

## THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH.

## VIII. THE CONSUMMATION.—CHAP. XIV.

THE highly figurative representation given in this chapter was apparently not intended to be a realistic picture of any one event. It conveys the impression that God and His people will triumph, and will do so by miraculous interposition at the hour when appearances are most against them. It shows us the day of the Lord opening in gloom but light at evening; great calamities falling upon the city of God, but resulting in her being lifted as the conspicuous, life-giving metropolis of the race. When already the enemies of Jerusalem have stormed the city and are sacking it, when she is suffering all the horrors which even well-disciplined troops can scarcely be withheld from inflicting on a town that has long resisted their siege, when heaps of spoil are piled up in her open squares and savage soldiers are quarrelling over the booty, when the women and children and men who have escaped the first slaughter are tremblingly waiting to learn their fate, then the Mount of Olives shall cleave in two parts, and through the valley thus made the inhabitants shall flee. This friendly earthquake is the sign of the Lord's coming, the beginning of that day of the Lord which is described in the remainder of the chapter.

The chief points in this description are that that day, which is *one*, or unique, and known only to the Lord, shall be dim and hazy, a gloomy twilight, but shall clear eventually to bright and cheerful light. There shall also flow through the land both east and west, both to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, a perennial stream of water, refreshing and fertilizing the whole country. Jehovah shall be owned as God in the whole earth. There shall be one God, and His name One. His sanctuary also shall be elevated

in the sight of all men. Then follows, in vers. 12-19, the announcement that those who refuse to own God and His sanctuary shall be punished; and the prophecy closes with the remarkable prediction that all things shall be holy.

The physical accompaniments of this great day, the murky twilight and earthquake and pestilence, give us no certain outline by which we can represent it to the mind. We turn, therefore, to its spiritual characteristics, the changes which will then be discernible in men's ideas and habits, and here we find much to instruct.

The grand result of this great manifestation, which the prophet entitles "the day of the Lord," is enounced in these words: "The Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord and His name one." This, then, is to be the great result of the world's history, of the world's experience, and of the world's thought. It is not, as we might have expected, the starting-point. But that which all is to lead on and up to is, that men shall at last know and own their God and their unity in Him. The Old Testament prophets sometimes speak of the day of the Lord and of His appearing in terms which fitly apply to the coming of Christ and God's manifestation in Him; but sometimes they use language which is by no means exhausted by that first coming and manifestation, but awaits for its fulfilment some further revelation of the glory of God. This present order of things is to terminate in this final manifestation of God, which is not so much a new revelation as a completion or application of that which has already been made in Christ. We can in looking at the Old Testament history partly see how things were preparing for Christ's coming, and yet men could not have gathered—as indeed in point of fact not even the best instructed persons did gather—either the time or the mode of His coming. So now we may dimly discern that things are working on towards His return to reign in glory, and yet

it is impossible to say when or how this shall be. But the first expectation having been fulfilled, it becomes the best guarantee that the second also will not be disappointed.

Besides, all this that we read in the Bible is so much in keeping, in its own way, with what science tells us, that our belief is aided and made easy. Science tells us that for hundreds of thousands of years this earth has been passing through tremendous changes—changes to which this cleaving of the Mount of Olives is like the scattering of a molehill by a passer's foot—and has been slowly, very slowly we should say, assuming the shape, the temperature, the atmosphere, the inhabitants it now has. It tells us also that though there have been great convulsions, breaking again and again the old order of things, bringing perpetual ice where there had been tropical vegetation, and extinguishing species of animals that have never again appeared, yet that through all there is distinctly apparent a connected thread which links the last appearances to the first. Now all this confirms, in three important respects, what these prophets tell us.

First.—Science and prophecy agree in calling our attention to the fact that God works on the principle of beginning at the beginning, of commencing with the seed small as a grain of mustard seed, but which is destined to fill the world's gaze as a tree; God begins with what is smallest and lowest and works on to what is highest and best. We should have said God must *begin* by giving to men the fullest knowledge of Himself. Science says, No; or if He does so, He acts in contradiction to all His other works, and to that mode of operation which meets us everywhere, and seems to be His law.

Second.—Science shows us that though things are only gradually and therefore very slowly evolved, yet there are great breaks and new points of departure every here and there. That is to say, the history of this earth, continued

through all these countless ages, has not been regularly continuous like the growth of a tree or of our own body, but it has resembled rather the growth of a nation, which is interrupted every now and again by a revolution, which is found to be helpful to its growth and to set it at once on a quite different level from that on which it has hitherto been. Or these breaks in the history of the earth may be compared to the breaks in the life of an individual, such, for example, as marriage, in which a man at one step enters upon quite a new stage and style of life, and not by any merely natural growth but by the action of his own will advances into new relationships. Similarly the Bible lays open to us a history which, while in the main it is a gradual evolution or growth, is broken in upon at one or two points by new forces, which compel it to a new course, or lift it at once to a new level or suddenly introduce elements which are to characterize the new period.

And third.—Not only do science and the Bible agree in showing us that the histories with which they are severally concerned are in both cases a slow growth from small and distant beginnings, interrupted every now and again by what seem to be new forces and interferences from without, but they also agree in affirming that there is one plan, or at all events one system, running through the whole, linking together the remotest past with the present, and proving that everything is connected with everything else, and can somehow be traced back to one common origin.

The prophet, foreseeing that all nations would give in their adhesion to the one true God, Jehovah, speaks of this under the forms with which he and his people were familiar. From all nations men would go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles. It is nothing to him that this is practically impossible. It is nothing to him that long religious pilgrimages are attended with disadvantages greatly outweighing

any advantages to be derived from them. It is nothing to him that the unity of religion which is secured by all men acknowledging one local centre is a greatly inferior unity to that which is secured by one spirit pervading all from centre to circumference. All this is nothing to the prophet whose business it is to convey to the men he has to do with a vivid impression of a great idea or event. The men to whom he was sent could not conceive of any religious unity which did not involve the recognition of one local, visible centre, as little as Mohammedans or Papists can. The idea of a universal religion could be conveyed to their minds only by some such representation as this, that all kinds of foreigners would be seen coming up year by year to Jerusalem to celebrate the great Jewish feasts. When he affirmed that all nations would one day come up and keep the feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem, he himself and those he spoke to understood that their God was to be universally acknowledged, and to object that the prophecy has not been fulfilled in the letter is very much the same as if you were to object to a person paying you in sovereigns a sum of money he had spoken of as so many dollars.

But why specify the feast of Tabernacles? The feast of Tabernacles was the commemoration of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, and their dependence on God when they dwelt in tents, not tilling the ground in fixed places of abode. And it was accordingly celebrated annually when the harvest had been finished, and it was looked upon in the light of a national thanksgiving or acknowledgment that still they were dependent on the same God who had kept them alive without harvests. It is the acknowledgment, therefore, of the God of nature appearing and manifesting Himself as the God of grace and salvation; it was the feast by which all who engaged in it acknowledged the identity of the God who delivered His people from Egypt with the God who upholds all nature's laws. Most suitably,

therefore, is this the feast in which the nations join ; coming from distant lands, where nature appears in different aspects, they join in acknowledgment that Israel's God is that one in whom they live and move and have their being.

This acknowledgment, however, would not be without exception, not absolutely universal. On those who refused this acknowledgment, judgment would fall—judgment congenial with the offence—a withholding of rain which is the essential of harvest ; and in a country like Egypt, where no rain falls, or none to speak of, other punishment would occur. This suiting of punishment to the offence is a marked characteristic of God's government ; a principle which has been constantly remarked upon. Dante has largely utilized and illustrated it in his great poem. In his visit to the realms of punishment he saw tyrants immersed in a sea of blood ; gluttons exposed with all their pampered softness to a sleety tempest of cold, discoloured, stinking hail ; the proud bending for ever under heavy burdens which will not suffer them to stand erect ; schismatics who have rent the Church in two, themselves cleft asunder ; those who had pried into the future and professed prophetic powers had now their own faces reversed, so that they could not look before them and see their own way. A great part of the pain of punishment, and a great part of its remedial action, arise from this feature of it. Our punishment becomes insufferable not from its mere pain, but from the circumstance that the pain continually reminds us of the iniquitous and gratuitous and self-willed folly that has made this pain our lot in life. Were it not self-inflicted, we could bear it ; were it pain incurred in a good cause, we could glory in it ; but as it is, we can but hang our heads in shame and bear our misery alone and in secret as best we may. The only solace is that this misery may be remedial ; that this very pointed reference it bears to our sin may be helpful in separating us from the sin that caused it.

It does not always or necessarily do so. To the impotent man whom our Lord healed after thirty-eight years of punishment, He said, "Sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee," seeing that after this lifelong punishment the power of sin was not broken. And how often have we seen the same; a man all through life keeping himself back and gathering all kinds of misery around himself by persisting in sin, so that again and again we say, How is it possible he can persist in sin, no better, no wiser, for all he has come through; but so it is, no amount of mere punishment changes the heart.

There is the same rational and significant connexion still existing between the sins and the punishments of communities. But if this connexion is often overlooked, ignored, or violently thrust out of sight by individuals, communities seem much more commonly to disregard its significance. The conscience of the community is scattered and lacks concentration. Yet in some matters it has been aroused, and the community has tardily shaken off a burden or cleansed itself from a blot. Revolutions and riots slowly led us to see that injustice was being done to large classes of the people. Cholera and typhoid fever slowly do their part in compelling attention to God's laws. And now in prolonged commercial depression we seem to be having another lesson read to us if only there are men of skill and courage enough to read it for us and lead the way in enforcing it. When catastrophes of a disastrous kind occur some law has been broken, and if we are to be free from their repetition these laws must be discovered, and must be observed. We are called to face a period of distress such as need not have occurred. Thousands are thrown out of employment and must be provided for, because some social law has been broken. No doubt accidents happen, disasters occur, in which no one is much to blame; but until inquiry is made, no one has a right to assume that the accident was

unavoidable. We should feel that the authorities were not doing their part if no inquiry was made into each railway accident as it occurs; and the fact that other disasters are of greater magnitude and of longer duration and of more obscure origin ought not to lead us to class them as unavoidable calamities. As certainly as the dearth and drought in the countries spoken of by Zechariah, were meant to call attention to God and His laws, so certainly is the present distress meant to draw attention to what has been culpably neglected. The present distress will pass away, but it will be a thousand pities if it does so before it has compelled those whose duty it is, thoroughly to understand the real causes of it, and to take steps to prevent its recurrence. The contrivances for keeping the balance between different interests in society are of the rudest description; and if through the present distress some advance is made in adjusting class to class and making society more like a coherent unity, even those who suffer most will surely acknowledge that their suffering has not been in vain, but that they have been indirectly and perhaps unintentionally working out the welfare of future generations.

But that which is especially remarkable in this description of the consummation of all things is the abolition of the distinction between things sacred and secular. Men who have keenly felt the degradation and misery of our present entanglement in moral evil, have seen two ways out—but neither of these does the Jewish prophet welcome.

1st.—He does not promise us an emancipation from all connexion with things material, as if such an emancipation would of itself deliver us from evil into a state we could permanently live in with comfort. Some of the religions which have most powerfully appealed to earnest men have acquired their influence mainly by promising emancipation from sin by emancipation from all connexion with the



body and the material world. It is the flesh, they say, that leads us astray. Crucify the flesh, bring your body under, separate yourself from the world, do with as little food as possible, do not attend to the cleansing of the body or any of its wants, do not comfort it in any way, and you will be free from sin. In which there is a great deal more truth than we commonly admit, but when accepted as containing the whole truth, and as being in itself a perfect way of salvation, it is of course delusive. In this Jewish prophet there is none of the wholesale condemnation of matter you find in many other teachers. He, too, sees a way out of this present evil world; but it is not by emancipation from the body, nor by separation from the world, nor by ceasing to have to do with such demoralizing creatures as horses; but by bringing a holy spirit into all occupations, by writing on the bells that dangled from the horse-collars the inscription on the High-priest's frontlet, which had given him entrance to the Holiest of All.

This, then, is to be a characteristic feature of our eternal condition, that we are no longer to feel as if some moral contagion attached to the material world and to all worldly occupations; as if we had to admire the scenery of this earth by stealth, or to retain a scruple and hesitation about devoting time and energy to trade, or as if God turned away in displeasure or looked in pity and contempt when we enjoy any natural and innocent pleasure. Something of the ascetic feeling clings to us still, and few of us have the same clearness of perception about the holiness of things secular as Zechariah had. Nothing is itself sinful or profane which God has made; nothing common or unclean; but everything God has created is good and to be received with thanksgiving. Look at the life of our Lord, how He found all things sacred—birds, plants, dinings-out, paying His taxes, fishing, adventures on the lake, all occasions and all relationships of life. In His life the distinction between

sacred and secular is no longer possible. His glory was manifested at a marriage supper no less than in the synagogue or the temple.

But some lives fall quite manifestly into two parts, which, for all that appears, have little affinity to one another. Their sacred duties stand by themselves, and their secular duties are perfectly distinct. Some persons, indeed, seem to have no idea that religion is anything else than the devout performance of certain observances and the keeping-up of certain appearances. If you deprived them of the power of going to church, or of using certain phrases and forms of worship; if you took out of their day one or two half-hours in it, you would really leave them no religion at all; so easily separable is their religion from their life. Now so long as religion is a separate thing like this, it lies as a burden on a man, like undigested food in the stomach, only giving him uneasiness and dulling his vision and weakening him. It is a weight and a nuisance as long as it is a foreign body, a thing separate from the man's most real self. It is only when it is thoroughly absorbed and enters into the blood that it is a source of comfort and of strength, and becomes an unnoticed factor in all he does. Religion is a thing which need not have a separate place; it is to be the health-giving element in the atmosphere of the world, and must be found everywhere. It is a thing we can carry with us into all we do, for it is a matter of the heart and of the spirit; it is unison in will with God. Therefore in the perfected kingdom of God which Zechariah had in view, he saw no outward change effected. There were still horses with all their trappings; there were the sounds of trade and friendly intercourse in the streets; but the spirit was different. That kingdom does not require that men be grouped in relationships different from those which now connect us, or be engaged in occupations now unknown; it requires only that men live with God in all things.

2nd.—But Zechariah is, on the other hand, no secularist, who thinks that merely by forgetting God and going on with our worldly occupations we satisfy all requirements. The distinction between sacred and secular is to be abolished, not by making everything secular, but by making everything sacred; not by making the bowls which held the victims' blood like the pots in which the priests boiled their dinners, but by making these pots, which were no part of the sacred furniture, as sacred as the bowls which were essential to the worship. "Holiness to the Lord" is not to be obliterated from the High Priest's frontlet, so that the officiating priest might feel as little solemnized when putting on his mitre and entering the Holiest of All, as if he were going into his stable to put the collar on his horse; but when he puts the collar on his horse and goes out to his day's work, or his day's recreation, he is to be as truly and lovingly at one with God as when with sacrifice and incense and priestly garments he goes into the Holy of Holies.

This state, then, can never be attained by merely abolishing or neglecting sacred times and ordinances and observances. This is merely to ape a manhood we have not attained, and so to secure that we shall never attain it. In the state anticipated by the prophet we shall not need the ordinances we now need, or the Sabbaths that now recall us to the thought of things eternal; but he who forthwith abolishes his Sabbath because in a perfect state he would not need it, might as well leap confidently into deep water far from shore because, were he a perfectly accomplished man, he ought to be able to swim. We *ought* to be all the week in the state of spirit which the Sabbath rest and services induce, but *until* we are so in point of fact we cannot do without the Sabbath. And the consequence of assuming a superiority to such spiritual aid as the Sabbath brings would inevitably result in our bringing that day down to the worldly week-day level, and not in bringing the

week up to its level. The student hopes one day to be able to do without grammar and dictionary, but he knows he will arrive at that desirable state only in proportion as he now makes diligent use of grammar and dictionary.

Let us then so use the means of grace that we can rationally expect that one day we shall not any longer need them. When the diligent student has at length become a man of education and culture, all he does he does as a man of culture; that is the atmosphere he lives in, and you cannot run a distinction through his life and say, "These things he does in the spirit of an educated man and these others not." Education is wrought into the grain of his mind, and is part and parcel of the character—part and parcel of the man. But all this he has from his former recognition of his ignorance, of the broad distinction between ignorance and knowledge, and his resolution to bridge that interval. The present is the time given to us to bridge the interval between the secular and the sacred; to bring up all our employments to the level of "holiness to the Lord." Let us fix in our minds that this earth and its fulness belong to God; that He is with us in all our occupations. Let us make it our persistent, daily renewed aim to live for Him, to give ourselves to Him body and soul; and that which threatens to cut us off from all that attracts and makes life interesting will practically be found to be the gateway to more abundant, intense, and vital life.

MARCUS DODS.

---