

GOD'S ENSIGN AT REPHIDIM.

IN reading the story of Israel's first battle after the exodus from Egypt, Bible students have found difficulties in the way of seeing its meaning. A recent writer refers to three proposed explanations of the occurrence, and then proffers a fourth, which he deems more reasonable. The first suggested explanation is that Moses, on an eminence, with uplifted hands, was exercising military command over the Israelites in directing their movements on the battlefield. A second explanation is that Moses was holding aloft the rod of God for the purpose of bringing down Heaven's help upon Israel's host, as if by a magical or mechanical agency. A third and more commonly accepted explanation is that the uplifted hands of Moses represented his intercessory prayer in behalf of God's people, even though this involves the idea that, while in his physical weakness Moses failed to thus intercede, Amalek overbore Israel in the fight, as if God were refusing aid to His people unless in the hour of Moses' prayer. The fourth explanation, advocated with ingenuity and scholarship, is that Moses on the hill above Rephidim "is to be regarded as the full embodiment of his people's power," and that "in the steadfastness of his strength was firmly rooted the people's strength."

Now is there not a reasonable view of this occurrence which is different from any one of these four views, and even more closely accordant with the letter of the text, and with the spirit of the entire narrative? Is not the uplifted rod in the hands of Moses the symbol and assurance of the presence and power of the Divine Commander, whose chosen standard, or ensign, or flag, it was, in the conflicts of Israel with the enemies of Jehovah?

God's first call to Moses to lead out the Israelites from

Egypt designated the rod in the hand of Moses as the evidence of his representing Jehovah in any conflict with the oppressors of God's people. When Moses feared that he would not be accepted as the representative of Jehovah, God asked him, "What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod." Then God gave assurance, "Thou shalt take in thine hand this rod, wherewith thou shalt do the signs." The rod, or hooked stick, of a camel driver, or of a leader of sheep or goats, in the Sinaitic peninsula to-day, is in the same form as was the primitive symbol of authority and power in the hand of Amon, and Ra, and Osiris, and other gods pictured on the monuments of Egypt long before the days of Moses. Such a rod was not, therefore, an inappropriate symbol or standard of one who stood in the name of Jehovah over against the gods of Egypt. The Israelites and their enemies well knew its significance.

With this rod the wonders in Egypt were wrought for the release of the Israelites. By its use the waters of the Nile became blood, the dust of the earth was turned into lice, the very sun in the heavens was darkened, and all the firstborn of the Egyptians were destroyed. When the host of Pharaoh pursued the departing Israelites, and the Israelites were dismayed, Moses said to his people, "Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you to-day. . . . The Lord shall fight for you." Then Moses lifted up that rod, and a path was made for them through the Red Sea. Again the rod was lifted up, and the Red Sea closed over the Egyptians. Yet again the rod in the hands of Moses smote the rock at Horeb, and water gushed out for the thirsting Israelites. Would not the sight of that rod uplifted in the hands of Moses give restful confidence, after this, to his people in any emergency?

At Rephidim the Israelites were for the first time called to engage in a pitched battle with an enemy. The Amale-

kites came out against them, and they were summoned to meet the issue. "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill *with the rod of God in mine hand.*" Joshua was to lead the host on the field; while Moses upbore the designated standard of the ever victorious Divine Commander above the field. That was the plan for the battle. All seem to have undertood it.

This was neither the first time nor the last that a standard, or a banner, or an ensign, was the centre of interest and the source of inspiration to a fighting people on a battlefield. Such was the case in the wars of ancient Babylon and Assyria, and of Egypt. It has been thus in conflicts under Alexander and Cæsar and Napoleon. It is so in the Hauran and the Jaulan, east of the Jordan, and in Mesopotamia, to-day, where the leader's standard,—a staff, with or without a distinguishing streamer,—displayed on a hill-top, animates the fighters. If it goes down, they waver or fail. At Rephidim it was not the rod itself which gave confidence to Israel, but it was the rod in the hands of Moses as the representative of the God of Israel. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand (with the rod in it), that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." That was natural. Are there to-day any organized fighters on land or on sea who would not be dismayed if the flag of their commander was no longer seen flying in its place?

Of course there must be some provision for keeping that standard in the hands of Moses upborne on the hill-top until victory was won. So when "Moses' hands were heavy"—lacking strength to upbear the banner—"they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon." It is easier to hold up an ensign, or a standard, in one's hands while seated than while standing. "And Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands," while Moses upheld the rod,

“the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”

In order to make it clear, just how the battle was won, and just what the rod uplifted in his hand signified at Rephidim, “Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi,”—the Lord is my flag; in Jehovah’s name I battle.

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A NEW SECOND-CENTURY CHRISTIAN
DIALOGUE.

TRANSLATOR’S PREFACE.

[THE dialogue which is here for the first time translated and given to the public is one of the earliest documents of the Church; for it was written not many years after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 135, and therefore belongs to the epoch of Justin Martyr, to whose dialogue with Tryphon it bears the closest resemblance, in the attitude assumed towards the conquered Jews, in its treatment of the Messianic argument, in its Christology, and in its general tone and style. Yet it is not excerpted from that writer, but is an independent document. On the other hand, it was certainly the inspiring document of several writings which have come down to us. These are, firstly, the *Adversus Judæos* of Tertullian; secondly, the *Altercatio Simonis Judæi et Theophili Christiani*, which has been edited by Prof. Harnack, and by him ascribed in its present form to the middle of the fifth century; thirdly, the turgid and monkish dialogue published in 1671 by Acherius in his *Spicilegium*, and entitled, *Altercationes Zacchæi Christiani et Apollonii Philosophi*. This last must have been written soon after 400 A.D.; fourthly, the *ἀντιβολή Παπίσκου καὶ Φίλωνος Ἰουδαίου*, edited by A. C. McGiffert, New York, 1889. The dependence of