come upon the family of Ahab. A small comfort to Ahab, you might think. But ancient Jewish feeling was different in this respect from ours. The principle of the solidarity, the union, of the father and his children, almost pervades the Old Testament. Ahab would suffer in his children, but it was at least a mercy to Israel that the disastrous period of revolution was postponed for a time. Slowly and painfully did men come to see that each person must suffer for his own sin; and that, if the children of a sinner are punished, it is not for their father's sin, but for their reproduction of it in a heightened degree. Anyhow what the inspired writer wishes us to dwell upon is the truth that mercy may be had even by the greatest sinner. It is perhaps a poor expression which this grand truth finds here, but how early a place it occupies in the catalogue

of evangelical passages! It is like the first red streak of dawn in the east.

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? The title was undeserved; Elijah was not Ahab's personal enemy. After the great day of Carmel, he even ran before his chariot, like a courier. He might have called down fire from heaven upon Ahab, as another biographer actually says that he did on the messengers of Ahaziah. But no; in his heart he interceded for Ahab, and God—to whom the American poet[1] so devoutly says,—

> "All that I feel of pity Thou hast known
> Before I was; my best is all Thy own"—

heard and answered his prayer.

It seems hardly necessary to apply this striking story to ourselves, just because it is so striking. Our Lord was not, it would seem, fond of interpreting His parables. He did so when the dulness of His disciples compelled Him. What is the story of Naboth but an inspired comment on the Tenth Commandment,

[1] Again I quote the noble-hearted Whittier.

showing forth at once its meaning and the kindness of Jehovah (oh, yes, one of our God's names is still "Jehovah") in issuing such a command? What I want to explain now is the cause of Ahab's strange moral downfall—I call it strange because even if in his heart he was still a Baal-worshipper, like his wife, there was no necessity for a Baal-worshipper to break the second table of the Law so conspicuously.[1] Elijah's widow-woman at Zarephath was a Baal-worshipper, and she certainly "loved her neighbour as herself." The truth is, I think, that Ahab's nature was not a religious one. We have seen that his introduction of the Tyrian Baal was probably due to political considerations. Tyre would and could only grant its friendship if equal respect was paid in Israel to Baal and to Jehovah. Ahab, I strongly think, was a devout worshipper of neither; and as morality was even more closely

[1] It is wonderful, the way in which the evil tendencies of a religion are sometimes counteracted by "the Light which lighteneth every man." See Mungo Park's "Travels in Africa."

connected with religion in Ahab's day than it is in ours, the consequence of his undevoutness was that he had no morality but such as suited his conscience. To a devout worshipper of Jehovah it must have been easy to love his neighbour as himself, almost easier from one point of view than it is for us, because his religion did not recognize the spiritual rights of the individual. Not to the individual Israelite, but to the community of which he was a member, were Jehovah's protecting care and love assured. It was only through Israel that the blessings of the covenant descended to the Israelite, just as in Roman Catholic countries it is only through the Church—*i.e.*, the Church as they regard it—that the individual Christian too often believes that he enjoys the blessings of the Gospel. Brotherly love was therefore an indispensable quality of a good Israelite, not only that he might imitate Israel's God, but because as a fact the Israelites collectively formed a single organism, to which alone Jehovah's favour was secured. It ought, I say, to have been easy to an Israelite to love his

neighbour as himself, because to all intents and purposes his neighbour *was* a part of himself. Ahab, however, was not a devout Israelite; and therefore he had no brotherly love. In times like his the twelfth Psalm might well have been written, which begins, *Help, Jehovah, for the man of brotherly love is no more, for the faithful have vanished from among the children of men.* This would have been only a slight exaggeration, for was not Elijah told upon Mount Horeb that there were but seven thousand Israelites who in worship and in practice obeyed the law of their holy God?

This was how Ahab—a man in whom generous feelings were not wholly deficient, and who died nobly, even if he lived basely—fell into this grievous sin. He failed to realize that no statecraft could be a substitute for the Divine favour, and that this favour was conditional on Israel's cleaving fast to its God and cherishing brotherly love in its midst. And, my friends, are the conditions of God's favour altered now? I know that we are not as dependent spiritually upon the Church as

Ahab was upon Israel. As Jeremiah foretold in that great prophecy which is among the title-deeds of our evangelical inheritance, we need no priest always at our hand to teach us and to offer sacrifice for us, for each one of us individually is "taught of God," and can obtain from Him "true absolution and release." Yet it is most certain that a religion which is divorced from brotherly love is dead in the sight of God. We may perhaps, through favouring circumstances, keep clear of such glaring transgressions as Ahab's; but remember that in the account of the last judgment in Matt. xxv. the things for which those on the left hand are condemned are not sins of *com*-mission, but of *o*mission: *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.*

Remember, too, that brotherly love means far more to a Christian than to an Israelite. Christ has broken down the partition-walls of nations; Jew and Gentile, Greek and bar-

barian, are alike brethren in Him. Henceforth "brotherly love" means to a Christian worthy of the name just what it meant to Christ. An inspiring but also a humiliating thought! Well may Christ say to each and all of us, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!* Alas! which of us does? How could we sleep if we remembered all that has been omitted or not rightly done by Christians in the past, and all that remains to be done in the future? Not to destroy men's lives, nor to *heal their hurts slightly* (Jer. vi. 14), but grandly and largely to save them, by baptizing men instrumentally with a heavenlier fire than Elijah dreamed of—this is the work which Christ began, and to which every form of moral and spiritual work is helpful. Yes; it is a mistake to interpret the phrase "spiritual work" in a narrow sense; let us read the Gospel for the tenth Sunday after Trinity (1 Cor. xii. 1, etc.) and form bolder hopes. What we want is, not, from misplaced humility, to deny ourselves Christian ambitions, but to get that "power from on high" which our

Saviour promised to those who share in His "travail." With work for Christ to do and a "Divine electric fire" to vitalize us, we shall have no room for purely selfish desires. Let our master-impulse be to work for the kingdom of God, and we shall be raised above that sordid but most common temptation which was the ruin of Ahab. For what is covetousness? It is simply desire directed towards the wrong objects—those which have no connection with the soul's true life. St. Paul calls it idolatry, and bids us mortify it. But how shall we do so? By starving our emotional nature? Oh, no, but by nourishing it with purer and more satisfying food. "Is it hard," cries the saintly Faber,—

> "Is it hard to serve God, timid soul? Hast thou found
> Gloomy forests, dark glens, mountain-tops, on thy way?
> All the hard would be easy, all the tangles unwound.
> Wouldst thou only desire as well as obey."

For *his commandments are not grievous*, and His *promises exceed all that we can desire.*

IX.

THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH.

"*And as they still went on and talked, behold chariots of fire and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder and Elijah went up by the tempest*[2] *into heaven.*"—2 KINGS ii. 11.

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[1] So R.V. margin.

[2] A.V. and R.V., "by a whirlwind."

IX.

THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH.

ELIJAH'S noble but weary work was over. The time was come when, as the narrative says, *Jehovah would take up Elijah into heaven by a tempest.* No more was that strange figure in the rough mantle to be seen hurrying to and fro between kings' palaces and the wild mountain-side. Elijah had not done all that he wished, but he had done all that God sent him to do. Jehovah-worship had not been restored to its original purity (witness the story of Naboth), but the dangerous Baal-worship of Jezebel had sunk at any rate into the religion of a sect. Elisha had been anointed to take up the reformer's work, and far away in the distance there was the prospect of a nation growing up out of the seven thousand into *a people prepared for the Lord.*

It was at the hill-town of Gilgal—not that near Jericho, but one in the centre of Palestine —that Elijah and his disciple were now residing. A guild of prophets also dwelt there —for this is the meaning of the phrase *the sons of the prophets*—so that we may conjecture that the great leader gave his last thoughts to confirming his younger colleagues in the true religion. Elijah and Elisha descended the hill together. But before they had gone far, with a tenderness which reminds us of his sojourn at Zarephath, Elijah turned to his companion and said, *Tarry here, I pray thee, for Jehovah hath sent me to Bethel.* To this the faithful minister would not listen; he would go, if need were, even to Horeb, to attend his master to the last. So they went together to Bethel—one of the most ancient sanctuaries of Israel. It seems as if the prophet wished to take leave of the hallowed spots which he loved so much. Another prophetic guild was established here; and its members, warned by some prophetic instinct that their leader was seeking the appointed place of his

departure, came out to meet them. While Elijah was resting, they called his companion aside, and said, *Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head to-day?* But the matter was too grave to be made the subject of conversation. A collected mind was as necessary for the disciple as for his master at this turning-point in the lives of both. Once more Elijah tried to persuade his minister to remain behind, and once more Elisha was proof against entreaty.

They arrived at the city of palm trees (no palm trees are there now), and the same scenes were repeated as before. It is a wondrous story. Does Elijah's strength begin to fail in the hot, steaming Jordan valley? Oh, no; onward he moves, drawn with cords of love by his invisible Guide to the other side of the Jordan—the side which, for Gilead's sake, he loves the best. There he stands, gazing; it is not a noble river, but far more interesting to him than the Abana and the Pharpar; and if not a wide stream, it has at any rate a resistless rush which gives it a character of its own.

Will Elijah be detained? for the stream is too deep to ford. No; his God will honour him as He honoured Moses in days of old, when He said, *Lift up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it.* "He ungirds the rough mantle from around his shaggy frame; he rolls it together, as if into a wonder-working staff; he smites the turbid river, as though it were a living enemy; and the waters divide hither and thither, and they two go over on dry ground."[1] At a distance stand fifty prophets of Jericho. They respect Elijah's privacy, and yet wish with their keen eyes to follow him as far as they can. And now the Gileadite is at home again; how he enjoys a last look at the beloved hills! *His eye* is *not dim, nor his natural force abated*—these words were first said of Moses, but in the spirit of the narrative we may safely apply them to Elijah. Together they climb the steep ascent—the old prophet and the young. Can we doubt which ascent it is? It *must* be that of Nebo, or else the last touch which gives perfection would be

[1] Stanley, "Jewish Church," ii., 290.

wanting to Elijah's portrait. And as they press on, the elder prophet breaks the solemn stillness with generous words: *Ask what I shall do for thee*—(but ask quickly) *before I be taken from thee.* There could be only one gift which Elisha would desire; unworldliness is always a sure mark of the true prophetic character. *I pray thee,* says Elisha, *let a double portion of thy spirit*—the portion of a firstborn son (Deut. xxi. 17)—*be upon me.* This is all that he dares ask; there could no more be a second Elijah than a second Moses; the great Artificer of souls never repeats Himself.—But even this is no slight boon; it is a bold venture of faith to ask it. Of course Elijah, friendly as he is, cannot himself grant it; the God of the spirits of all flesh can alone transfer or transmit prophetic capacity. Nor can even God Himself do so without a heroic effort on the part of Elisha; only through a fiery trial can this heavenly gift be won. *Thou hast asked a hard thing,* replies Elijah; *nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. If thou see*

me—that is, If thou canst gaze at me without being "blinded by excess of light." For Elijah is about to be transfigured on Nebo,[1] like our Lord on the slopes of Hermon; the reflection of the Divine glory which has so long irradiated his spirit is about to manifest itself outwardly, and who but one of Jehovah's mighty ones can see this unscathed? What more passed between Elijah and Elisha, the story saith not; but the former at least could scarcely help recalling that other wild mountain walk and the glorious vision which had been its goal. Again he seeks an ancient mountain sanctuary, warned by the "still small voice;" but how great and glorious the vision this time will be, he cannot guess. This only he knows: that it will be no transient brightness, but heaven itself, and that his "mortality is about to be swallowed up of life." Expectantly he gazes at the sea of peaks around him; and lo, the heralds of the great King already appear. The mountains begin to gleam with flashes

[1] "And lo, as they entered" (the Celestial City), "they were transfigured" ("Pilgrim's Progress," Part I.).

of lightning, and to peal with claps of thunder; the flashes are God's arrows, and the thunder is His voice. Elijah has always thrilled with joy at a thunderstorm; but how his heart bounds to-day! And now the lightning comes closer; we should have said it was like falling masses of fire,[1] but, in his more poetic style, our story-teller can see in it the same chariots and horses of fire,[2] which invisibly surround the dwellings of the just (2 Kings vi. 17; Psalm xxxiv. 7). This heavenly host parts Elijah from his disciple; but Elisha, whose inward as well as outward eyes have been opened, can see Elijah carried up by the tempest—that is probably by one of these fiery chariots—into heaven.[3] *And Elisha saw it; and he cried, My*

[1] See p. 118.

[2] Bunyan unconsciously corrects the "chariot" of the Authorized Version in his fine adaptation of 2 Kings ii. 11: "But, behold, all the banks beyond the river were full of horses and chariots, which were come down from above to accompany him to the city gate" ("Pilgrim's Progress," Part II.).

[3] Comp. Ecclus. xlviii. 9: "who was taken up in a whirlwind, in a chariot of fiery horses." What does Milligan gain by rejecting this obvious interpretation?

father, my father, the chariots[1] *of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes, and* (like one who mourns) *rent them in two pieces.* Presently he will assume the sacred mantle of Elijah, but for the moment he forgets himself in sorrow for Israel's loss. For Elijah was indeed like chariots and horsemen to his people, not so much for his power of working miracles, as because he was Israel's personified conscience. Yes; he was a born chariot-fighter; swiftly and surely he dealt his blows against all that was displeasing to Jehovah; and the fiery chariots and horses which were all that Elisha could see after the disappearance of Elijah were to him a speaking similitude of the spirit of his master.

Elijah's end corresponds with singular exactness to his beginning. He appears in the history of Israel like a meteor, and he disappears as mysteriously. The mountain hollows and ravines were searched, as when Moses

[1] So R.V.; A.V. and R.V. margin, "the chariot."

died[1] (the Jews say) of a kiss from God, but none could find the body of Elijah; and it is in perfect harmony with the spirit of these earlier narratives that Moses and Elias are introduced together on the Transfiguration Mount communing with Him who resembled but surpassed them both.

Surely I may call this narrative the grandest prose-poem in the Old Testament. A dry-as-dust historian may reject it because of the late date of its composition. A student of St. John may question it on the ground of our Lord's words *No man hath ascended into heaven but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven* (John iii. 13, R.V.). To me it seems to possess great value both historically and devotionally even if it be only a prose-poem. Historically it tells us that the Jewish Church in the time of its author was ready to believe that some extraordinary persons might and must escape death. This makes Jewish unbelief of the resurrection of

[1] Deut. xxxiv. 6: "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."

Christ the more extraordinary. Devotionally we may at least be excused for regarding it as a poetic symbol of our Lord's ascension. In one of our Ascensiontide hymns we read,—

> "'Master,' may we ever say,
> 'Taken from our head to-day,
> See, Thy faithful servants see,
> Ever gazing up to Thee,'"

where Charles Wesley evidently alludes to the speech of the sons of the prophets to Elisha. This appears all the more natural when we remember that several of Elijah's wonderful works are suggestive of striking miracles of Jesus. Still if we look more closely, we shall, I think, see that the parallel is not complete. How calm and bright are the transfiguration and ascension of Jesus; how awful and tempestuous is that of Elijah![1] Nor could it well have been otherwise. Comparing the lives of Elijah and of Jesus as wholes, we cannot say that the relation between them is that of a type to its antitype. As our Lord taught His disciples, it was John the Baptist of whom

[1] In Elijah's case the two scenes are fused in one.

Elijah was the type, because the character of both was similar, and the mission of both was to preach righteousness and to turn Israel's heart back to its God. For myself, it is not of the transfiguration and ascension of Christ that I am reminded by the Hebrew prose-poem, but of an important stage in the lives of His followers.

Do you know those beautiful pages which close both parts of *our* great religious prose-poem—the "Pilgrim's Progress"? It is more especially the conclusion of the second part to which I would draw your attention. Read it again, if I may venture to ask you, to-day, because it was two hundred years last Friday [1] since the "Glorious Dreamer" passed into the eternal realities. There you will find the land of Beulah described, that pleasant, sunny region on the banks of the river, where the pilgrims await the messenger who is to summon them to their home. Bunyan's idea of the last stage in the Christian's pilgrimage is that of a waiting-time,[1] during which the soul by prayer

[1] Bunyan preached his last sermon (on John i. 13) August 19th, 1688, and died Friday, August 31st.

and meditation fortifies itself for its supreme trial. How many there are to whom this description applies, persons of scanty leisure, who have longed in vain to "come apart and rest a while," and to whom the solitude even of a sick-chamber gives a welcome opportunity for reflection! Such have often found it painfully difficult to combine the varied interests of this and of the other world, to be at once worldly and "other-worldly," to *render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's.* But are there not many others who, even in the last stage of life, do not need such complete seclusion, and upon whom therefore it is not providentially enforced? "In journeyings often"—journeyings of mind or of body—they can still meditate and pray. Movement is to them a necessity of existence, and progress the essence of life. These two classes

[1] This seems to be Bunyan's final idea. In Part I. he represents Christian as partly walking through the land of Beulah, partly resting or detained there by brief sickness, also as crossing the river without waiting for a messenger to call him. This gives a less consistent picture than that in Part II.

of pilgrims are widely different, and the story of the great travelling prophet's last journey[1] is specially edifying to the latter. All his life long Elijah has stood in spirit before Jehovah, and has alternated between meditative retirement and bold intervention in the highest national concerns. Why should he change his manner of life now? The Divine Spirit sympathizes with him, and bids him visit his fellow-prophets once more and let them print his holy features upon their memory; after that, let him go up to meet his God on the sacred mount. So Elijah becomes a type of those who remain to the end thankful citizens of two worlds, and who, amidst all their activities, can say, with the poet-philanthropist,—

> "And so beside the silent sea
> I wait the muffled oar;
> No harm from Him can come to me
> On ocean or on shore."[2]

The truth is that as there are two types of

[1] It is with great insight that the Talmudic legend represents Elijah as an indefatigable traveller, often to be met with in the ruined places of Palestine.

[2] Whittier, "The Eternal Goodness."

religious character, so there are two kinds of waiting, and we cannot say that one is distinctly better than the other; God has appointed them both. Nor can it be denied that in some respects both classes of Christ's pilgrims may turn Elijah's closing scene into golden coin. The Christian knows, even as Elijah knew, that he is not walking downwards to the tomb, but upwards to glory, and that the "King of love" will only send chariots of fire to those whom He strengthens to bear them. He thanks God from his heart that not to a chosen few alone—to an Enoch and to an Elijah—this prospect of the heavenly glories is opened, as the Jews long thought, and that not merely, like the Psalmist, in one of his most exalted moments, but in his deepest physical depression, he will be able to murmur the words—

According to thy purpose wilt thou guide me,
And afterward receive me with glory (Psalm lxxiii. 24).

Even though his departure, like Elijah's, should be shrouded in mystery, he knows that with his redeemed spirit all will be well. He

will be for ever on the Transfiguration Mount in that tabernacle which will never be taken down, holding high converse with the noblest society of heaven. Will he be meet for such a privilege? Yes; the Father long since *made him meet*, as St. Paul says, *for the inheritance of the saints in light* (Col. i. 12). Worthless without Christ, he is perfect in Christ; and if he needs a quiet, final preparation-time, the Father will not refuse it, for *precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints* (Psalm cxvi. 15).

Precious! Do we all of us realize what this means? Let us go to one[1] who, if he were not such a great novelist, would be a great preacher, nay, who has preached better than many of us by his novels, and listen to the opening words of a simple, touching prayer, which ought to be read in its own expressive Scottish: "O Thou in whose sight our death is precious *and no light matter*, who through darkness leadest to light, and through death to the greater life, we cannot believe that Thou

[1] Mr. George Macdonald, in "David Elginbrod."

wouldest give us any good thing to take the same back again, for that would be but child's play. We believe that Thou takest that Thou mayest give again the same thing better than before, more of it and better than we could have received it otherwise; just as the Lord took Himself from the sight of them that loved Him well, that, instead of being visible before their eyes, He might hide Himself in their very hearts." Yes, "precious and no light matter" is death, worth being carefully prepared for, and when it comes full to the eye of faith of heavenly brightness, a mild and chastened brightness as of the ascending Saviour. Nor is it unfitting to believe that the inner eyes of departing saints can see an unearthly radiance, and that their inner ears can hear the sweet melodies of the angels of light. Shall we envy those who are *entering into peace* (Isa. lvii. 2)? That were as unwise as to bemoan them. *Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him, neither envy ye him. The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground,* at least if *I have set God always before me.* How

beautiful is the world, and how desirable is life, if I can see in the one the glory of the Lord, and in the other the pillar of cloud and fire, guiding me by day and by night!

APPENDIX.

TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD RESULTS OF HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM, ESPECIALLY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, BE RECOGNIZED IN SERMONS AND TEACHING?

(*A Paper read at the Church Congress, Manchester, October 2nd*, 1888.)

SO then there *are* results of historical and scientific criticism of the Old Testament which demand at least some recognition in sermons and teaching. The Israelitish history and literature *are* a history and literature like any other, save that the hand of Providence may to us be plainer in that history than elsewhere, and that that literature may reveal a religious genius which by us can only

be ascribed to the Holy, the Divine, Spirit. This is more than I hoped to see admitted, I will not merely say twenty, but as late as five, years ago. The modernizing of our criticism and our exegesis, for which in the Church Congress at Reading I ventured to ask tolerance, to-day meets with more than tolerance—recognition. Thank God for this sunshine! May it prove no transient gleam! And now, since we are thus far of one mind in our house, let us ask first in what spirit we ought to approach the great question before us. Surely in the spirit of faith, hope, and love. Of faith in Him who directs or overrules the phases of criticism, just as He does the course of external history. Let there be no more talk of the endless subjectivity of the critics; there is a broad stream of critical tendency, and One who "sitteth above" is guiding it. It is equally wrong to despise criticism and to fear it. Of faith, too, in that Spirit whose operations, even in St. Paul's time, were so manifold. Can we believe that the cycle of noble Christian characters is finished? *Hast thou not reserved*

a blessing for me also, my Father? Among the many new embodiments of the Christian spirit, may not this be vouchsafed us—a free and yet devout critic; one who loves all the departments of God's truth with an equal love; one who does not try to concede as little as he can to a power which he cannot bless, but dares not curse; one who is not afraid even to make mistakes, on the chance of finding out some fresh fact, and when he has made them to admit them, but who, like Job, is greatly afraid to "speak unrighteously for God" (Job xiii. 7)? Of hope, too; that is, of sure confidence that "all things"—including even the subversion of traditional opinions—"work together for good" to the Church as well as to its members. And of love, seeing much to respect and sympathize with even in those from whom we differ, and even when we censure them doing so, not for the glory of self or party, but for their own good, or, if they are no longer with us, for that of the Church. Time forbids me to develop these sentences, which are so many friendly criticisms

of much that has been said and printed on our subject by members of the Church of England. Would that I could disburden my whole heart! But the President's bell would ring before I had done a quarter of my work. In place of a volume, I can only offer suggestions which might perhaps be called commonplace were it not too evident that they are by no means axiomatic to the majority of English theological writers.

The Subjects Committee has shown genuine insight in its phrase "historical and scientific criticism," and in the precedence which it gives to the epithet "historical." So far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is impossible to meet the arguments brought against it by not a few eminent scientific men and their disciples without the aid of historical criticism. I am really pained at having to make this dogmatic assertion. In the field of study with which I am mostly concerned it is the part of the true scholar to be abundant in qualifications and reserves; but I can find no qualification to make in this sentence. I seldom take up a

book on either side of the controversy "Science *versus* Theology and the Old Testament" without being struck with the narrow and uncritical view of the Hebrew Scriptures equally accepted on both sides; and I ask myself, "Can this be science, and can that be theology?" There is doubtless far more excuse for the advocates of science (if I am bound to use this beautiful word in such a limited sense) than for those of the Old Testament. The former have been so long accustomed to hear the defence of those Scriptures rested on non-critical grounds, that they have come to believe that any other point of view is non-existent. They are perfectly at home in their own subject, and they assume that their opponents are equally so in theirs. And so they have well-nigh demolished the conventional orthodoxy, I will not say of to-day, but of yesterday, so far as this has to do with the Old Testament; and but for the infiltration of more critical views into the minds of English Bible-students, the cause of this priceless heirloom of the Church would be virtually lost.

A change is, I hope and think, taking place; but it is a very slow one—at least, it is slower than it need be. Let critical scholars open their mouths, in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, in season and out of season, and have the courage to be dogmatic. It is both useless and needless for them to meet non-Christian assaults on the Old Testament Scriptures by counter-arguments; change the point of view, and the arguments of scientific critics vanish into thin air. Let me give an example, at the risk, which I cheerfully accept, of being called arrogant alike by those eminent scientific allies of orthodoxy Professor Dana and Sir William Dawson on the one side and Professor Huxley on the other—men at whose feet I would sit were I worthy to become their pupil in the sciences which they illustrate. Take the document, then, which is sometimes called the Hebrew cosmogony, and sometimes the prologue to the Book of Genesis—the one description is as loose as the other; it begins at Gen. i. 1, and ends in the middle of Gen. ii. 4. The position of modern criticism and exe-

gesis differs *toto cœlo* from that which the orthodoxy of yesterday asserted and the science of to-day denies. The so-called cosmogony was not meant to be taken as an account of what we call "facts;" it is not a specimen of rudimentary science or pseudo-science. How far the idea of natural science had dawned upon the Babylonians may be left an open question; there is no evidence that it had dawned upon the Israelites in Old Testament times. A pious Hebrew writer takes a semi-mythical narrative current either in his own or in some neighbouring nation, and moulds it into a vehicle of spiritual truth. Can we be surprised at this, remembering the numerous undoubtedly mythic phrases in the language of the Old Testament? Whether we are surprised at it or not, it is a fact about which none of the competent experts are or ever have been in doubt. It is useless then for the experts in other subjects to depreciate this document on scientific grounds; it is the underlying spiritual truths against which alone, with due seriousness, it is admissible to argue.

But it is not only scientific workers who attack the Old Testament from a wrong point of view. I suppose that one of the great questions of our time is this: "Shall the working-men of England stand by Christ and His religion, or shall they 'make new gods'?" and that this religious question is constantly debated on grounds largely derived from the Old Testament. The battlefield has been selected by the foe; *we* might have preferred to confine it in the first instance to the New Testament. This is not, however, a real misfortune. There are elements of vital truth in the Old Testament which are not fully drawn out in the New, and which it concerns Christian patriots to emphasize, such, for instance, as the continued Divine government of nations and the idea of the higher prophethood as the personified conscience of Israel. Now permit me to say that the hostile criticism of the secularist leaders can only be adequately met by giving them a new and better point of view for the examination of the Bible, such as will at once put a new face on their difficulties,

scientific, historical, and, above all, moral. I will not blame those who, like Dr. Newman Smyth,[1] seek to mitigate the moral difficulties of the Old Testament by the consideration that the Divine selection of the people of Israel could not withdraw it from the action of the law of historical development. But how much more definite his argument would have been had he accepted at any rate the safest results of historical criticism! Indeed, without that criticism how can he justify his use of such a line of argument at all? No; I think that in any serious debate with thoughtful (I do not say, educated) men, especially of the working classes, the Christian advocate is at a great disadvantage if he does not avowedly adopt the point of view of historical criticism. I know that his position must in any case be a hard one. The Bible has been so long presented and interpreted uncritically and irrationally that it will require immense patience and energy to undo the mischief; but unless

[1] "The Morality of the Old Testament" (Cassell, 1886) ("Helps to Belief" Series).

we put forth this patience and make this effort, the prospects of even the simplest historic Christianity among working-men as a class seem to me gloomy indeed. I say this with all modesty, and simply because I am distressed at the heavy burdens which are accumulating for the Church of the next generation. Disabuse working-men of the notion that the Christian Church is committed on theological grounds to a definite system of views on the historical origin and meaning of the books of the Old Testament; tell them on the authority of experts (as worthy of respect in their own line as Huxley and Tyndall in theirs) some at least of the most assured results of critical study; and let them see how much more intelligible and interesting and both morally and religiously *usable* those books become, thanks to those results: and you will have acted as true missionaries and good patriots.

I have used the phrase "Christian advocates" of those who take the Christian side in meetings of secularists. But does the title belong only to these? May it not also be claimed by

all who have to deal as preachers with thoughtful and sceptical men and women of the nineteenth century? For my own part, I do not much believe in the preaching from which all "apologetic" considerations are systematically excluded, nor in exposition of the Scriptures which calmly overlooks difficulties. Would St. Paul under all circumstances have "determined not to know anything" but a crucified Saviour? Surely not; the preaching of the Cross has, in a certain sense, like its Apostle, to "become all things to all men," and there must be some neglect of duty when it does not. I can understand the position of a pure intuitionalist, but I fail to see how a "minister of God's holy word" can preach without occasional reference to the facts of historical criticism. I know that the realizing of a few simple but very deep truths is all that is essential to salvation. It is these realized truths which give peace. But when John Bunyan's Pilgrim had slept in the chamber whose name was Peace, was he not had into the study, and instructed in the great deeds of

the Lord of the House Beautiful and of His servants? The records may not be all, as the Dreamer thought, "of the *greatest* antiquity;" but would it be pious to neglect the study of them altogether? Just because they are so precious, it is our duty to be critical. We want the truest truth and the facts of God's revelation in their most original form; when we have got these, we will doubt no more.

But some one will remind me that there are "weak brethren" to be considered—persons who cannot distinguish between the truth and its casket, or between the various forms which revelation assumes in different ages, persons who can believe in God the Father and in God the Son, but not, except in His relation to individuals, in God the Holy Spirit. Such "weak brethren" doubtless exist, and the tenderest sympathy is due to them. They may be divided into two classes: those who are weak by nature and those who have become so through the fault of their teachers. Those who are weak by nature will not have the mental ability to grasp either the method or

the results of historical criticism; those who are so by a faulty education (of whom Renan at Saint Sulpice, described to us by his own masterly pen, is a melancholy instance) will be saved from all evil consequences if you show them that the Church is not officially committed to any definite system of Bible-interpretation, and that essential Christian truth is not endangered by (do pardon me if I use the phrase in my own sense) true scientific criticism. Those who are weak by nature will feed on those precious truths of heart-theology some of which should be conspicuous in every sermon, and will leave the rest; those who are weak by education will at least see that you personally have your feet planted on a rock, and will ask how it is that what would make *them* stumble only seems to give *you* a bolder and a more rejoicing faith. I say, then, Encourage such "weak brethren" to inquire; regard it as a part of your pastoral work to lead them to a higher point of view, remembering that he who said, "Destroy not the weak brethren" (Rom. xiv. 15), was himself un-

weariedly active in enlightening the conscience and enlarging the point of view of his spiritual children.

Does some one ask for a few ounces of practice to these bushels of theory? I will reply that I am not entirely strange to pastoral work, and know a little of its difficulties. Not as a model, but as a specimen of what may be done, I will mention a small volume, nearly through the press, on Jeremiah and his times in the light of criticism,[1] based upon sermons which it fell to me to deliver last year in one of our cathedrals, and another on the life of Elijah,[2] which consists of cathedral sermons written with no thought of their being printed, but published this day as an illustration of these ideas. I may also venture to say that in all my own critical work since the year 1880 the separation of the permanent from the temporary religious elements of the Old Testament has been my chief aim next to that of ascertaining historical truth. I do not see

[1] James Nisbet and Co. ("Men of the Bible" Series).

[2] Hodder and Stoughton.

why a scholar, even if he be also a professor, should not have a true pastor's spirit. He cannot, he dare not, conceal his well-weighed results, even if they give a momentary scandal to the "weak," even if they are but approximations to the truth. But he may transfer some hours from his delightful studies to the service of the Church at large, and so make somewhat plainer to thoughtful Christians the significant facts which God is revealing through criticism. Even if he should suffer as a scholar, he will gain as a man. Is there not too much refined self-seeking among us scholars? Can we all of us take for our motto "No man liveth to himself"? Have we thought enough of *the hallowing of criticism?* Give us more of your confidence, and we will seek to correct our faults, which are partly due to the lamentable indifference of the Church at large to theological scholarship. Oh, how faulty has the organization of theological study been in the old English universities, not to speak of the Nonconformist and the American colleges! How little attempt has been made to fill the chairs

with mature and progressive scholars, and to train up young men of talent for the career of truth-finders and professors!

I have spoken of what the Church may expect from her preachers and professors. There is still a department in which very much is left to be desired—that of the teaching of the Scriptures both in Sunday and in weekday schools of all classes. The subject is too large to be more than glanced at here. For my own part, I do not see how the higher Bible-teaching in schools can be much improved till we have better books both for the training of the teachers, and for use in class. There has long been a want of a good school handbook to the religious history of Israel; but it is a peculiarly difficult want to supply. A kindred but an easier task has been undertaken by two American professors of the sister-Church, and upon the whole their work can be recommended. The first volume,[1] which is all that I know, contains the Israelitish tradi-

[1] "Scriptures, Hebrew and Christian, Arranged and Edited for Young Readers as an Introduction to the Study of the

tions of that which happened from the Creation to the Exile, condensed, rearranged, and illustrated both from the more literary parts of the Bible and from external sources. The translators have not felt themselves bound either to the Authorized or to the Revised Version; I fear (though I should be very glad to be proved wrong) that this will somewhat limit the circulation of the book. Meantime all superior teachers can at any rate use the Revised Version. They will try the opposite plan to that on which they were themselves too probably taught. The political history of Israel will retire into the background; they will try to make their pupils enjoy the Old Testament in its finest and most suggestive portions. As the children become older, the range of study will gradually be extended. Criticism, too, free but reverent criticism, will become necessary. These children have to

Bible." By Edward T. Bartlett, A.M., Dean, and John P. Peters, Ph.D., Professor, in the Protestant Episcopal Divinity School in Philadelphia. Vol. I. (London: James Clarke and Co., 1886.)

be prepared for life, and in life they will meet with the advocates of a falsely free and irreverent criticism. We all know that there are secularist preachers who were formerly Sunday-school children and teachers, and our highly cultured Agnostics (different as they are from those coarse and only too practical artisan leaders) have all presumably passed through some kind of Bible instruction. Many teachers will, I think, be glad to be referred to Dr. Newman Smyth's small book in Cassell's series, though it will be necessary to supplement it from other more pronouncedly critical sources, among which Canon Driver's "Sunday-school Lessons" (a bold title!) on parts of Genesis and Exodus[1] and his recent volume, "Isaiah: his Life and Times,"[2] must not, small and unassuming as they are, be overlooked.

Alas! I know the difficulties which will impede our clergy in realizing the just expectations of the Church. Thus (1) the quantity and variety of the official work which falls

[1] New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.

[2] James Nisbet and Co. ("Men of the Bible" Series), 1888.

upon them, except in some country parishes, make connected study almost an impossibility. Some there may be who, like the late Bishop Wordsworth, are so constituted as to find recreation in a change of work; but the physical constitution of the English race (or is it perhaps our faulty educational system?) does not seem to favour such an experience. What shall we say to this? We shall say that a duty does not cease to be a duty because through causes beyond our control we are unable to perform it. We shall also say that somewhat more might be done than is done, and that much sympathy and encouragement is due to the parochial clergy from their more happily situated brethren. But (2) must we not go further back, and confess that, with a singular want of insight and of prescience, our superior teachers of the Old Testament have too often treated modern criticism and critical exegesis as enemies of Christianity, the result of which is that many of our clergy can have little or no idea what the study of the Bible means? What shall

we say to this? We shall say, first, that the friends of criticism must try to overcome the prejudice of these well-intentioned, conscientious men, and, next, that the latter on their side must try to assimilate all that they honestly can of the results of criticism. The point is, Do they desire a richer and more inspiring view of the Old Testament than they at present enjoy? It is such a view which criticism, rightly pursued, can give them. Just as Christ has been hidden behind theology, so the Bible has been obscured by a traditional and unscientific criticism and exegesis. I know but too well that no "-ism" of any sort can give the nobly discontented Bible-student what he craves. A person is wanted, he whose coming I have prophesied already, the free but devout critic.

"Flash on us, all in armour, thou Achilles!
Make our hearts dance to thy resounding tread."

Before thee let the misconceptions and illusions of the past vanish! Be that second Hooker for whom our own Milman longed,[1] "who shall show us the eternal, irrepealable truths

[1] In the "History of Christianity."

beneath the imaginative forms of the Jewish and even the Christian Scriptures;" but, even more than this, be a second and greater Herder to a larger and more religious public than that of the poet-theologian of Weimar. Put off the stiff robe of the professor which hampered even that true Churchman Heinrich Ewald. Appropriate the results of modern criticism in the interests of religion. Let others share with thee the joy of the discoverer, so finely described in Keats's sonnet, as each new planet —each transformed, but not disfigured, book of Scripture—"swims into his ken." Show them that the Bible gains infinitely more than it loses when viewed in the light, not of an unreal tradition, but of a seven times tested criticism.

In a word, we require special books for the clergy and the educated laity. First, we want a statement, by some one who has a command of the complicated questions involved, of the present position of the researches into the origin of the Hebrew Scriptures,[1] with some

[1] Professor H. L. Strack has given such a statement, with the learning, and I must add the dryness, peculiar to German theologians in Zöckler's theological series.

hints as to their bearing on the interpretation of the contents. Special students will require more than this, but less than this cannot be offered to the educated public. It must always, however, be remembered that there are few who can do justice to the processes of criticism, and fewer still who can give an intelligent opinion on disputed points. We need not be surprised at this. How many of us have no special aptitude for mathematics, even if, unlike Vico, we have "got the length of the *pons asinorum* in Euclid,"[1] or even, one may hope, a good distance beyond! On the other hand, there are many who can perfectly well assimilate the best results of Biblical criticism, and appreciate the inspiring view of the sacred literature and of the history of revelation which they open up. Consequently we want a second book which shall give such a view, assuming those results, in a popular style, and in a historical and sympathetic spirit.[2] For the

[1] Professor Flint, "Vico," p. 24.

[2] Herder's "Geist der Ebräischen Poesie" is an inspiring book, but of course incomplete and unmethodical. Nor was Herder a special scholar.

present distress I can think of no better book than a freshly written and stimulating, though necessarily incomplete, volume by Mr. R. F. Horton, called "Inspiration of the Bible,"[1] which displays in a high degree that sympathy with the "weak brethren" which is not less essential to the teacher than critical insight.

I have mentioned two of the greatest difficulties which impede the recognition of the results of criticism by the clergy. There is still one to which I must, however briefly, refer. It is that the clergy are in doubt as to the doctrinal results of such a recognition. How I should myself deal with this question, I stated at Reading in 1883. I should insist on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's continual presence being made ever more and more a reality. No essential truth which He has once revealed can be impaired by any fresh discovery of facts. Faith in the supernatural cannot pass away; but our modes of

[1] T. Fisher Unwin, 1888.

conceiving the supernatural may be largely modified through the revelations of science and of criticism. Spiritual truths cannot become antiquated; but if the successes of criticism have the value which I have ascribed to them, they must lead to fuller insight into Divine truth. All truth, in fact, is Divine; all truths are connected, and therefore ultimately reconcilable. Do not, then, be afraid. The Church of England has lost time; it was a hundred years last year since the death of Lowth, and how little interest has been taken in the Old Testament in the interval! Let us make haste, but make haste slowly. It is to the young men that I appeal. Let them not blindly accept this or that system of criticism. The great popular book on the Old Testament which I have prophesied will admit that different solutions of some problems are possible. But let them close their ears to those who falsely assert that no durable results have been attained. The certainties are neither few nor unimportant. Would that I could speak of them as they deserve! Think,

for instance, of the Pentateuch (even apart from Kuenen and Wellhausen), Isaiah, Daniel, and Ecclesiastes. Already the Old Testament is transfigured to those who regard it historically. Yes, criticism is a great power already; and yet is there not something greater still, of which it is its glory to be the minister—exegesis? The transformation or reinterpretation of theology for which the Church of the future will importunately ask will have for one of its presuppositions a modernized and a critical exegesis.

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