

MOSES THE MEEK

by F. S. PARNHAM

WE are glad to publish a further meditation in the Scriptures from the pen of Mr. Parnham, whose previous studies on the miracle at Cana and Mary of Bethany have been appreciated by many of our readers.

MOSES was a man of God, strong in faith. From birth he was set apart and later called to discharge the most exacting task that could fall to the lot of mortal man, for he was chosen to act as God's mouthpiece and mediator to an ungrateful nation. As a prophet he had no equal in Israel. Among the many saintly men who served God in their day and generation Moses was an outstanding character whom the Lord knew by name and to whom He could speak as a man speaks to his friend. When he finished his course his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated; he passed into the presence of God in full possession of his faculties, bequeathing to his nation a rich legacy of inspired legislation and many precious memories. In life he bore this testimony that he was "faithful in all God's house". In death he was accorded the rare privilege of being buried by the Lord, who thereby ensured that his tomb should be hidden from the gaze of the curious and not made an object of veneration.

If—as is evident from Scripture—this patriarch's birth and death were alike determined by the will of God, so the length of his life was governed by the decree of Genesis 6: 3, comprising, in his case, three equal periods of 40 years.

Emerging from enforced obscurity Moses is first seen as a helpless babe, lying in an ark of rushes, moored by the river-side and watched over by his sister Miriam. It was no mere accident which brought Pharaoh's daughter to such a place at such a time. Subsequent events, beginning with his adoption as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and a close connection with the Egyptian dynasty, justify the conclusion that in all these things God had a purpose, viz. that His chosen instrument for the liberation of Israel should be conversant with the learning and wisdom of Egypt. Enjoying, therefore, the facilities and patronage of the royal court Moses grew up to intellectual maturity, a powerful speaker whose deeds matched his words. Stephen, in his condensed review of Jewish history, supplies much of this information and in Acts 7: 22 also provides the means for correcting the faulty translation

of Hebrews 11: 24 in the Authorized Version. Moses had long passed the days of his youth so there could be no question of "coming to years". Rather he had become great in reputation and knowledge, with the added prospect of one day, perhaps, ascending the throne of Egypt. Yet, what happened to bring this first promising period of 40 years to an abrupt end?

We turn again to Stephen's testimony. When Moses made his tour of inspection to see, at first hand, how his enslaved countrymen were faring, he acted upon a "supposition", for "he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not" (Acts 7: 23-25). He himself was fully assured of his calling but the ignorance of the Israelites proved to be an obstacle which even his strong personal conviction failed to remove. In fact, his credentials were seriously questioned and his benevolent intentions met with no better response than a severe rebuke: "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (Exodus 2: 14).

Viewed in the light of what transpired later, Moses' intervention at that time was 40 years too soon and the method he tried to apply was unwise. Instinctively one thinks of Paul's words to the Galatian Christians: "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing" (Galatians 4: 18). True; but zeal needs a controlling hand to guide it into the right channel. Whatever was lacking in Moses—possibly due to his upbringing at the Egyptian court—had to be made good in the Lord's school of discipline with a curriculum that could not be hurried. All the wisdom of Egypt was no substitute for that spiritual quality which counts so much with God, for with Him it is an inflexible principle that "the meek will he guide in judgment and the meek will he teach his way" (Psalm 25: 9).

Events moved rapidly to a crisis. Despite frustrated hopes and misguided efforts Moses was still a man of faith and Hebrews 11: 27 bears this out: "By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king", yet he deemed it expedient to avoid the consequences of his ill-concealed slaughter of one of Pharaoh's subjects. His flight took him to the land of Midian, where he began his second period of 40 years as a exile in the humblest of circumstances—a shepherd tending the flock of Jethro. "As for God, his way is perfect" (Psalm 18: 30) and beyond criticism. A revised syllabus for the education of the Lord's servant was called for and it is safe to say that his prolonged schooling in a strange land was not wasted, as the sequel confirmed.

So the years rolled quietly by while Moses—with ample scope for meditation—was being trained for the supreme task to which

God had called him. In the tranquil circumstances of his adopted country he learned much and discarded, perhaps, even more. Meanwhile the Spirit of God was re-shaping and moulding his character to a degree of meekness that fully justified the testimonial of later years recorded in the Scripture of Numbers 12: 3. There is no place for pride in God's service.

But the crucial turning-point in Moses' career was reached when the Lord appeared to him in the bush that burned with fire and yet was not consumed (Exodus 3: 2). Without realizing it at first, he was then and there brought to stand upon the holy ground of God's Presence and challenged with a purpose from which there could be no more retreat. With veiled face and trembling heart he listened to the voice of God Who confirmed his original appointment as liberator of His people. The cries of the slaves had reached unto heaven and called for redress. At long last the time was ripe for action and Moses is God's choice for the work. But hear the many protestations of incompetence which greeted the gracious words of divine authority: "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3: 11). What an amazing change in the man who was once "mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7: 22), but is now reduced to a state of humility expressed in the words: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent; I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue". Indeed, he would seem greatly relieved if the Lord would choose another in his place!

We pass on. What shall we say of those final 40 years of fruitful but strenuous toil in the wilderness? The Preacher (Ecclesiastes) could not have composed a better epilogue than the words of Eccl. 7: 8, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit". While sharing the vicissitudes of the people as they wandered in desert ways Moses fully justified the spiritual value of his previous training and thus we see the erstwhile candidate for royal honours crowned with the better ornament of a meek and quiet spirit (I Peter 3: 4). He displays this when he speaks as a prophet and foretells the advent of Christ in a future day, saying: "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thy brethren, *like unto me*" (Deut. 18: 15). "Like unto me"? What is the implication of this unusual comparison? Matthew 11: 29 gives the clue and Numbers 12 the illustration. The One who said: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" was the same gracious Lord Who reviled not again when He was reviled but committed Himself to Him Who judgeth righteously (cf. I Peter 2: 23).

Family jealousy was a severe test to Moses' faith. Confronted by the accusation of Aaron and Miriam he refused to be provoked and wisely remained mute, content for God to judge his cause. How important is the context of this recorded episode for Numbers 12: 3, where Moses is said to be the meekest man on earth, indicates a virtue which enabled this man to serve God acceptably in a fellowship that endured to the end. God hates pride and arrogance. That is one reason why the Lord's school of discipline still functions and His disciples (learners) are ever welcome. In that holy atmosphere the fruits of the Spirit blossom and ripen fast. There too we may see and capture something of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and shed it upon those around us.

Despite his one recorded failure the verdict of Scripture is clearly set out in Deut. 34: 10. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face". Blessed indeed are the meek among us if they establish a like reputation!

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