

ARTICLE III.

MARKS OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN GOD'S PROMISE
TO ABRAHAM.

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THE controversy of Rationalism is not with Christianity, but with Theism. The denial of the possibility of the miraculous is its essential doctrine and the source of its vitality and strength. But miracles are possible if there is a personal God. Positivism or Pantheism are the only positions in which the denier of the possibility of miracles can make a stand.

Christianity is essentially miraculous. It implies primarily a supernatural, divine action in the redemption of fallen man; and, secondarily, a supernatural revelation by that action. The whole conception involves the miraculous — the creation, the fall, the primitive promise, the call of Abraham, the covenant with the chosen people, the preparatory and prophetic dealings of God with that people, the coming of the Messiah, "the Word made flesh," his resurrection and ascension, the outpouring of the Spirit, the second coming of Christ, the final judgment. Whether true or false, this is Christianity. The denial of the supernatural is the denial of Christianity.

Christianity is willing to appear and submit her claims to decision in the court of reason. The question to be submitted is: Is this scheme of redemption an adequate solution of the great problem of human nature, history, and destiny? Is there in man a need of redemption and a demand for it? Is the scheme theoretically consistent and reasonable, and does it commend itself to the reason as adequate, if historically true, to solve the world-problem? Was it from the beginning so incorporated into human history, has it in its late influences so wrought itself into

human history, as to commend itself to reason as a historical verity?

But if this question is to be decided in the court of reason, it must be Christianity itself that appears before the tribunal, and not a makeshift bearing its name, but divested of all that constitutes its distinctive character, grandeur, vitality, and power. The denial of the possibility of miracles is the denial of the possibility of Christianity. It is giving judgment before the question is opened for argument. It is not arguing the question with Christianity in the court of reason; it is shutting Christianity out of court. Deny the miraculous and nothing is left in the Bible but the debris of myths and legends, and the fragments and crumbling ruins of a history which, even so far as it may be true, is no longer significant or important. Then the question is triumphantly propounded: Does this insignificant residuum solve the great problem of human history and destiny? What if it does not? It is not Christianity. The plea of Christianity has not even been heard.

The question of the truth of Christianity is debatable, then, only with a theist who admits the possibility of miracles. Then the conception of Christianity appears in all its grandeur, as a supernatural, redemptive action of God, traversing the history of man from his creation to the judgment; and the question is fairly before us: Does this conception adequately solve the problem of human history and destiny? Has it inwrought itself into history so as to prove its historical verity?

It is, therefore, fruitless to debate the evidences of Christianity with a rationalist who denies the possibility of miracles. Let him be shut up to his controversy with the theist; driven back to his legitimate position either in positivism or pantheism.

For similar reasons rationalism has no right to criticise or interpret the Bible. The denial of the possibility of miracles necessitates beforehand that criticism be destructive and interpretation false. The Bible is a record, whether

true or false, of a grand series of supernatural, divine actions in the redemption of fallen man. Though the work of many authors, in many centuries, this grand conception dominates in all, is steadily and consistently unfolded more and more clearly, and advanced by accompanying historical events to completeness, and gives to the series of books a unity which indicates the control of one superintending mind. The denial of the supernatural necessitates in criticism the assumption that the books are false in their substance. That denial makes a right interpretation impossible; for the Bible is a story of the supernatural; and its actual meaning, whether true or false, can be ascertained only by recognizing the supernatural. Deny it, and the meaning of every part of the book changes—the essential and vital significance is gone. The grand panorama of redemption vanishes. Nothing is left but a blinding drizzle of myth and legend over a dreary waste of uncertain and valueless stories in which float—“*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*”—a few fine moral sentiments, like those found in the literature of every nation. It is absurd to criticise or interpret the Bible from this point of a view. If a man enters St. Peter's church with the assumption that it is a private dwelling-house, his criticism must pronounce the plan and construction faulty, and his interpretation must miss the significance of every part. Not less absurd the attempt of Strauss to criticise and interpret the Bible on the assumption that the supernatural is impossible.

These principles are important in the interpretation of God's promise to Abraham. If a miracle is impossible, then God never made the promise, the account of it is peremptorily set aside as a myth, and the whole story at once takes its place among the obscure beginnings of history as a tradition respecting the origin of a nomadic tribe which afterwards established itself as an agricultural people in the small province of Palestine. When this position is frankly acknowledged and held with logical consistency, the scepticism is comparatively harmless. But rationalism extends

its poison beyond the circle of minds that accept its legitimate conclusions. The miasma debilitates many who are not prostrated with the plague. Many in the churches are reluctant to acknowledge in the covenant with Abraham more than the founding of a nation and the promise of secular advantages. Under the same influence they will not see in any scriptural event a reference to the spiritual, if it is possible to extract from it a meaning which refers it to the temporal. They find it difficult to discover in the Old Testament any Messiah or Messianic kingdom; and we have the strange contrast of Jews finding the Old Testament full of the Christ, and Christians who find it Christless. Rationalism and naturalism have swept over modern thought like a sandstorm of the desert, not only overwhelming those in the centre of its path, but blinding and bewildering those that are far off.

The difficulty arises from forgetting the unity of the scriptures as recording the grand series of divine actions in redemption. Every part of scripture is included under this unity and derives its significance from it. As a segment of the human body shows in its dissevered ligaments, fibres, and vessels its connection on every side with the body, and is utterly unintelligible except as this connection is recognized, every part of scripture shows its connection with the organic whole, and is meaningless aside from that connection. As the acorn can be understood only when it is known as the seed and therefore the prophecy of an oak; as the history of the oak can be understood only when the tree is known to have grown from an acorn; the Old Testament can be understood only when it is known to be the germ and prophecy of the New; and the history of the New Testament is intelligible only as we find its germ in the Old. And as the sight of the growing oak enlarges the knowledge of the acorn, even to those who had theoretically understood its nature as a germ, the coming of Christ must give a deeper and clearer understanding of the Old Testament, even to those who had understood its prophetic and pre-

paratory character. Overlooking this unity of redemption, the interpretation of single passages of scripture becomes impossible. The structure is crumbled into a shapeless heap, and the several parts become undistinguishable and meaningless rubbish. The denier of the supernatural, in attempting to interpret the Bible, necessarily acts over again the bookish want of common sense, which has been ridiculed from the beginning of literature, and shows a brick as a sample of the house.

When it is admitted that the scriptures have this unity in the work of redemption, it becomes natural, and even necessary, to interpret the promise to Abraham as referring to the blessings to come to mankind through redemption. On this supposition, it is evident that the Bible teaches that redemption was to be brought into human history by the agency of a chosen people, and that the Jews were that people. It is, then, the obvious and necessary interpretation of the call of Abraham that it was the call of that chosen people, and that the covenant with him had reference to their agency in the great scheme of redemption. On this supposition, the questions of criticism respecting the author and composition of Genesis become of minor consequence. If God was in Christ the Redeemer of the world by supernatural action, then it was through the line of Jewish history that the supernatural agency took its preparatory course; and in their very origin God must have destined the Jewish people to this service. On this supposition, even the facts of their history, which remain fixed under the most destructive criticism, could receive no other interpretation. If not so interpreted, the incarnation and redemption of Christ must be denied. Accordingly Colenso, who in his first book on the Pentateuch writes as if he were still retaining the supernatural in the New Testament, appears in his second part to have seen the impossibility of resolving the Old Testament into myths and holding the New Testament as history, and so abandons both.

And, further, if the supernatural work of redemption is admitted, the facts of the previous history of the race compel us to interpret this promise as referring to redemption; for then we must admit the fact of personal revelations of God in Eden, and, subsequently, the fall; the promise of deliverance through the agency of the woman's seed; the beginning of the fulfilment of that promise in the existence of a chosen people, in the line of Seth, Enoch, Noah, and Shem; and in God's personal revelations to them. These great facts Abraham must have known. In the light of these facts he must have understood his call, and the promise of blessing to all mankind through his seed, as a renewal, enlargement, and further definition of the primitive promise, and as a designation of his posterity as the chosen seed of the woman, through whose agency God was to bring redemption. Even if the promise had made no mention of the blessings of redemption, the mere fact that God had called Abraham's seed to be his peculiar people necessitates this significance. And the case is not altered, even if Abraham as yet had no knowledge of a personal Messiah, but only of redemption to be wrought by God through the agency of a chosen seed.

It should be added that the subsequent history of the Israelites necessitates the same interpretation. It assumes that they are God's covenant people. All their literature teaches the same. Their government is theocratic. Their prophets, with ever-increasing distinctness predict that the kingdom is to be perpetuated by the Anointed One, the Son of David, who is to make it a spiritual kingdom of righteousness and peace, and under whose reign the kingdom is to become universal, and the chosen people is to possess the world. The covenant with Abraham is the key to the entire history and literature of the Old Testament. If we had no historical record of it, we should be obliged to assume that at some time, in some form, God had chosen this people, and entered into covenant with them.

Whoever, therefore, admits the conception of a redemp-

tion supernaturally wrought is bound by all these reasons, and in accordance with the laws of interpretation, to explain the call of Abraham and the covenant with him as referring to it. With one who denies the supernatural it is idle to argue the question of interpretation; since he begins with the assumption that the fundamental conception which the Jewish history and literature develops is an absurdity.

But if the interpretation is correct which regards the call of Abraham as one in the series of actions by which God redeems men from sin, still we should expect that in the call and the promise, the coming of a people from his loins and the divine care of them as a people would be most conspicuous, and that provision would be promised for a country and a temporal career. While the very fact of calling a people to serve God and to be the depository of his revelations and the vehicle of conveying his redemptive energy implies a principal reference to redemption, we should expect that the explicit mention of this reference would be general and indefinite; because in our conception of God's supernatural work, it is primarily a divine action, and secondarily a divine revelation; and the revelation is made by the action. When, in its fitting time, God performs any act in the great series of redemptive actions, it is the act itself that reveals him. He performs the act, and leaves it to tell its own story, to make its own revelation. He does not stop to comment or explain. He unrolls the panorama, but gives no lecture on it. The great fact that God called Abraham, and entered into covenant with him to make his posterity God's chosen people, stands there, in its place in the world's history, a revelation of God. The subsequent history of Israel and the ultimate coming of Christ are the sufficient commentary.

We proceed to notice some of those characteristics of the promise to Abraham which evince its divine origin:

I. It is a promise of blessedness to man. The history of man, as given in the book of Genesis, opens with the

blessing of God pronounced on him. After man had fallen, in the midst of the condemnation, the divine blessing reappears in the promise of deliverance from the evils into which he had plunged himself, and of victory over the power that had ruined him. The same is implied in God's intercourse with those that served him before Abraham's day, which is sketched in the slightest manner, and may be regarded as prefatory to the principal history, beginning with the call of Abraham. In this call the blessing is distinctly reannounced. In the first record of the call we find, in the most condensed form, the call to Abraham to separate himself from all others to serve God, the promise that he should become a great people, the covenant that God would be the God of that people, and the promise that through him, as the father of this covenant people, all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. xii. 1-3). It was renewed both to Isaac and to Jacob. It was unfolded with increasing clearness in the Psalms: "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." By the prophets it is presented in stronger light; they linger on it with affectionate delight, and accumulate all the beautiful things of the earth to set forth its glory. In the New Testament, amid the songs of enraptured angels, it bursts like sunlight over all the earth; "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." The Bible, from beginning to end, is the development of this grand idea of blessing from God to sinful man through redemption. It lies here in the beginning of the history, in the promise to Abraham, the key to the entire Bible and to all God's action in man's redemption; the keynote of that divine harmony of many parts which sweeps through all human history, and swells triumphant in the music of heaven.

It is to be observed that the Old Testament does not

present this idea as a poetical fancy to be admired and forgotten, but as an end to be practically realized — an end that is dominant in God's action, and to the realization of which all whom he chooses as his servants are in that very election consecrated. In calling Abraham he elects the Israelitish people as the human agency which he will employ in realizing this end; as his own chosen people, set apart and consecrated to this service; a nation founded with the design to bless mankind — this is the very goal of its ambition, the highest glory held out to its founder, the grand motive inspiring the national life. Incorporated into the very charter and covenant of the national existence is the law of love. And the fact is pregnant with the meaning that whoever are chosen by God as his people are thereby consecrated to the work of securing to men the blessings of redemption. They are to accept this as the chief end of their lives, and devote their entire resources and energies to its realization.

This alone lifts the Old Testament above all heathen literature, and stamps it as divine. This conception of blessing to the world as the key to God's action and an end to which human life and endeavor are to be consecrated, is foreign to the heathen mind. The poetical fancies of a returning golden age, were fancies only, and did not even suggest the thought of an endeavor to realize them. If mythology fabled that a city or state was founded under the patronage of a god, the promise was only that it should conquer and possess other cities and states, never that it should bless them. Philosophy gave no definite statement of the great idea, and much more failed to propose it as an end to be realized by God's action and to command man's service, or to propose any scheme by which its realization is to be secured. Ackermann has an elaborate argument to prove that Plato had caught the idea of salvation for mankind; but his argument leaves the mind in doubt; while the very necessity of such an argument proves that, at the most, the most advanced minds of the heathen nations

had but a glimpse of the idea, and did not present it as a conception exerting a practical power.

The development of this idea in the Old Testament sets those writings apart from all heathen literature, and stamps them as divine. And the force of the argument is enhanced by the fact that the idea is gradually developed in, and incorporated into, the history and literature of the nation. Thus the evidence of divinity in it is raised above the niceties of criticism, and becomes as indubitable as the history and literature of the nation. The same argument is still more convincing when applied to the whole Bible, in which the New Testament appears as the complete development of the Old.

De Tocqueville notices, as a peculiarity of a democratic civilization, the prevalence and practical power of faith in human progress and perfectibility. The belief has been erroneous as to the nature of the perfection of human society, and the means of attaining it; just as the Jewish expectation of the Messiah had become erroneous; but, like that, there is in it a germ of divine truth. It is, at the root, a Christian idea. The promise, to which that expectation unconsciously looks, and by which it was originated in the life of humanity, came down from heaven. In the ages when human culture and history as yet gave elsewhere no suggestion of this quickening thought, it breathes through all the literature of the Israelites, and lives in all their history. There breathes, as a divine prophecy and promise, as a human expectation and hope, the idea which is the inspiration of modern thought, the life and power of modern progress.

II. The whole human family is to be the recipient of blessings through Abraham's posterity. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

To the Greek and the Roman the largest object of love and service was his city, or, at the most, his country. He could be a patriot, but not a philanthropist. The idea of the human race as a whole had scarcely been formed in his

mind; it was not a force in the civilization of his times. He was a stranger to those mighty ideas—the one family of man; universal brotherhood; the welfare of that family definitely proposed to every mind, as an object to be accomplished; the divine power entering human history in redemption, and thus consecrating humanity; the universal obligation to consecrate life, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, to the service of God in the service of man—these great ideas are not in the literature of Greece and Rome. Nor can you find the derived thoughts, so familiar to the modern mind—the worth of man; the sacredness and universality of human rights; missions; reformations; human progress; the conversion of the world. Whatever of thought, or action, or institution, looks to the welfare of mankind as a whole, to the rights of man, as man (not as a subject or citizen), to the elevation and renovation of humanity, is wanting.

But in the opening of Genesis, the human race is presented as one family, and a foundation is thus laid for all the grand and quickening ideas which flow from this conception. The power of this unity of man as one family, having a common relation to God, their maker, is enhanced by their common fall, and their common participation in the ruin of sin, the condemnation of God, and the hope of deliverance through a human seed. What a unity of the human kind here, which makes even the wickedness of a man a reason of tenderness towards him from his fellow-men, who are also fellow-sinners, and comprehends even the enmities of men within its all-embracing community of interest. Why does this old book open with this grand conception to which heathen culture never attained?

For the full force of this argument, it is necessary to consider the circumstances under which the promise to Abraham was made. It was nineteen centuries before human cultivation began anywhere to look beyond the limits of national exclusiveness; it was when men were dispersing themselves through the world; when families

and clans held their little territories, or roamed nomadic over the unoccupied earth, the germs of nations that were to be; it was when history herself was not yet born,¹ and even Egypt is dimly seen as a centre of national life and unity. Then was announced this promise of a blessing for all mankind. It was announced as a prophecy to be fulfilled in the future; as the life-principle of a nation, and the object to be realized in its history; as the key to the plan of God's providence in all the history of the world. This great idea of the human family, one in origin, one in a common fall, and by a common redemption, fills the Bible. It is the Bible. Prophecies and doctrines, commands and promises, ritual and types, providential acts and miraculous interventions, are all the mighty growth of this one seed-thought.

III. The promise recognizes the idea of a universal religion.

Any explanation, which admits that the call of Abraham was supernatural, requires this admission; for then the essential conception of the call must be, that God selects Abraham's posterity as the depository of the knowledge of himself, and the agency through which he is to bring redemption to the world. The same is apparent in the various inspired records of this covenant.

To the minds of modern Christians the idea of a universal religion has lost its strangeness. They understand that religion must be the same to an American, or a Chinese, or a Hawaiian. But it was not familiar to the ancient mind; it was even rejected as impossible. It was urged as an argument against Christianity, that it claimed to be a universal religion. Says Celsus: "He must be a fool who can believe that Greeks and barbarians, in Asia, Europe, and Lybia—all nations to the end of the earth—can unite in one and the same religion."

The history of the Israelites exemplifies the difficulty felt by the ancients in receiving this idea, which the Bible has

¹ "History herself was born on that night when Moses led forth his countrymen from the land of Goshen."—Bunsen.

made so familiar to us. They were slow to believe that Jehovah was the one and only God. The idolatry into which they were continually falling, was not the renunciation of Jehovah, as a god, or as the god of their nation, but it was falling back to the common belief of the times, that he was only a god of that nation, and that other nations had gods as really divine as he. Hence the reiterated proclamation: "I am Jehovah; there is no God else. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." It was not till the captivity that the lesson was thoroughly learned.

But this idea of a universal religion in the worship of one God, in the participation in a common redemption, is the ground of the possibility of a community of human interests, and of all efforts for man's spiritual salvation, or even for a universal and homogeneous social progress.

Polytheism is essentially divisive. Each nation has its peculiar gods, embittered against the gods of other nations with all the enmities of the nations themselves. The gods of the hills fight against the gods of the valleys. Thus there is no common ground of unity; no common and supreme God; no common and authoritative law of right and wrong; no common standard of appeal; no common idea of sin, or of salvation; no common faith, nor hope, nor spiritual experience. The cleavage which divides the nations, cuts down through the deepest foundations of common thought, feeling, and interest, and leaves them more hopelessly dissevered than ships driven asunder on the ocean; for it cleaves the ocean itself, and leaves no common element in which they separate.

This foundation of a universal religion and a common redemption must be laid in human thought before it is possible for men even to have the idea of a permanent community of interest among all nations. There may be temporary alliances, arising from a temporary coincidence of interest, to be changed to enmity when that temporary coincidence ceases; but there is no basis of common progress, character, interest, and hope, the same under all

outward changes. This foundation must be laid in human thought before it is possible even to have the idea of the conversion of the world, of missions, of philanthropy, of popular progress, of the education and improvement of mankind.

But this idea of a universal religion is implied in the promise to Abraham, and is declared with ever-increasing clearness in the Psalms and the Prophecies.

IV. This blessing to mankind through a common redemption and a universal religion is to be realized through the agency of a people chosen by God, and, by covenant, made his peculiar people.

Here is an apparent incongruity. The promise is of universal blessing; a universal religion; a redemption to bless mankind. But the promise is made to a single people; it includes within itself a call and a command to that people to separate themselves from all others, and a covenant of God with them which distinguishes them from all others as his own.

This incongruity becomes more conspicuous in the subsequent history. Moses established stringent and minute regulations to insure the separateness of the Israelites. They were forbidden to round the corners of their beards, and were required, by many similar rules extending to the minutiae of life, to make themselves unlike other people, and to prevent the contamination of associating with them. By bloody wars they took the land of Canaan, seeming to be the enemies, rather than the benefactors, of mankind. The spirit of exclusiveness grew into their national life, and became a Pharisaism.

On the other hand, all the literature of this people is vital with the promise of universal blessing—of a Redeemer and a religion for all mankind. In the thinking of all the leading minds of the nation this great idea grows broader and clearer as the actual separation of the people becomes more distinct. In the Psalms and the Prophecies it is uttered in language at once the most explicit and sublime: "The wilderness

and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: for as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things which are sown in it to burst forth, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

But this seeming contradiction is itself a proof of the divine origin of the promise and its development in the Israelitish writings.

1. It shows that there is nothing in the life and institutions of that people which can adequately account for it.

The literature of a people is the utterance of its inmost heart and life; but the institutions of the Jews were designed to separate them from other nations. They imbibed the spirit of their institutions, rather than the spirit of the universal promise; and exclusiveness penetrated and characterized the national life. How is it to be accounted for, that this promise appears at the beginning of their history, and breathes its broad, generous, hopeful spirit through all their literature? We have seen that the idea is wanting in heathen literature for two thousand years after the call of Abraham, and that it was difficult to be received, was even regarded as absurd, when definitely propounded by Christianity. Now we see that the outward institutions and history of the Jews themselves were in seeming antagonism to the idea, and could not originate it. How can its existence, under such circumstances, be accounted for, except as an inspiration from God.

Especially is this difficulty insuperable to those who accept the low views of the Israelitish character common to sceptics. For example, Goethe says the Israelites had never been good for much, as their own judges and prophets were always accusing them; that they had few virtues, and more faults than any other people. The single merit of toughness is all that he allows them.¹ But how, on any

¹ Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, Book II. Chap. 11.

naturalistic or rationalistic principles, can the production of such a literature from such a people be accounted for? How is it explained that the prophecy of blessings to all mankind, through a universal religion, is declared at the origin of the national existence, and is developed to greater distinctness in all its literature and history? It avails nothing to say that there was a higher life flowing within the Israelitish history, like blood within a body, and that the literature, which announces the universal blessing, is the utterance of this inward life. This is true, as the New Testament teaches: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: for he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly." But this removes no difficulty for the sceptic; since it is only admitting that the Jewish people is in some sense an inspired people, and that the inmost heart of their history is the supernatural.

2. The seeming contradiction shows in the promise a reach of thought into the future which could not have been less than divine.

It implies a divine foresight. Nearly two thousand years were to pass before this great thought would become a working power in the civilization of the nations; yet it is boldly announced, not as a beautiful fancy, but as a prophecy and a promise of what God's action was to be. And during the long centuries following, when, over all the earth, no sign of its fulfilment appears, psalmists and prophets persistently announce the great idea and predict its sure fulfilment. When the farmer in autumn casts seed into his field, he buries it in entire isolation; but he does it with a knowledge of the vital powers of the seed, and with the foresight that it will lie protected in its hiding-place till the winter is over, and with the coming spring will shoot up and cover the field with verdure. So this seed-thought must have been deposited in the Jewish mind with the knowledge of its divine power, and the foresight that, protected during the wintry ages, it would in due time

come forth and bless the world. The very fact of burying the seed proves that he who buried it knew its vital power, and buried it that it might grow.

It evinces not only foresight of the fact, but also plan and preparation for its accomplishment. The Jewish nation is selected to preserve the truth on the earth, till the time when it should be given to all nations by Christ, as a light is enclosed in a lantern to protect it from the wind, till it can be safely uncovered within the house. The seed-thought is deposited in the roughness of Jewish institutions, as nature deposits a chestnut in a burr, to protect it until grown. The Israelites were a people dedicated to the future. Prophecy and promise breathed through all their writings. The expectation of the Messiah and of his kingdom at last penetrated all their thinking, and became the distinctive characteristic of their national and religious life.

3. The separation of the Israelites, as God's chosen people, from the world, is only the application, in a peculiar form, of a principle which is universal.

Christianity is a power of separation, as really as Judaism was. It proclaims: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." It is even a power of antagonism: "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Allegiance to truth must separate from allegiance to error; allegiance to God must separate from ungodliness, and must often occasion sharp antagonism. Christianity is a power of division before it is a power of harmonizing or uniting. It divides, that it may unite. It becomes universal only by being separate. It separates, that it may be universal. God's chosen people is separated from the world to draw the world to itself, until mankind, yielding to the attraction, become God's people. The conception is not of mere universality, but of that which is distinctively Christian made universal.

Hence, in history, every special forth-putting of the divine

energy in redemption has been a notable power of separation. Not only did the call of Abraham separate him and his Israelitish posterity, but when the apostles preached Christianity the church of Christ became as really separate, though the separation differed in its outward form. The preaching of Luther separated the Protestant churches. The Puritans and the Methodists became a separate people. When a missionary preaches Christ to the heathen, the converts are by their conversion separated from the heathen mass. Religion can advance towards universal acceptance only by separation. The separation of the Israelites, therefore, is only the application, in a peculiar form, of a principle which is universal.

Accordingly God always carries on his cause by the agency of a chosen people. The use of such an agency belongs to every part of the administration of divine grace. It belongs to the fundamental conception of the spiritual kingdom growing without observation — in the world, but not of it.

The parallel may be carried even further. The Israelites were a race descended from Jacob, and as such, a nation. This conception is the more prominent in their history. Yet within the nation was always the spiritual seed — in the greatest corruption, seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. It was this spiritual seed which constituted the true Israel; this, whose hidden life found utterance in the spiritual sentiments and expectations uttered in psalm and prophecy; this, which gave the true significance and value to the Israelitish history; this, the chit within the corn, embodying all the life of the kernel, and shooting up, while the rest of the kernel decayed, into a new and glorious life. On the other hand, in Christianity, the spiritual seed, existing as a spiritual church scattered among all nations, is first and prominent. Yet those nations are the most efficient in promoting human progress whose civilization is the most thoroughly penetrated and vitalized by this spiritual life and truth. The immense empires of China and

India are of no account in the history of human progress. We call them unhistorical. The English-speaking race, the most thoroughly Christianized of all races, is more efficient in promoting human progress than any other race. Even in discoveries in science and inventions in art, which are working such wonders for human welfare in modern times; it is the most thoroughly Christianized nations which have accomplished the most. Heathen and Mohammedan nations contribute nothing. It may be a fulfilment of the original promise that man should subdue and rule the earth. The promise to the human race, as such, was forfeited in the fall. It was renewed to God's covenant people. It is continually reiterated that they shall inherit the earth. Do we not see its fulfilment in this fact, that heathen and Mohammedan nations discover and invent nothing; that the more thoroughly Christianized a nation is, the more it contributes to the wonders of modern discovery and invention, by which the powers of nature are subdued to man's service, and man takes possession of the earth, and inherits it? Thus, while in Christianity the spiritual life and church are foremost in thought, the very nations and races in which this life is mighty become God's chosen agents in advancing human welfare; and in this sense God is carrying on his work, now as in ancient times, not by all nations, but by a chosen nation, or at most by a few chosen nations.

4. The Israelitish people was a church in covenant with God, to which was intrusted the preservation and propagation of the true religion. They were thus, like Christians, "stewards of the manifold grace of God." Missions to other nations were not enjoined; for the world was not yet ready for them. God did, however, scatter them among all nations, carrying with them the knowledge of Jehovah, and of the Messiah to come. And the principle of missionary labor was established in the beginning; that they who have the knowledge of God and redemption, have it intrusted to them as stewards to preserve and propagate it. Two methods of fulfilling this stewardship were especially en-

joined on the Israelites; the consecration of their children to God, followed by the sedulous and persevering education of them in the true faith, and the conversion to the faith, so far as practicable, of all foreigners with whom they came in contact. It should be observed that this method of preserving and propagating the faith by the consecration and training of children, is in all ages the principal reliance of the church for its own growth wherever Christianity has once been accepted by a people; and it is here declared as fundamental in the first formal institution of the church in the call of Abraham.

Thus the Israelites, though separated from other nations for the preservation of the true religion, were in advance of all contemporary nations as to the spirit and principles of a world-wide religion and philanthropy. In the ages when all other nations were shut up in national exclusiveness, and scarcely had the idea of a human race, much less of one God and one religion and one blessedness for all mankind, the Jews had this grand idea; it was in their literature as the promise and prophecy of God; it was seminal in their national life; it was vital in every generation in the lives of spiritual men and women;¹ and the expectation of its realization in the Messiah gradually became assured and universal, though accompanied with errors.

For all these reasons, the separation of the Israelites is not inconsistent with the universality of the promise, and, instead of invalidating, confirms the argument for its divine and supernatural origin.

¹ See Luke ii. 31, 32.