

*THE "CURSING OF THE GROUND" AND THE
"REVEALING OF THE SONS OF GOD" IN
RELATION TO NATURAL FACTS.*

III. THE RESTORATION.

THE calamities produced by the Fall are not irretrievable. Man had been defeated in his first encounter with the serpent; but the fight was to be continued. The enemy would have to adopt new, base, and insidious tactics, his head in the dust; and, finally, a descendant of the beguiled woman will, though not without conflict and wounding, bruise his head. This protevangel, which is the key-note of the whole Bible, and the commission of the Saviour Himself, extends through the writings of prophets and psalmists down to the triumphant songs of the Apocalypse. For a time, however, little is said of the share of the lower creation, either in the defeat or the triumph. One note is struck in the blessing on Noah after the flood, referred to in the last article, which announces a removal of the curse, except that part of it which proceeds from "the evil imagination of man's heart." Here and there the subject is referred to in the book of Job, in the Psalms, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, and more fully in the remarkable passage in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, which paints peace among the lower animals and a little child as leading them. The cherubic figures also continued to testify through all this time to the share of the lower creation in the benefit of man's redemption. It will be better, however, for our present purposes not to dwell on these passages, and to go on at once to the wonderful view of the relation of nature and man contained in the eighth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which may be considered as the central and crowning testimony on the subject. Paul was not merely an apostle commissioned

to preach to man the Gospel of salvation; he was a scholar saturated with the Old Testament literature, and fully alive to the aspects of nature and of man viewed from the broadest and most philosophical standpoint. All these stores of knowledge and culture he was inspired to bring to bear on this difficult subject, and to draw from it truth useful to every Christian. The kernel of the passage reads as follows in the revised version: "For the earnest expectation (outstretched neck) of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the Sons of God, for the creation was subjected to vanity (failure) not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together (with us) even until now."

The setting of this passage shows us the purpose for which it was introduced. The time was one of suffering for Christians, but this suffering leads to a future of incomparable glory. Nor are Christians to be alone in this glory. All nature, doomed to "vanity" and "corruption" by man's fall, is to be emancipated from this painful disability in his restoration, and this is linked with the fact that in man himself, not merely the soul and spirit, but the body also is to be redeemed. This accords with Paul's reasoning elsewhere as to the first and second Adam,¹ with the prediction of Peter as to a new heaven and new earth,² and with the glowing pictures of the restoration of Eden as the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse.³ The germ of the same doctrine we, no doubt, also have in the teaching of Christ.⁴

Let us now examine more closely the testimony of St. Paul. It is not necessary to discuss the many and often

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 20, *et seq.*

² 2 Pet. iii.

³ Rev. xxi.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 29.

grotesque notions which have been held respecting the word "creation" (*κτίσις*). Many of these arise from entire failure to appreciate the fact that the Apostle is dealing not with man alone, but with nature as a whole. The word can mean nothing less than all created things, especially when it has prefixed to it the adjective "whole"—"the whole creation."¹ More especially, no doubt, he refers to the animal creation as that which can best express its sufferings; but there is a sense also in which vegetation and even inanimate things can mutely complain of the wrong done them, or rejoice in the favour of God and give glory to Him.² May we not, therefore, suppose that to thoughtful and inspired men, and to God Himself, creation has been all along lamenting its losses by the Fall?

This creation, then, is represented as "waiting with outstretched neck," or "groaning and travailing in pain." The pain is not, however, that of dissolution, but that of birth, a very expressive figure, pointing to that failure of fulfilment of promise and progress to which the world was doomed by the fall of man. It is as if at the introduction of man the creation had come to the birth of a glorious new era, but its parturition was arrested by the Fall, and it continues in travail until now, and must so continue until the revealing of the sons of God. Thus there is no pessimism in Paul's view. The travailing of creation is but an episode, a long-delayed birth-pang in the great programme of God's creation, which extends from the first introduction of life to the final consummation. All through the geological ages there had been more or less of suffering and death, but these were in the interest of the greater happiness of the greater number, and for the sake of the onward progress of the whole. So even the aggravated sufferings of the lower creatures, by the sin of man, are the travail-pains of a new

¹ See also verse 29 of the same chapter.

² Isa. xxiv. 4, *et seq.*; Ps. xix. 1, cxlvi. 1.

birth. Our sufferings also look toward the glory following, and our groans are the impatient longings for a promised redemption. The practical lesson, therefore, to us is not one of despair, but of faith and hope.

The "vanity" to which nature has been subjected by man's sin is literally failure or unprofitableness, a falling short of its purpose, just as in the case of a plant which puts forth its leaves but withers away before producing its flowers or fruit, and finally falls into "corruption" or decay without fulfilling the main purpose of its existence. Nature was subjected to this "vanity," not by any fault of its own, but "because of him who subjected it," that new head of creation who, failing in his obligations to God, fell from his first estate and was the cause of putting back the clock of the world by a whole age. Creation suffers in some sense even more severely than man, as the soldiers of an army may suffer more severely than the leader who, by folly or wickedness, has subjected them to danger and defeat. The animal creation more particularly suffers, not only directly, but indirectly, through the tyranny and cruelty of man himself. It cannot, like man, have a promise and a hope, nor can it have the support of the indwelling Spirit to sustain it, nor can it experience the full benefits of the redemption, for it has not the immortal life and individuality of man; and its past generations have all fallen in the wilderness; only the final survivors can share the liberty of the restoration. This distinction Paul expresses by speaking of nature as a whole, not as individuals, and by characterizing its deliverance as one from bondage into the liberty which it will attain when the children of God, as individual heirs of glory, shall attain to their inheritance.

Just as, after the deluge, there was some mitigation of the original curse, so now under the Christian dispensation there may be some alleviation of the woes of creation. The merciful man is merciful to his beast, and enlightened

Christianity must necessarily have respect for those humble companions who have been subjected to failure not willingly, but by our fault. It is to be feared, however, that this great duty, so manifestly pointed out in the Bible, is as yet too little before the minds of the children of God, who should in this be like their Father in Heaven, who cares for all the works of His hands. Its full accomplishment is to come at the revealing of the sons of God, and of this Christ speaks as identical with His own second coming, that age in which men die no more, but are as the angels, and are manifested as "the sons of God, being sons of the Resurrection."¹ It is scarcely necessary to say to readers of the New Testament that this identity of the coming of Christ and the revealing of His people runs through all the apostolic writings. A good example is the statement of Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians, that "when Christ who is our Life shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory." In the passage now in question Paul defines (verse 14) the sons of God to be those who are "led by the Spirit of God," and the creation waits for the "revealing" of these, now in obscurity and even in suffering; and this revealing he connects with the "redemption of the body," or the resurrection and new spiritual body of which he has written to the Corinthians.¹ When this happy time comes, when death, the last enemy as well as the first, has been finally overcome by Christ "who is our Life," then will the whole creation, wrecked by Adam's fall, "itself also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God." It seems further evident that this can be nothing else than the new heaven and new earth predicted by Peter,² and the New Jerusalem of John, in which there is "no more curse."

It is now pertinent to our present purpose to enquire a

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 44;

² 2 Peter iii. 13.

little as to these foreviews in their relation to the Fall and the promise of restoration. John, in the Apocalypse, bases his prediction on the conditions of Eden and the Fall. In an anticipatory note of triumph in the earlier part of his book¹ he informs us:—

Every created thing which is in the heaven, and in the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying: Unto Him that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and dominion for ever and ever.

To this the four living creatures or cherubim say "Amen," thus showing that, whatever their nature and significance in Eden, they are here heavenly representatives of creation redeemed. Thus we have presented to us the cherubim which guarded the Tree of Life in a new relation to paradise regained.

In like manner the golden streets, the pearly gates, and the walls of precious stones in the New Jerusalem, represent the gold, bedolach, and shoham stone carefully and laboriously collected by primitive man in one of the rivers of Eden.² The tree of life becomes a grove of trees, no longer inaccessible to man, and the streams of Eden are represented by "a river of water of life." It is in consistency with this adoption of the imagery of Eden that there shall be "no more pain or death," that "all things are made new," and that "there shall be no more curse." The change from a garden to a city would seem to intimate that all that is good in the civilization of fallen man shall be preserved, unalloyed with evil, in his new and renovated world.

This raises the great question—Is it the same earth in

¹ Chap. v. 13.

² See my work, *Modern Science in Bible Lands*, and paper in a previous volume of the EXPOSITOR.

which we now live that is to experience this glorious change and to be the abode of the redeemed? In so far as the New Testament is concerned, the best answer is probably to be obtained from that remarkable passage in the second Epistle of Peter, in which the deluge and the final catastrophe of the present world are placed in juxtaposition.¹ With reference to the flood, Peter says that "the earth, compacted (standing together) out of water and by means of water, being overflowed with water, perished," in so far as its "kosmos" or arrangement was concerned. This clear description of a physical fact warrants us in attaching a like physical meaning to the succeeding statement that fire is being "stored up" for a new and different destruction, which will result in a greater change than that effected by the flood, or in the production of a new heaven and new earth, not merely a new kosmos.²

In his excellent articles, in recent numbers of this journal, on the second coming of Christ, Prof. Agar Beet refers to the physical possibility of the earth becoming naturally dried up and lifeless as a prelude to a new era; but this would require an immense lapse of time, and would scarcely agree with Peter's foreview of a fiery destruction. There are two other ways in which such a change might be effected under the operation of ordinary physical laws, and of which we know something, because there is reason to believe that they have actually occurred in past time. The first is the impact of some solid body rushing toward the sun by the force of gravitation and striking the earth on its way. Such a collision might reduce the earth to a liquid or even vaporous condition, or might so affect its interior as to produce stupendous changes on its surface. It would,

¹ 2 Peter chap. iii.

² The words *γῆ*, *κόσμος*, *οἰκουμένη*, and *αἰών* indifferently translated "world" in the Old English version, are used with strict scientific accuracy in the New Testament.

however, require a long time to restore the earth to a habitable condition after such an event. But without any such foreign disturbing cause, the earth's crust might collapse and might be violently ridged up, with great extrusion of molten matter on its surface and of dust into its atmosphere, and wholesale destruction of man and his works. Such a catastrophe is known to have occurred at the close of the great Palæozoic period, in the Permian and Triassic ages, and on a smaller scale in the Pleiocene Tertiary age. Such changes might be of comparatively short duration,¹ but would as effectually destroy the present kosmos, or order of things, as the deluge destroyed that of the Antediluvian time. The occurrence of such a catastrophe would, physically considered, be no more a miracle than an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, events which, on a small scale, resemble extensive cosmic revolutions which have again and again in the course of geological time interrupted those slow and gradual changes which, because they have produced the greater part of the stratified rocks, bulk more largely in the eyes of geologists than those more rapid critical changes which occur only at long intervals.

The times of these great cosmic changes are known to the Creator, and may be regulated by Him in harmony with the requirements of His moral government, but they cannot be calculated by us. It is enough for us to know that a great critical change must at some time, near or remote, close the era of comparative uniformity in which we live, and that such a cataclysm is plainly foreshown in New Testament prophecy. Nor can we suppose when we read such passages as that above quoted from St. Peter² that

¹ There are the strongest physical reasons to believe that the great crumpings of the earth's crust and extrusions of molten rock accompanying and following them were paroxysmal.

² Peter's argument against the "wilful ignorance" of those who hold that all things will continue as they are, is a strictly geological one, based legitimately on physical facts. 2 Peter iii. 5.

these anticipations are altogether symbolic, or that they are intended to relate to any other earth than that which we now inhabit.

Allow me to draw a geological picture illustrative of these possibilities. Let us suppose, for example, that a visitor from some other sphere has examined our continents in the great Carboniferous age, when our coal-beds were in process of formation in vast swampy flats under an equable climate, by the growth of trees quite different from those now existing. These forests would have, of course, seemed to him primeval and permanent, and he would see no sign of change. But had he returned a little later, he would have witnessed the rolling up of these flat coal-deposits into high mountains, amid great displays of internal igneous force; and when this time of trouble was over, he would find a new kosmos, with new species of trees and of land animals, a different geography, and a different climate. Still later, and after a great and long-continued submergence of the continents under the sea of the Chalk period, he would, on another visit, have beheld a new fauna of mammalian animals, and again a quite different vegetation, while he would have witnessed the wondrous spectacle of a climate so mild that fruits of kinds now limited to warm temperate latitudes would ripen within the Arctic circle. Later still, all this beauty would seem to be forever wiped out by the cold and submergence of the glacial period, which, however, was but a long winter to be followed by the genial spring of the post-glacial in which man appeared. If God has done such things in carrying out His long programme of the world's history, and if man has already witnessed one great and destructive change followed by a renewed world, may there not be similar and possibly still greater changes in store for the earth? These vicissitudes, it is true, occupied long time; but there are some indications that they have been more rapid in later than in earlier

times. After the considerable period of quiescence since man came on the earth, we may be nearing another great critical period, for which the forces have been long accumulating, and which may reach their culminating point at any time, though the times and seasons of such events are quite beyond our calculation. There is, therefore, nothing unreasonable in Peter's idea of the "storing up" of fire for such an event, and his foreview of this may be as much in accordance with natural facts as the admirable sketch of the deluge with which he prefaces it.

One great difference, however, meets us here, in the share which man and other creatures may have in the coming geologic age. Whereas in previous ages animal species became extinct, and were replaced by others, in the coming age, while this may still apply to the lower animals, it will not hold good of man, who, as a spiritual and immortal being, must preserve his individuality, and thus the same men will re-appear, albeit in a glorified state, in the new earth for which we look. Thus, while all that can be said of the lower animals is that those creatures which became extinct "furnish the stock of their successors,"¹—perhaps more literally the "types" of their successors,—man passes on individually from the present to the future stage. The further question as to how he is to be preserved through the fiery ordeal of the perishing world, and in what body he shall come, is beyond the domain of natural facts as at present known. Thus if the consideration of past geological ages might induce us to look forward with dread to future and mighty convulsions such as those which have decimated the earth's living inhabitants in former times, revelation teaches us to hope for a new and better life in a renovated world. Paul says of it, "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us-ward," and speaks of our religion as animated

¹ Zittel, *Palaeontologie*.

by the hope of that new and yet unseen world. Peter, in like manner, says to us: "Seeing that we look for these things, give diligence that we may be found without spot and blameless in His sight." John, looking to the manifestation of Christ, exclaims, "Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Christ Himself strikes the key-note of all this in His frequent references to His second coming, and in the last chapter of the Apocalypse He is represented as grasping the whole of the present and the coming age in the significant proclamation: "I am the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in by the gates into the city." Here we have the Divine unity of nature and of grace, of the beginnings of humanity, and the final revelation of the sons of God and restitution of all things; and all this in the Redeemer and His second coming and glorious kingdom: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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*ON THE INTERPRETATION OF TWO PASSAGES
IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.¹*

ONE of the many injurious results of the dominant North-Galatian theory is that it has led to a general misinterpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians. When the Epistle was supposed to refer to certain historical facts, there was produced an unconscious bias in the direction of finding references to these facts. It is proposed here to give two examples of such misinterpretation of the Greek of the Epistle.

¹ Probably the two interpretations here advocated are not new: it is difficult to find anything that has not been said before about Paul. But they were novel to some excellent authorities to whom I mentioned them.