

LOST OR LATENT POWERS OF THE
FIVE SENSES,

WITH RELATION TO 2 KINGS VI. 8-17
AND ST. LUKE XXIV. 13-35.

Lost or latent is a caption meant to indicate that they are alternative terms in the solution of the problem to which they refer. Perhaps it may serve to show our standpoint in respect of the former ("lost") if I begin with an illustration. On a recent pilgrim-visit to an Elizabethan mansion, a little discovery was communicated to us. Amongst other things, this historic mansion has some fine views from the windows. The rooms are old-fashioned and low-ceilinged, but have been adapted to modern ideas as well as circumstances permitted, without obliterating its ancient and quaint character. The present proprietor is proud of the place. One day, looking toward his house from the edge of a coppice, it struck him that there were faint traces of a window having been formerly in one of the angles where now there was only a dead wall. By means of a ladder, he made careful examination, and discovered that a window had been skilfully built up—so skilfully that an ordinary onlooker would never have suspected such a thing. It had been built up evidently for reasons of convenience in the interior. The point I wish to accentuate is, that the built up window commanded a *bit* of exquisite scenery not visible from any other window in the whole mansion.

Necessarily all analogies are imperfect, though the imperfection partakes of their quality. But I find this thought started by this discovery, that one might argue that at present a window may be curtained or shuttered which may yet open wide to the SPIRITUAL. And beyond this, one asks whether this window were not temporarily thrown open for God's seers? and that there may be a sixth sense as

different from any one we now have as hearing is from smelling? and still further, why not this be one of the things LOST in the fall (accepting the tragic word)? I submit the illustration for what it is worth as a sanction of our use of "lost" as well as "latent." But I readily own that "latent" more nearly describes what I am anxious to bring out in this Bible-study.

As given in our heading, the example of LATENT POWER is fetched from the story of Elisha and his young attendant in beleaguered Dothan; and by it I find myself led forward to the co-equally remarkable one of the two "disciples" (query, husband and wife?) of Emmaus, who were overtaken by our Lord on their home-journey from Jerusalem on the great third day. Both seem to give us fore-glimpses and foretastes (so to say) of the probable aggrandisement of our five senses—arguing from one ("sight") to the other four. Let us as summarily as may be look into this matter.

In limine, I must state that I believe in the supernatural and miraculous and in a living providence of God, exactly as I believe in the existence of the natural and law-governed universe. But just now it is not required that one intermeddle with the problem or problems involved therein. For our present purpose it is sufficient to postulate that I accept alike the Old Testament and New Testament narratives as historic fact. Neither, I must further remark, am I called upon to offer any theory or explanation of the phenomena involved. These phenomena I receive precisely as I receive the phenomena of LIFE, without gainsaying as without attempt to get at their secret, which, as in so much else, God meanwhile holds in His own keeping.

I. 2 Kings vi. 8-17: "Now the king of Syria warred against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are

coming down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once nor twice. And the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, Nay, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber. And he said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host with horses and chariots was round about the city. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." From this we learn that Elisha, the illustrious servant of Elijah, was now temporarily resident at Dothan, and that he was "wanted" by the king of Syria, in order that he might be on his side as against the king of Israel. Having discovered that Elisha was at Dothan, the king of Syria "sent thither," we read, "horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about" (ver. 14). The circumstances were thus extremely perilous for the prophet of God, who necessarily had no "horses, or chariots, or hosts" of any kind, neither force of any kind to meet counter-forces. Nevertheless Elisha appears before us stout of heart. For we find that when, before the dawn of the next morning after the arrival of the royal "com-

pany," intelligence was brought to him that "an host encompassed the city both with horses and chariots" (ver. 15), and his young attendant became terror-stricken, exclaiming, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" that master answered courageously, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (ver. 16). Thus spake the man of God and man of faith—manifesting the same grand faith that sang later, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7); "He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for they were many that strove with me" (Ps. lv. 18); "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. xci. 11); and the same faith that bore up Hezekiah under the threats and insults of Sennacherib, and enabled him to hearten his captains of war, saying, "Be strong and of a good courage, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there is a greater with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. xxxii. 7): and yet again the same faith that inspired St. John to write those clarion words, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John iv. 4). May it not also be affirmed that it was the same faith that made Martin Luther go to the diet at Worms and John Knox to the council-meeting at Stirling? All honour to Elisha for his dauntless bearing! all honour to his unshakable faith! But be it noted that it was faith. Surely this renders it the more striking that Elisha should have asked something else, and so different, for his young servant!

En passant, it does not at all lessen, though it accounts for, the prophet's courage of faith, that it rested on a prior experience, when he had the veil that hides the unseen

raised, on his master Elijah being taken away, as thus vividly told (2 Kings ii. 10-12): "And Elijah said, . . . If thou *see* me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared chariots of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it." All this being so, we are to understand that on the present occasion Elisha fell back on his former experience and knowledge; and though he himself neither needed nor asked a repetition of his vision of the armies of the Lord, he sought for his young attendant that he might have his alarm and distress hushed by a demonstration to his sense of sight of the reality of his master's assurance that it was literally true that there were "more with them" than all the hosts of the king of Syria. And so Elisha, not at all standing on his dignity, much less taking offence that, spite of his assurance, his young attendant still trembled, turned to the Lord and prayed, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

Before passing on, three subsidiary lines of thought inevitably call for brief statement.

1. Elisha, like the Roman centurion of Capernaum, was not above sympathising with and caring for his "servant" ("slave"?), and not only so, but was confident that the Lord God of Elijah and his God was interested in the humblest.

2. Elisha's prayer tells us that whatever the new power was that saw the else invisible, it was in his opinion communicable to the humblest, and so to his "servant."

3. Elisha did not strain or seek to over-prove the faith of his young attendant, but rather sought for him that he might walk by sight, albeit sight touched to finer issues.

In all this there is not a little that may well come home to our businesses and bosoms to-day.

The narrative of the prayer of Elisha is very memorable (ver. 17): "And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see." Equally memorable, and conveying a sense of swift and Divine immediateness and supernaturalness, is the record of the issue and answer: "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." All that flaming splendour unsealed for the sake of one obscure, lowly, nameless "servant"! Only one other incident excels it—Jesus preaching one of His supremest revelations to the one woman by the well of Jacob!

We have thus before us the example of lost or latent powers of the five senses as contained in the Old Testament story. At this point therefore it will reward to ponder the employment of ordinary words to inform us on this extraordinary thing. The Hebrew verb פָּתַח and the Septuagint διανοίγω = to open by drawing asunder (διά), to open thoroughly what had been closed, are elsewhere used in Holy Scripture in the ordinary sense to "open" or "open up"; just as Elisha in his prayer uses the ordinary word meaning to "see," while the fulfilment is recorded by the same word, "and he saw" (וַיִּרְאֵהוּ, וַיִּבְרָא). It is here I find the "latent" power that is the subject of this exposition. For as I read the story of Dothan, the "opening" was of the young man's natural eyes, but after such sort that, to his ordinary faculty of ordinary seeing or vision, was super-added the extraordinary faculty of seeing the otherwise unseen. To my mind there is revealed in this something infinitely deeper than the modern fable of "eyes and no eyes"; infinitely deeper than such incident as is told of Hagar, "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" (Gen. xxi. 19)—meaning that her tear-dimmed eyes were divinely guided to "see" a well that otherwise she should have overlooked. In short, I find in the narrative of

the answered prayer of Elisha the impartation of a new faculty to the eyes, and a new faculty to the soul through the eyes, of the young man, whereby he saw the encompassing armies of God. I must also infer from this bestowment on Elisha and his attendant, that we have herein set before us possibilities of the enrichment and ennoblement of the sense of sight (to begin with) as opens up a whole world of delightful speculation, and that may well kindle hopes that, wonderful as is the sense of sight (selecting it) in our present experience, it is far beneath what it may yet attain.

II. The same line of thought-speculative (not imaginative) belongs to the corresponding New Testament incident already designated, as recorded in St. Luke xxiv. 13-35. I confine myself now to the two things contained in vers. 16 and 31 respectively, "their eyes were *holden* that they should not know Him," and "their eyes were *opened*, and they knew Him." The phrasing of the former, *ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μῆ*, . . . seems indubitably to express a supernatural agency being employed to produce the effect of non-recognition. That is the least we can take out of "holden" (*κρατέω*). The phrasing again in the latter, *αὐτῶν δὲ διανοίχθησαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί*, . . . seems similarly to assume a supernatural "opening"; that is, a release from the previous "holding" or hindering.

Without going into details, or confusing exposition with exegesis, we have here again the sense of sight controlled, on the one hand hinderingly and on the other helpfully. So that, though variant from the Old Testament story in its accidents, the same phenomena of "latent powers" is illustrated. Hence I again find in this New Testament incident warrant for anticipating that sight will be a measurelessly greater, nobler, diviner thing than it is at present. For the conclusion is inevitable that there are "lost" or "latent powers" in man's senses that only require Divine

“opening” to engrandeur them—as with sight—into higher and still higher faculties.

We must notice also the simpleness of the working out of the result. Going back upon the “opening” of the eyes of the “young man,” and on the “opening” of the eyes of the two disciples, one has a feeling that, prodigious as was the aggrandisement of the sense, it came as quietly and unremarkably as “opening” the eyes or dropping the eyelids. A good man’s prayer of half a second or less, and immediately we read, “And he *saw*: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” And again: for an hour or more the two disciples’ eyes were “holden” that “they should not know Him”; and contemporaneously the sense of hearing must have been in some way suspended, or they must have recognised the old, familiar tones. But by-and-by we find “their eyes were *opened*, and they knew Him.” Can it be questioned that all this permits us to infer that even now a Divine touch or look upon us, and these mortal eyes of ours should “see” God’s ministering spirits hastening hither and thither; “see” a thousand and one evidences of a living Providence; “see” that no child of God is alone, but is God-guarded? One’s bosom swells, is “enlarged,” one’s forefeeling of one’s destiny greatens, in the anticipation of the “ampler air” we are appointed to breathe, and the purer light we shall yet “see.”

I would shun spiritualizing; but, combining with the simpleness of the Divine operation in revealing “lost” or “latent powers,” may we not find a symbol herein of that “opening” of eyes which takes place under the gospel? We meet with fellow men whose eyes are shut and sealed. We argue with them. We point them to this and that, and then we ask in amazement, *Don’t you see it?* They really do not. Should we not take Elisha’s way, and “pray” God to “open” their eyes?

I have thus far taken sight to represent the five senses. But the same inference applies to hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. He who made the eye made the ear; and it is congruous to conclude that, marvellous as is our present sense of hearing, it may well be a mere beginning of its faculty. The micrometer of Edison has revealed a new world of possible observation and record of hitherto unrecognisable sounds. But the one discovery and invention makes us feel that we are standing on the borderland of many kindred. Who so recently as a couple of years ago would have credited that the walking of a fly across a window-pane, and even over a ceiling, could be, and would be, made audible? Yet it is so. So that I for one am shut up to think that in the "highest height" of present attainment there are still "higher heights"; in short, that the sense of hearing as we now exercise it is as nothing to what it is predestined to become. The "music of the spheres" may yet be heard, and even grander things. In thus writing, I but argue from the exaltation of sight to the exaltation of hearing.

Smelling in our chill Western countries is a very meagre sense compared with what it is in the East; *id est*, as a source of God-intended enjoyment for man. One who travels in the East—in the lands of the Bible—is much struck with the deliciousness of scents, perfumes, fragrances, sweet smells there. These enter into the daily life, into the familiar use and wont, of nearly all classes. So that one retains a charming recollection of the refreshment and pleasantness of the exercise of the sense of smell in the East, especially when, foot-sore and tired, we were passed into the bath, and came forth with such *élan* of refreshment as words are poor to utter.

The sense of smell is greatly undervalued with us as a source of gratification. Nay, it is cruelly sinned against by that still too common indulgence which the negro wisely

refused by saying, "No, massa; me nose no hungry." I met with no users of snuff in the East. It would have been treason to lands so odorous.

When we come to study it, it surprises how frequently in Holy Scripture the sense of smell is addressed.

The possibilities of aggrandisement of the sense of smell, co-equally with sight and hearing, is further seen when its exercise is observed among the Bedawin of the desert and the Red Indians of America. Their sense of smell—as of water at a great distance, of a trail of game—is acute as against our dulness.

Even more humiliatingly, we get insight into what the sense of smell is—its richness, its informingness, its supremacy, its divineness—in, *e.g.*, the dog. I sometimes think that the nose of a greyhound or of almost any dog is as wonderful a contrivance as the eye or ear. Here is an actual case. "Clyde" is a short-haired, pure-bred Scotch collie. Some years ago he "took" to one of the students—call him Frank Richardson—in a certain college, who afterwards went as a missionary to the Congo. About a year ago he had to come home unexpectedly on furlough. He came off so suddenly, that the letter to tell of his coming was in his pocket. He came to the door of one of the professors, to whom "Clyde" belonged, straight from the steamer at Plymouth, and absolutely unannounced. Before he had knocked "Clyde" rushed to the front door in a state of the wildest excitement for joy, and as soon as the door was opened, leaped to embrace him. How did the dog know sooner than the professor and his family circle? There are "strange things in heaven and earth." I can conceive the transference to man of this higher function given to smell. So conceiving, I get another glimpse into the possibilities of "lost" or "latent powers" of the five senses.

Tasting adds so much to the enjoyment of life, owing

as we do to it zest, relish, agreeableness in daily food, that a separate argument might be constructed for this sense also being exalted far above present attainment, and becoming the co-equal of its associate senses. Take the element of sin out of it, and how Divine a faculty might not taste become!

Touch is to be studied at its present best in the blind, and deaf, and dumb. Into how exquisite a sense it grows in them! How does even the boasted tactile sensibility of Meissonier's fingers sink into insignificance beside the story of Laura Bridgman! Born without sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, with only touch, this extraordinary woman, through this solitary and relatively inferior sense, came to know God, and to reveal an intellect of exceptional strength and varied capacity, and a heart tender and loving. What a conception her case gives us of the soul, when a soul that was despoiled of the four senses, and dumb, nevertheless by the sense of touch grew to be what she did grow to be, and to do what she did! So here again this very capacity within these limits leads us up to the "lost" or "latent powers" of the five senses, when, present limitations being removed, and present circumstances changed, we shall rise to our full dignity.

I close our study with indicating other three things suggested by our observations:

1. The question rises, "What is the spiritual body?" *Certes* not matter thinned into thinnest air, but an actual body, made "like unto Christ," which He Himself declared to be of "flesh and blood and bones," and in which He ate of "broiled fish and honey" as before (St. Luke xxiv. 42). We must think of the "spiritual body" as possessed of larger and more wonderful powers, and as wholly responsive to the pure spirit that dominates it, and as somehow *en rapport* with the heavenly and unseen, though still remaining a human body.

2. We are constrained to link on the whole of our present inquiry with the great words of St. Peter, "partakers of [a] Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4), as if something nobler than pantheism in its most glittering dream ever conceived were waiting for God's redeemed. The "Divine nature" pointed at was (I judge) of "God manifest in the flesh," Jesus Christ. How august the destiny of conformity to Him! and how does this ratify our idea of "lost or latent powers of the five senses"!

3. We have all been witness or have heard of pre-manifestations of the heavenly state on this hither side. I select one out of many known to me. Miss A. B. was dying of consumption. Within a short time of her death, a radiance suddenly overspread her face, as if a gleam of morning sunshine had fallen upon it. She cried out in a rapture of joy, "O my Saviour, I am coming!" And then turning to her friends, as if amazed at their unmovedness, she asked, "Do you not see Him? It is heaven to see Him." She spoke as collectedly and sensibly as when in health. I dare not say there was not reality there. I find in it something as if the bird-soul in the close of Blair's *Grave* saw the sun rising in the east. Dr. John Macfarlane's *Night Lamp* tells as striking a thing of his dying sister Agnes.

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