

GOD IN NATURE AND IN HISTORY.

II. ON THE APPREHENSION OF GOD IN HISTORY.

WE shall now turn to Psalms of a different class, with the view of still further illustrating our principles. Hitherto we have dealt with Nature, we now pass to History. And, to bridge over the transition from nature to history, we may take the subject of Providence as lying between them. The last section of Psalm lxxv. will suffice us as a specimen of this class of Scriptures. "*Thou hast visited the earth, and made it overflow, thou greatly enrichest it with the brook of God* (i.e., the rain), *full of water : thou preparest their corn, for so thou preparest it (the earth), drenching her furrows, settling her ridges ; with showers thou softenest her, her springing thou dost bless. Thou hast crowned a year of thy goodness* (proleptical, for "thou hast crowned this year as a year of thy goodness"), *and thy foot-prints drop down fatness. The pastures of the steppes drop therewith, and the hills gird themselves with gladness. The meadows are clothed with sheep, and the valleys enwrap themselves with corn : men shout for joy, yea, they sing.*" Here we have the bounties of a plentiful rain, followed by an abundant harvest, thankfully acknowledged. God is recognized as the giver of both : the rain is "the brook of God" ; the plentiful harvest is a "year of God's goodness." The rain and its results form a theophany ; God is apprehended in them. Now what thought had the Writer in his mind when he connected the rain and the abundant crops with God ? Was the connection a material one, or a religious one ? Can it be the Psalmist's intention to tell us the physical

cause of the good harvest, by way of satisfying our curiosity? And did he mean to represent the fruitfulness of the year as owing to an unusual activity on God's part, as if "God's goodness" were a new cause introduced into the chain of facts determining scarcity or abundance? If so, then a year of scarcity would be one in which God had become inactive, or less active, had forgotten to do his part; and that cannot be meant. If the fruitfulness of one year is owing to God's interference with the chain of physical causation (*i.e.* to say, to an interruption of his ordinary and constant Providential work), and if this be his "goodness," or kindness, then the badness of another year would be owing to God's want of goodness, would be due to God's unkindness. But surely God's kindness is unchangeable; no one can fancy that it could fluctuate in this way. Further, there is here, as elsewhere, the difficulty that if the Psalmist wanted merely to know the physical cause of the rain, we cannot think why he should ascribe it to God, rather than to the clouds, or the wind, or numberless other celestial agencies. He did not inductively eliminate these, and leave God alone remaining, according to modern scientific methods. Do we not escape these difficulties by here accepting the same explanation as before; that the apprehension of God, in Providence as in Nature, is not owing to anything peculiar in the physical causation of things; that the connection of God with nature apprehended by these Psalmists is not a material one at all; that when a Psalmist ascribes the harvest to God's goodness, he does not mean to make a scientific affirmation as to the cause, but is speaking in a different region altogether, is giving a religious interpretation of the facts, is expressing a perception of the spirit, not of the reason? Is not the simple fact enough, that these bounteous gifts of rain and a fruitful season bring God home to his heart, awaken in him thoughts of God?

This much, at any rate, is clear, that it is not a miraculous interposition of God that the Psalm relates. It is simply God's ordinary providential carefulness which is praised. And from this we must accept the deduction that, in order to an apprehension of God, there needs not anything extraordinary in the physical causation of events. A theophany *may* be an unmiraculous event. And if we go this length, we can hardly refuse the further step, hardly refuse to admit that the distinguishing characteristic of the theophany is simply an inward experience of God in a godly man. No doubt the event will always have something uncommon or wonderful about it; otherwise no experience of God would be occasioned. Mere everyday commonplaces awaken no emotion whatever: this harvest was unusually bounteous. But the extraordinary is enough; it does not need to be miraculous.

Passing now to History proper, or the vicissitudes of individual and national life, we may, first of all, take Psalm vi. as the type of a class. Here we have the complaint of one who is in distress through the wickedness of enemies (Verses 7, 8, 10). At first he uses the phraseology of sickness in describing his state (Verses 2, 6, 7), and this has led many commentators to think that the occasion of the Psalm was actually a severe illness. But the sickness is only the result of the persecution of his enemies; or, perhaps even, it is nothing more than a poetic and figurative way of expressing the troublesomeness and the danger of their persecution. The Writer is face to face with death (Verse 5); he is on the verge of despair; but God then relieves him (Verses 8-10), in answer to his prayer.

Now what we have to call attention to is, that the Psalmist regards this state of things as a manifestation of God's "wrath" and "displeasure" (Verse 1): "*O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, nor chasten me in thy hot*

displeasure." His trouble is to him a theophany, a revelation of God; only it is a revelation of God in anger. But if God's connection with the Psalmist's distress is a physical one, if God is in any sense the physical origin of this persecution, we have two causes assigned to one event: (1) Human enemies; and (2) God's displeasure. And yet the Writer evidently does not intend these two to share the responsibility together; and hence they cannot be thought of by him as both causes in the same way, and to the same effect. He recognizes that all the moral blame of his sufferings falls on his enemies; they are "workers of iniquity"; their enmity is *their sin*, and God takes no share in that responsibility. If these two causes, therefore, are not to clash, if we are not to accuse the Psalmist of the uttermost confusion of thought, their causation must belong to different spheres. The human responsibility is entirely borne by the enemies, *i.e.* to say, in the scientific sphere, they alone are the causes of this trouble. But, besides this, there is the entirely independent sphere of the religious interpretation and use of calamity; and there the cause of the trouble is God, for the Psalmist recognizes a Divine purpose in his affliction. It is from God, because God speaks to him in it, because his heart is religiously moved by affliction.¹

A parallel from the historical books, which will prove that this double view of events was really a current thought in Israel, is found in David's words regarding Shimei's cursing (2 Sam. xvi. 10), when Abishai asks leave to put the reviler to death, the king replies: "*So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David . . . let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.*" Here the natural interpretation is so plainly false, that it will be rejected by every one. God cannot have commanded Shimei to commit this sin. But was David's conception of God, perhaps, so rude and undeveloped that he was capable

¹ See Ps. xxxviii. for circumstances exactly similar.

of ascribing such a command to God? Did David mean to insinuate that Shimei was not so very much to blame in the matter, because a higher power was moving him to do this wrong? By no means. In his dying speech (1 Kings ii. 8, the passage is by the same writer as 2 Sam. xvi., see Wellhausen's "Bleek's Einleitung," 4th ed., §§ 112-118), David charges his son with the execution of due punishment on Shimei for his crime. He quite recognizes that, in the sphere of phenomenal causation, the act was wholly Shimei's, and wholly criminal. Yet also the act was God's, and David refuses to allow Abishai to put an immediate end to the affliction, because he recognizes a religious use in it. He sees that God is speaking to him through the infliction. There is a lesson of humbling for him in it, and David will not spare himself the learning it. Again we are compelled to distinguish two spheres: the human and phenomenal region, that which science has to do with, in which the whole cause is Shimei's evil passions; and the divine or religious sphere, the religious use of all that happens in reminding the soul of God, and awakening the varied forms of religious emotion in the spirit.

On this same principle—of religious use not of physical causation—are to be interpreted all the passages in the Old Testament that seem to ascribe to God unrighteous or ungenerous actions, as in this case of Shimei. And such passages are somewhat numerous. One of the clearest is Ezekiel xx. 25, 26: "*Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live; and I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that first opened the womb, that I might make them desolate.*" Here the introduction of Moloch-worship is attributed to Jehovah; but, of course, not to the effect that He desired such worship, and therefore moved men to commence it. The Prophet only sees a religious use, or meaning, in the introduction of such

heathen worship, viz., perhaps, a means of testing the reality of Israel's professed religion. So with God's tempting David to number the people (2 Sam. xxiv. 1); "the evil spirit from the Lord" that troubled Saul (1 Sam. xvi. 14-23), tempting him to commit murder (Chapter xviii. 10, 11); the lying spirit that went forth at the Lord's behest to entice Ahab to his ruin (1 Kings xxii. 20-23), by inspiring his prophets with falsehood; the Lord's "stirring up adversaries to Solomon," i.e., urging men to rebellion against their lawful king; the Lord's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod. ix. 12; x. 1, 20, 27; xi. 10; xiv. 4, 8).¹ See also Isaiah lxiii. 17: "*O Lord, why dost thou make us to err from thy ways, and harden our hearts from thy fear?*" Isaiah xxix. 10: "*For the Lord hath poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes, and your rulers hath He covered;*" Isaiah vi. 9, 10: "*Make the heart of this people fat,*" etc; also Psalm lxxxii. 12: "*So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust; and they walked in their own counsels;*" Psalm cv. 25: "*He turned their (the Egyptians) heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.*" It may not always be easy to say what is the precise religious use or interpretation that is in the Writer's mind when he refers each of these various actions to God; but it is quite clear, on the face of it, that the Writers cannot have meant to charge God with being the cause of these acts, in the modern sense of "cause," else they must also have thrown the blame of them on God, and that they never do. The contemplation of these events awoke in them the thought of God, awoke religious emotions and feelings in them; that, and that alone, is what they meant to express when they said, These are God's doings. When

¹ In this latter case we have positive proof of the existence of two ways of looking at the one fact, for elsewhere (Exod. viii. 15, 32) Pharaoh hardens his own heart. The phenomenal cause was Pharaoh himself; the ascription of the same phenomena to God also shews that the Hebrews could see a religious use and meaning, for them and for Pharaoh, in the event.

after the loss of all that he had, Job submissively cried : “ *The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord ;*” was he thinking only of the “ *fire of God*” that “ *fell from heaven and burnt up the sheep and the servants,*” and “ *the wind from the wilderness that smote the four corners of the house upon the young men that they died ?*” Was it only in these that he saw the Lord’s taking away ? Or, if he included therein the whole of his calamities, did he mean to say that the Chaldeans and the Sabæans were not wholly criminal in what they did because there was a higher power urging them to it, and so taking part of the blame ? Was it anything better than mere love of rapine and avaricious greed which moved these robbers to this raid ? Of course not. Yet the action of the Chaldeans and Sabæans, which was guilt in them, was recognized by Job as an act of God, with reference to which his only duty was submission. In short, he sees that in these losses there were lessons from God to him ; he at once resigns himself to the religious use of the calamity. The bad news stirs in his mind emotions that are connected with God’s presence—awe, reverence, submission ; he is at once thrown into a religious state, that is to say, the Lord is in the calamity.

We may next take an example from the history of nations. Psalm lxxix. is a lament and prayer in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. A picture is given of the desolation of the Temple and the city (Verse 1), of the slaughter of the inhabitants (Verses 2, 3), and the malicious glee of the enemies of Judah (Verse 4). Verse 5 then ascribes all this to the anger of God at Israel’s sins ; “ *How long, Lord ? wilt thou be angry for ever ? shall thy jealousy burn like fire ?*” The instruments of this wrath, as all will admit, were Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans ; and these were, also admittedly, quite

free in their actions, and had no idea that a Divine Power was working through them. This attribution of national calamity to the wrath of God is universal throughout all stages of Israelite history. It is useless to begin quoting instances: every Chapter almost in the Prophets would have to be cited. Undoubtedly, then, God was apprehended as active in all such calamities; and what we have to find out is wherein this apprehension of God consisted. If we are to suppose that the Prophets and Psalmists thought that Jehovah, in some way, worked out his will through the free activity of Nebuchadnezzar, still the question remains, and it is the only question which has the slightest interest for the theory of Revelation: What made them think that Jehovah had any hand in the matter at all? It was no perception of sense which apprehended his presence. Phenomenally, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was as much a natural event as the destruction of Rome by the Gauls. If the Psalmists and Prophets only cared about the cause of these calamities, they would have thrown themselves into utter confusion by finding two equally complete causes, a human and a Divine one. The state of mind in which their national calamities appeared as theophanies can only be understood when we break away from the conception of physical causation in interpreting their words. The hearts of the worshippers of Jehovah apprehended God in their visitation, because it awoke religious emotions and experiences in them. Thus, again, we are led to the conclusion that, in their minds, God's connection with their calamities was not one belonging to the sphere of physical causation, but rather to the sphere of religious use. If any one should pretend to have proved that the events leading up to the capture of Jerusalem were all perfectly natural and predictable from ordinary causes, he would not thereby have eliminated God from history; for that is not the fashion

in which God is in history. The discovery of "God in History," as of "God in Nature," is not one that science can help or hinder; it is a perception of the religious nature, the spirit, and not of the reason.

It is needless to multiply instances further. The same lines of reasoning might be applied to all the cases of the apprehension of God in history, *e.g.*, to Psalms like the Eighteenth, where David praises God for having redeemed him in numerous instances all through his lifetime; or to Psalms cv., cvi., etc., which narrate the ancient Israelitè history so as to call attention to God's hand in it. The same explanation must be given in all these cases, at least for all non-miraculous events in which God is seen. The presence of God in history was not due to anything peculiar in the physical causation of the events. God was in any event the contemplation of which aroused religious emotions in men. God was seen, no doubt, in miraculous events also; but it was not the miraculous character of the events that constituted his connection with them. This result, it may be observed, tallies exactly with that already obtained from the consideration of "God in Nature." Religious communion, experienced by godly men, is seen to be the source—that is, the invariably antecedent state in *man's* mind, we are dealing only with that—of all affirmations made in these Psalms about God's presence in Nature or in History. That seems to lead us towards the general proposition, which we do not pretend to do more than point towards, that communion with God, or religious experience, is the correlative in man of what is revelation, or self-manifesting activity, in God; hence that, humanly speaking, religious experience is the source of all new truth in regard to religion. Accordingly, if we would know more about the process of Revelation, we must analyse religious experience further. And when we reflect that the Holy

Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is the representative of religious communion (2 Cor. xiii. 14), there seems opened to us a vista towards some better appreciation of the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Source of all Revelation, inspiring the Prophets of the Old Testament (2 Pet. i. 21; 1 Pet. i. 11), and "guiding into all truth" the disciples and followers of Christ under the New (St. John xvi. 13; see xiv. 17, 26).

We may, in a single word, answer an objection which may be taken to the view above indicated. The cry of irreligious naturalism has been usually raised hitherto against attempts to do justice to the indications we have been dealing with; and it has been argued that, in this way, all the religious worth and meaning is taken out of Scripture, and especially out of the history of Israel. It seems to us that the very reverse is the case; that it is the ordinary interpretation which is the naturalism, because it turns the impassioned language of religious communion into mere cold propositions of the scientific sphere to which they do not belong, and thus involves itself in conflicts with science. Surely the "naturalism" lies in denying the independence of the religious sphere, and allowing that the scientific sphere is all, so that, unless room can be found there for God, there is no room anywhere for Him. The religious meaning of the whole of Nature and of the whole of History, the universal reign of Jehovah, is exactly what we have been trying to vindicate. This religious meaning is freed from uncertainty, by being taken out of the region of logic into that of immediate spiritual perception. The evidence of God's presence in Nature and in History we consider to depend not on reasoning, but on immediate intuition of the spirit; and the trustworthiness of all ultimate data of our perceptive faculties must always be a

postulate which is above criticism. That we do habitually, though it may be unconsciously, distinguish the religious sphere or the religious interpretation of phenomena from the scientific, an illustration from ordinary life will show. We have seen men and women disabled for life, say by the carelessness of a nurse, who has let them drop from her arms while infants. Or we have seen men reduced to penury by the downfall of some commercial fabric in which they were interested, a downfall wholly attributable to the guilt of speculators, and for which the law holds these speculators responsible, and punishes them. In both cases the sufferers, if godly men, submissively recognize that God has afflicted them, and think it their duty not to murmur, but to triumph over calamity by faith, and render it only a means of increasing their nearness to God. This they do as much in the cases quoted, where men are to blame, as when limbs are injured or property is lost in a gale at sea, or by the "fire of God." When, therefore, such men ascribe their calamity to God, and bear it patiently and cheerfully on that account, must Science describe their words as purely anti-scientific mythology? Or, on the other hand, when they acknowledge that their so ascribing their misfortunes to God, is only the religious use of calamity, and that the *cause* was wholly the carelessness or wickedness of their fellow-men, must Theology cry out that this is ungodly naturalism? Are not both interpretations equally legitimate? There is, of course, no doubt that science is right in saying that it can find no cause save human carelessness and wickedness; but is it not also unquestionable that the right attitude for a finite spirit to take up towards unavoidable affliction is to receive it from God's hand with patience and meekness, and to conquer it by the power of the religious life. This, then, is exactly how we understand similar statements in the Bible; and we hold that the analogy between the two cases is sufficient

to preclude the objection of "naturalism." Our interpretation of the words of the Bible must then be left to stand or fall according to the verdict of exegetical science.

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THE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF THE LAMP.

I. THE PARABLE (*concluded*).

ST. LUKE xi. 33.

THIS charming parable occurs in three other passages in the Synoptic Gospels (St. Mark iv. 21; St. Luke viii. 16; and St. Matthew v. 15), and was uttered by our Lord in at least two wholly different connections of thought. Of these other uses of the Parable I gave an exposition in the last number of this Magazine. But here St. Luke gives us another repetition of it, and links it on to a passage so philosophical and profound that we must not expect to fathom half its depth of meaning and suggestion. In his version of it it runs: "*No man, when he hath lighted a lamp, putteth it into a cellar, or under a bushel, but on the lamp-stand, that they who come in may see the light.*" And the Verses which follow it, literally rendered, run thus: "*Thine eye is the lamp of the body. When thine eye is single, thy whole body is illuminated; but when it is evil, thy body also is endarkened. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. For if thy whole body be illuminated, having no part dark, the whole shall be illuminated as when the bright shining of the lamp irradiates thee.*"

Now no one can read these words without feeling how difficult they are, without being conscious of a meaning in them which it is hard to grasp and define. There is a touch of mysticism in them. Though they are found in the Gospel of St. Luke, and, substantially, in the Gospel of