

A Yorkshire Manuscript of 1687.

WILLIAM MITCHELL'S "DIFFERENCE BETWIXT EGYPT
AND CANAAN."

(Concluded from page 173.)

ANALYSIS

"EGYPT," in general, figures the natural state of man, ignorant of God, in bondage to sin, refusing to have Christ as ruler, even as the Israelites did Moses. In particular, it figures the four aspects of natural man, as follows: First, he is dead in sin: all in Adam fell under a spiritual as well as a natural death. Second, he is a child of darkness, seeking light and life by works, by the wisdom of the first Adam. Third, he is in a sleep or dream, ignorant of his true state. Fourth, he is disobedient, and so is kept in bondage by a "cruel Jaylor" in the power of the spiritual Pharaoh (who has his servants, namely the priests of organised religion). It is here that Mitchell launches an attack upon the priesthood of his day. [These ministers of Pharaoh "tell men to be strict for the keeping a Church order, coming to Church as they call it, though they never knew any other Church but such as are made of slime and stone, they never knew what it was to be brought to Mount Sion, the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of ye first born which are written in Heaven." They seek to keep people in bondage, "so they command all things, and set the soul a mighty task, to do all things commanded and to avoid all things forbidden. So they say, if they will be saved, they must first be baptized, then they must keep their Covenant, observe their times and seasons, pray thus often and so often, come to Church, receive the Sacrament, perform all things that belong to their form or Church, and so, as they say, man must do his part, or perform the condition on his part, that is, do the things before mentioned, or Repent and believe the Gospell, and obey a Light within, or endeavour to keep all God's commandments, that so they may have a right to the Promise, but they must have nothing without doing; . . ." They forget that it is the spirit that matters, "that a man must be converted and born again" in Christ who is "all things that pertains to the soul."

"Well then if this be a truth that man is in this bondage to the enemies of his soul, even sin and Satan that old serpent, the lusts and corruptions of his nature, in which he is blinded and captivated, then it must needs be God which is the originall cause of man's salvation, freedome and Redemption, and it is his love, which is the originall cause of all, and then his power to make it effectuell."

The Exodus is caused by God's love and grace: the Lord

commands the dead soul to live. It is objected that there is no peace to the wicked; "I answer, indeed it is true there is no peace to none out of Christ, for all peace else is like the troubled sea . . ." Again, it may be objected that to those still in Egypt, the freedom of Canaan is incomprehensible. Mitchell answers by a "word or two" about the soul's deliverance out of Egypt, and three things are considered in relation to the deliverance. First, the Lord makes his power known on the Egyptians, that is, to carnal man, and affliction comes; there is thus a sense of bondage in the soul. Then there is the slaying of the first-born, signifying the flesh; there is no going forth till the Lord's power is made known on the chief of their strength, the first-born (the world, the flesh, all boasting, etc.). Then take note of the sacrifice, the lamb, a type of Christ: this is to be kept till the appointed time (while a man keeps to his own righteousness, he is without Christ).

A series of objections and answers follows, of great importance for establishing Mitchell's position. Must not man endeavour to come forth out of these evils he is in? The only way, answers Mitchell, is to know himself a sinner. Another objection is that we are bidden to strive to enter in at the "strait gate", to which answer is made that we are exhorted to strive to deny ourselves entirely. Then, it is objected, must not man be doing, performing, following a strict religious way? Answer: Truth saith otherwise. Moses did not set the Israelites working, but bade them wait on the Lord. "It is the taskmasters of Egypt, the Scribes and Pharisees, false Apostles and false Teachers who bring in damnable heresy, that set the soul a working, acting and performing their task, and that daily, the whole tale of bricks must be brought in, or else there will be nothing but scowling and threatening, and saying, Ye are idle, and slothfull and improve not your time; so the false teachers who are a kin to the taskmasters of Egypt, they set men a working, acting and doing something, which may further their salvation, as hearing, coming to church, reading, praying, and performing their duties, being baptized, receiving the sacrament once in a year, or sometimes three or four times in a year, then they think this is a Christian indeed, or ordering their words some thou and some you, or keeping Covenant, or waiting on a light within, they obeying of which, life is promised, nay any thing that Christ may not bee all in all. Now the bringing in of any of these to the furthering of life and salvation or commending us to God, is as detestable if not more than open Popery, for if it were possible they would deceive the very elect . . ." If a man be made righteous by the works of the law, Christ died in vain. "The promise . . . is made to faith and not to works."

A further objection runs, "Is it not a minister's duty to set men a working?" The answer is, no: Moses and Aaron did not set the Israelites to work, but asked for a three days' journey into the desert to sacrifice. It is true Pharaoh did not see the point. The sinner's three days' journey to the true worship of God signifies three things. First, a sense of his own misery; second, "it brings the soul to the doctrine and Baptism of John, to true Repentance for sin, and humble confession of sin"; third, "Thou art to be delivered up to the Baptism of Christ, for John bids thee stay not here on thy Repentance or Confession but saith, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, whose fan is in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into his garner: this is a purging and purifying day, the day of Christ: And is the third day in which the soul is purged and purified and brought to Christ . . ."

"Is not Repentance, faith and new obedience conditions of the new Covenant . . . ?" it is objected, and Mitchell replies that they are not conditions, but fruits of the covenant, and he treats them separately. "Is not man to prepare himself by pursuing holiness?" asks the objector. It is not holiness that prepares the soul to meet Christ, says Mitchell, but a sense of sin. Then again, "if man becomes more holy, will not that please God?" To that it is answered, God's love is unchangeable, so that nothing we do can alter it. If that is so, the objector replies, then we may sin as we like? This is no way to read the Gospel: continue in sin that grace may abound? A last objection asks, "if God elect, justify, and save souls freely by his grace, then it seems we may do what we will . . . ?" "I answer, God hath not elected us to sin and unholiness . . ."

Mitchell then leaves this carping critic of a Pharisee and turns to the Publican sinner. Let us come, he says, to the killing of the Lamb. Five points are to be noted. First, the lamb is Christ, the only way out of bondage. Second, the sprinkling of its blood means Christ's blood, i.e., Justification. Third, the sacrifice is to be roasted with fire and eaten with unleavened bread; "which holds forth first the power of the spirituall, flaming fiery Baptism of Christ, for the killing and crucifying of the flesh . . ." Fourth, none is to be kept to ourselves. Fifth, "to stand stedfast in the faith," prepared and armed. It is a day to be remembered by Israel.

The Israelites are next in difficulty at the sea and at the "subtillness of the enemy." They must not go up out of Egypt by the "gainest" way, lest they mislike, and the Lord in his wisdom closed up the sea behind them. The Lord is to make

known his power in a more mysterious manner than before, for all before holds forth the destruction of sin in the external part of it, internally it is alive. The soul has gone out to Canaan not from the apprehension of his love, but from the apprehension of his wrath. The fleshly apprehension of Christ means forgiveness. But "the coming of Christ in the spirit or his spirit Baptism destroys, swallows up and consumes and puts an end to the first and fleshly knowledge, which must be done, that so all things may become new, that is, all things may be known spiritually, so we may know no man after the flesh, no not Christ himselfe . . ." So the going away of the first knowledge of Christ (Christ in the flesh) will bring thee into great straits, as the Israelites were in great straits at the Red Sea. Then it is that the power of God by a strong East wind (deliverance by Christ) counts, but with Pharaoh on one side and the sea on the other, man does not see his deliverance, and cries out that it were better to be among the Egyptians again. Consider, first, that the former comforts are gone (the fleshly knowledge of Christ is found to be insufficient now), then that the old enemies come in, and last, that the way is stopped. In this situation Moses said, Stand still and wait and see the salvation of the Lord; so too the disciples were told to wait at Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit.

The holding forth of the rod ("it seems a foolish thing") signifies the "preaching of the everlasting Gospel" ("whereby the downfall of Babylon is accomplished, that is, Babylon in the heart of man, which is this sea that stops thy way"). Christ, the all-powerful East wind, divides the evils. "He hath consecrated a new and living way for us, through the veil, which is to say, his flesh; the flesh of Christ is the veil to the spirit, as the Law is the veil to the Gospel, and the Gospel in the letter is the veil to the Gospel in the spirit, and the externall part of it a veil to the internall and spirituall part of it, so one thing must veil itselfe to give place to another, so thou being brought through these veils to pass into the Holyest of all, by this new and living way, which Christ hath consecrated for thee, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, Hebrews: 10: 20: thou art brought from the death of Christ to the knowledge of his Resurrection and life, for being baptized into his death, and in this Baptism passing through this veil, thou art also raised with him by the faith of the operation of God, and so comes to have fellowship with him in his Resurrection and life, his second coming, wherein he brings salvation and life to thy soul, . . ."

It may be objected, is this not a strange doctrine to know Christ no more after the flesh, but formed in, not without, us?

Mitchell answers, naturally, perhaps it is, but scripturally, no. "Thus the saints, the true Israel of God, the seed of Abraham after the faith, are brought through the sea to the dry land by believing, as the Israelites passed through the sea by faith, so they pass through these seas, clouds, and veils, and so pass in within the veil, into the Holyest of all, to know and enjoy Christ in and after the spirit, being joynd to him, and made one spirit with him." This is the narrow way which so few find: carnal men and hypocrites, trusting in their own strength, perish like Pharaoh.

There is rejoicing at deliverance, at victory over iniquity, "over this sumptuous whore with her golden cup, and this mystery of iniquity and man of sin, and over the beast and his Image and his mark and the number of his name, standing on a sea of glass, having ye Harps of God in their hand, and they joyce . . ." Mitchell follows this with an appeal to his little flock, couched in his usual rhapsodical style. But to Israel there are still bitter waters and the wilderness; there is murmuring; there is no rest.

A report on Canaan forms the last big division of the book; it is necessary to set out the beauties of the land, for evil spies report ill things of it. Eight things will be found there. First, the presence of the Holy Ghost; then Justification, or God's love and grace, True faith, True rest, the Peace of God. There is also "the glory of Union, even of the electing grace and uniting love of God"; the Father "loved all his elect sons with one and the selfe same love with which hee loved Christ the son, flowing from his great love, and in this love of his he loved all those foreseen by the eye of love, and elected into this love, that so they might be made conformable to the Image of the son of his love . . . Thus the Father in the son, of his own love hath he reconciled to the elect his chosen, and gathereth them together in and by this love, and reconciled them to himselfe in this love . . ." There is the consequent Joy unspeakable, portrayed by Mitchell in terms of a palace, of treasures and of a feast; the luxurious language of this adjective-piling Yorkshireman here runs riot. Lastly, there is True holiness. In sum, Christ is the Promised Land.

"Thus I very briefly in some particulars commend to you the glories of this heavenly Canaan, and the glorious, rare, blessed and soul enriching fruits and soul replenishing, adorning, beautifying and clothing benefits, and garments of salvation, with which all the true Israel of God, the seed of Abram after the faith, the sons and daughters of Sion, the Citizens and dwellers in Canaans Land are richly adorned . . ." They have been brought from "Egypt to Canaans Land, from nature to

grace, from darkness to light, from death to life, from bondage to liberty, from the spirit of bondage to the spirit of adoption, from ye flesh to the spirit, from infidelity and unbelief (to?) a true and living faith, from the form of godliness to the life and power of godliness, from the knowledge of God, Christ, the Scriptures, the things of God and his worship after the flesh, to know, acknowledge him, worship and serve him in and after the spirit, . . . " and so forth. Why then do evil reports exist, made by those who say such and such and promise Heaven if people will "stick to their form," much as the Pope dealing pardons. These men afflict the people, who are taught that Heaven must be worked for. Heed them not, they would deceive the very elect. We shall enter in in this life, but there are many enemies to destroy in Canaan.

To this brief and inadequate summary of Mitchell's little book may be added his own leave-taking. He drops into verse :

"With Christ our Lord wee sup,
 and every Saint comes in,
 That is, desires with consent
 for to partake therein:
 No honest soul's kept out,
 their presence wee desire:
 No new ingagement, no new bond
 do wee at all require;
 But welcome Saints as Saints,
 of all wee make but one,
 Exhorting one another, more
 to live to Christ alone.
 Our bound is Christian love,
 our bond our Masters Word;
 In Ranting times our study is
 to walk with one accord;
 If any Saint dissent,
 and seperated bee,
 Hee may see cause to blame himselfe,
 and so his brother's free;
 These things wee take in hand,
 for troubles may bee near,
 Take time and mercies while they are,
 ere long they may bee dear."

FINIS.

It has been suggested that causes are often begun as much through the influence of a book as through the efforts of an evangelist, and as an example Mitchell's *Jachin and Boaz* is quoted as possibly responsible for the formation of the Baptist churches in the North-West.*¹³ If this can be thought of the later work, what shall we think of the present work, which gives us glimpses of an earlier Mitchell?

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*¹³ *Trans. Bapt. Hist. Soc.*, I. 114.