

teaching. By a natural blending of two cognate metaphors, the suffering Christians are bidden to tread in the footsteps of their suffering Master, copying His patient endurance touch by touch in their own lives, as children follow line by line the letters traced out to guide their yet unskilful hands.

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THE DRAMA OF CREATION.

SCENE THIRD.

Progress of Order and Beauty.

THE drama proceeds in its onward march along the lighted stage. Again is the commanding voice heard, and a further development of order takes place: "God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear." The messenger who reports the command, or the beholder who both hears and sees, adds, "It was so." Sublimely does action follow speech in this drama of manifold and awful changes, but of few words. All note of time is hidden from us. The result happened: we know nothing more precise. It is not a narrative or a history that we are reading, however brief and terse its statements may be. It is a spectacular representation acted and spoken in presence of some inspired seer, who can perceive at one glance what it may have taken myriads or millions of years to bring about. Sober prose and history, chronologically arranged, have no place here: yet it is "the word of God" which the seer calls on men to receive.

If gross ignorance of facts could be proved against the writer of this drama, or the fanciful representations of an ill-informed reporter, it would be requisite to consider the value of it as "the word of God." But there is no such

ignorance found, no such fancies of a mere romancer, and no call on us from these considerations to doubt that it is "the word of God." Into one place all the seas were gathered; and so the vast oceans of earth are to this day. But the same thing is not said of the dry land. There is one ocean, really but one ocean on earth. But there is no "gathering together" of the dry lands, as there was, and still is, a "gathering together" of the waters. There are, at the present day, three great masses of land, divided from each other, or, it may be, connected with each other, by the "gathering together of the waters." If the verdict of geologists be worthy of credit, things were perhaps never arranged otherwise. So at least they write; so they speak. Whence, then, was the truth to nature, found in this ancient drama, derived? It did not come from man's knowledge, for three or four thousand years ago man's knowledge of sea and land could not have enabled any writer to give a description so scientifically correct. Was it accident?

Accident cannot account for the accuracy of the description. Had the writer of the drama spoken of "the gathering together" of the dry land, but not of "the waters," he would have expressed the knowledge acquired by the age in which he lived. He knew of the parted seas, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean; he knew also of the united lands of Asia and Africa, perhaps Europe as well. But he makes no such mistake. Had he done so, the blunder would have been pounced on in our days, and exhibited to public view as a proof of the fictitious nature of the drama. Small though the matter be, it is well to give a place to this avoidance of error. "The gathering together" of the dry land, and the parting of the waters to form seas was consistent with such science as existed in the writer's days, but not "the gathering together of the waters" and the parting of the dry lands, as we know to

be the truth to-day. The writer of this drama was strangely, singularly correct for the age in which he lived. It was, to say the least, avoidance of error.

The drama proceeds to a fuller presentation of the third scene: "God saw that it was good," this orderly division into sea and dry land. Whether a messenger reports this judgment of God on the work done, or the voice of God proclaims it, we are not informed, but the audience hear and see what follows on the lighted stage. A barren sea! an equally barren land! The parting of these two indicates an orderly arrangement, and further progress in view, but the barren land may be repulsive to the eye of the audience, more repulsive than the barren sea. Life and growth are commanded to clothe the barren land with variety and beauty: "God said, Let the earth put forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth." As the audience look, carpets of gorgeous colouring spring from the barren ground, a wealth of beauty covers the nakedness of the dry land. To the seeing eye the stage seemed to be at once transformed into green meadows, fruitful gardens, and waving forests; "and it was so." Nothing could more strikingly bring out the dramatic nature of the writing than this immediate spectacular change. We are not reading a history; we are reading a drama of the past. That there is history in it cannot be doubted, but it is the history of many ages, concentrated by marvellous literary power into one glance of the seeing eye. Who does not wish that it were so, even if he cannot persuade himself to believe that it is? Or who, believing that this drama is of divine birth, does not feel his heart glow within him at a representation so true to nature and so lofty in literary power?

Should the reality of this literary form in the beginning of Genesis be denied by any one not acquainted with the

books written by Hebrew prophets and heroes, it may be well to remark here that the drama is not only not an uncommon way of conveying truth with them, but that there exist specimens of it, which recall to a reader's mind, if they do not echo, this drama in Genesis. One such was recited or acted in the great square of Samaria before the king of the land, his ally, the king of Judah, his courtiers, his priests, and his people. The reciter of the piece in Ahab's days was a prophet, otherwise unknown, called Micaiah, a prisoner of state, brought forth from his prison house to speak the Word of the Lord to the assembled might and wisdom of the land. "What the Lord saith unto me," he declared, "that will I speak," and an inspired drama was what was said to him and what he spoke. So far as the literary form of it is concerned, it is an exact copy of the drama in Genesis. It runs thus:—

"I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd.

"The Lord said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace."

In this inspired drama we have action and speech, and one at least of an audience. In a few words it recalls to our minds the drama of Genesis. There are the chaos and confusion of a nation, scattered on the hillsides; there is next a commanding voice, lovingly infusing order into this disorder. But in what follows Micaiah shows that there was a vast audience, a number of speakers, and action on earth following commands given in heaven. "He said:

"Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord:

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne,
and all the host of heaven standing by him
on his right hand and on his left.

And the Lord said,

Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up,
 and fall at Ramoth Gilead ?
 And this one spoke so, and this one was speaking so.
 And the spirit came forth and stood before the Lord,
 and said, I will persuade him.
 And the Lord said unto Him,
 Wherewith ?
 And he said, I will go forth,
 and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.
 And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and
 prevail also : go forth and do so.”¹

In this sacred drama, recited in the great square of Samaria, and handed down to us in brief outline, we have a view of what the audience probably was in the similar drama of Genesis, “all the host of heaven,” on the right hand and on the left hand of the throne; the train, as Isaiah describes them, the train filling the temple, the six-winged Seraphim standing before him, and “this one” calling to “this one” a song of adoring praise. We may well suppose that the audience in the drama of Genesis, audience and chorus or orchestra in one, were the Stars of the Morning, who sang their hymns of praise and shouted their gladness when the world was made, and a barren earth was carpeted with green and gold at its Maker's all-commanding voice. It is difficult to read the story of creation in the Book of Job,² “when the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy,” or the similar story in the Book of Proverbs,³ without feeling, or at least wishing, that they are borrowed from the sacred drama in the beginning of Genesis, or a larger version of it.

That there was an earth-history behind and explained by the unseen world-drama, recited by Micaiah in the great

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 17-22.

² Job xxxviii. 4-12.

³ Prov. viii. 22-31.

square of Samaria, is a matter that cannot be denied. But what, above all things, must not be overlooked or forgotten is that the drama itself is called "the word of the Lord." The representation was a vivid picture, fitted to impress the people who heard it spoken, and as fit to this hour to impress modern readers. It did not change the march of events, but its truth was proved by the facts that followed. In the same way the drama of Genesis is "the word of the Lord," seen in vision, as Micaiah saw, by some ancient seer, whose fuller descriptions may possibly be preserved for us in the books of Job and Proverbs. The drama is not a myth, it is not the invention of an illiterate or designing priest; it is a record of facts, glorified by poetic colour and sublime simplicity, showered on the prophet who saw the vision by "the Spirit that came forth and stood before the Lord," when all "the host of heaven was standing by him on his right hand and on his left."

As the prophet seer looked on the barren earth, he saw the tender shoots of the young grass rush from the repulsive ground, the full-formed stalks with the seed on them, and bushes or trees with matured fruit, whose seed was in itself—each growth after its kind. Spring and summer pass before his eye in this dramatic day. On one thing he lays special stress. How the greenness and beauty, the tender grass and the mature herb arose at first he could not see, and does not say. He knows no origin of life but the command of God. Nor has man to this hour discovered any other. Unquestionably, man has dreamed of the origin of life in the depths of the sea; he has sought it in the heights of heaven; but his speculations have only shown hopeless ignorance, and left him no resource but to fall back on that time-honoured origin, the command of God. But the seer or prophet is equally strong in his view of the spread of life on the dry land. Science assures us that without life preceding no life can follow. There is

nothing self-created but the self-existent One. The seer in Genesis accepts this position: "the tree yielding fruit, whose seed is in itself, after its kind." What science affirms to-day, the drama in Genesis laid down as the order of nature three or four thousand years ago.

Before the curtain of darkness fell upon the now green and beautiful dry land, a voice from the throne or a messenger-herald was heard proclaiming, God saw that it was good. The Creator blesses the wonderful work of His hands. God is seen to be quite distinct from this work of beauty and greenness. He is the Creator; it is the creature, separated from Him by a gulf none can pass but Himself. There is no confounding here of the Maker with the thing made, no bringing down of the former to the level of the latter, no raising up of the latter to the rank and glory of the former. Other forms of faith and philosophy have found or sought hope and peace in this confusion of things. It has no place in the drama of Genesis. All things are of God, is the simple, the sublime teaching of that drama: all things are God or part of God, is the teaching, largely believed in among men, which it condemns. Between the Creator and the creature an impassable gulf is seen to exist. Of the complete severance between the being of God and that of man Hebrew literature is full. A personal God, not pantheism, is the core of its teaching.

SCENE FOURTH.

Sun, Moon, and Stars.

When the curtain of darkness rose for the fourth time and the stage was again lighted, once more is the commanding voice heard, introducing law and beauty more fully on the scene: "God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and

years ; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." The grave, solemn words of this commanding voice, in calling sun and moon into being, condemn some of the worst superstitions to which the human race has been a prey. It is God that speaks ; it is also the loving Father of feeble and misguided men, condemning astrology, sun worship, moon worship, and polytheism, with their host of attendant evils. Spoken or written three or four thousand years ago, in an age of deep darkness, of gross superstition, and of general polytheism, the words cannot be set aside as the dream of a romancer. The light of science and truth has spread over earth since those days, but not the slightest flaw from ignorance or priestly deceit can be detected in the words, which describe the object had in view in the creation of these two lights. The pitfalls that have been avoided are neither few nor shallow. To have stumbled into one of them would have for ever destroyed the writer's claim to be a speaker of "the word of God." There is not a word in them to find fault with. It should rather be said that they embody in the simplest language instruction of the highest utility to deceived and credulous men. They are a veritable "word of the Lord."

In the first place, the words of the drama show the folly of astrology, that fruitful source of deceit, of sorrow, and of crime, in all ages of man's history. Whoever takes thought of the wrong done to humanity all over Europe by the Church's misinterpretation of the text, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," or realises the host of murders, drownings, and burnings committed under show of law, and from regard to that command of God, will be able to form some idea of the escapes made by the nations through the avoidance of error in this part of the drama. The silence in these statements of the prophet-seer is most impressive. They condemn the

dreams of that false science by speaking the truth. And they do this, although the Hebrews lived for many years in Egypt among a people who "considered themselves the first to suggest the idea of foretelling from the natal hour the future fortunes of each new-born infant, the life he was destined to lead, or the death he was fated to die, which were boldly settled by astrological prediction."¹ The two lights, sun and moon, are said to have been appointed for "signs." The literature tells us what the "signs" were, they were marks of God's presence and wonder-working power. Let any one read its magnificent lyric, that old but ever new poem, the nineteenth Psalm, and say if any literature, even the most modern, has found a nobler use or meaning of the word "signs." It is a bright reflection, it is a distinct echo of the drama in Genesis: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork," the object for which the two lights were set in the heavens. There is a stately march of "signs and wonders" here, no freezing torpor of life paralysed by astrological fooleries. Man may deceive himself into the belief that his studies of sun and moon and stars enable him to read the changes in the history of nations and men, hid in the womb of future time, their rise, their growth, their downfall, their death. In past ages all nations cherished this absurd delusion; to this day it is cherished and acted on by multitudes of men; but no countenance whatever is given to it in this drama, or in the literature to which the drama stands as a preface. From sun or moon or stars it holds out no hope of obtaining a clue to the fate of men or nations. How unlike the Egyptians among whom the Hebrews lived, and with whose learning their leader and lawgiver was conversant from his earliest years! "Most carefully," it is said, "they note the movements,

¹ Wilkinson, *The Ancient Egyptians*, ii. 455.

revolutions, and positions of the planets, as well as the influences possessed by each upon the birth of animals, whether productive of good or evil.”¹ They had names and attributes for the planets and some of the stars; the Hebrews do not appear to have known the planets by name. How unlike also the learning of Rome, even when it was leavened more or less with the truth of Christ! Among the Romans, it is said by a contemporary writer, “there are many who do not presume either to bathe or to dine or to appear in public till they have diligently consulted, according to the rules of astrology, the situation of Mercury and the aspect of the moon.”² Long after his time “the truth of astrology was allowed by the best of the Arabian astronomers, who drew their most certain predictions, not from Venus and Mercury, but from Jupiter and the sun.”³ What bondage this was for a community to live in! What dark shadows it threw across a great nation; shadows that stretched from the cradle to the grave! Freedom from the yoke of arithmetical calculations, in this absurd study of stellar influence on man’s life, was unknown among the most civilised and most powerful nations in the ancient world.

The drama of creation in the beginning of Genesis was the preface to a literature which held this abuse of the heavenly bodies in abhorrence, and covered with ridicule those by whom it was practised. “Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels,” that literature called out to the nations. “Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor

¹ Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptians*, ii. 465. See also iii. 49.

² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, iv. 83 (and note). ³ vi. 401 (note).

fire to sit before it . . . none shall save thee." What untold misery has been averted from men by the wise silence regarding astrology, and the plain statement of facts in this drama of the world! A word, a sentence might have produced, among the nations of Europe, sorrows beyond expression. Silence on the one hand, facts on the other, have resulted in freedom from falsehoods and superstition, such as have troubled the lives of millions of men in all ages in other lands. Truly, in this drama of creation we hear and read "the word of the Lord," and "Our Father" speaks.

To avoid astrology by a simple statement of the truth, as is done in this drama, was an unspeakable gift to man in his struggle with darkness; but to assign to the sun and moon and stars their just place in creation was a still greater boon. How simply, how sublimely, it is done! First of all, they are mere creatures called into being by a far mightier than they. The sun and moon are not gods. Enlightened nations, enjoying a literature, a civilisation, a science that lifted them into as high a place as any nation could claim, believed they were gods, called them so, and paid them devoted worship. One of the hymns to Amen-Ra in Egypt runs thus—

The ancient of heaven, the Oldest of the earth,
Lord of all existences, the support of things, the support of all things,

The One in his works, single among the gods,
Chief of all the gods;

Lord of truth, Father of the gods;

Maker of men, Creator of beasts;

Lord of existences, Creator of fruitful trees;

Maker of herbs, Feeder of cattle

The One, alone without peer

The gods rejoice;

The servants of the Sun are in peace.¹

Dying men are thus described in the sacred poetry of

¹ *Records of the Past*, ii. 129.

Assyria: "The man, who is departing in glory, may his soul shine radiant as brass. To that man may the Sun give life"; and, again:

To the Sun, greatest of the gods, may he ascend!
And may the Sun, greatest of the gods, receive his soul into his holy hands!¹

Of the sun and the moon it may truly be said that, in Memphis and On or Heliopolis, in the great cities of Nineveh and Babylon, in Tyre, in Athens, in Rome—seats of power, of refinement, of knowledge—their godhead was published and sworn by. But this drama, and the whole literature to which it forms a preface, reject all such claims for the sun and moon. They are only created things, owning the power of a Master's voice, and submissive to a Master's will.

But the drama guarded against another error, into which the nations fell. It placed the creation of light before the creation of the sun; it showed the dry land clothed with meadows, fruit trees and forests before the sun appeared. Readers of all ages were thus taught that light was older than the sun; and that plant-life was dependent on another source for its being and continuance. The sun rules the day, but he is not the beginning and source of light; he influences plant-life, but he is not its beginning and source. These teachings of the drama run counter to all human experience. They were published in the darkness of a credulous and superstitious age, and nothing similar to them was taught or believed among other nations; but they are now elementary truths of science. God made two great lights. He assigned to them their place; he prescribed their duty—"to divide the light from the darkness." No doubt could remain on a reader's mind that these two lights were servants, not masters; creatures, not gods. God saw that this was good. With Fatherly care of easily

¹ *Records of the Past*, iii. 134, 135.

deceived man, he provided against a flood of future evils, such as swept over the world from the prevalence of superstition and ignorance.

SCENE FIFTH.

Fishes and Birds.

The fifth scene reveals to the audience of the drama the creation of fishes and birds. With our modern views at least, we cannot fail to be surprised at the creation of sun and moon coming in between the covering of the dry land with vegetation, and the peopling of sea and air with life. We are more disposed to accept the view taken in the hymn to Amen-Ra, quoted above—the sun first, men and beasts and herbs afterwards. And it is also singular, while it is equally left without explanation, the joining of fishes and fowl in one day's work: God said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."

Three times already was it said of God's handiwork, "God saw that it was good." It was said of the light, of the severance of sea from dry land, of the making of sun and moon. It is said again of the calling into being of fish and fowl: "God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly after their kinds, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good." The crown of this sublimely simple description of creative work is, God saw that it was good. Almighty wisdom is represented in this drama as speaking with man's voice and taking man's view of created nature. It is seen by us to be good: God saw it in the same light. He took pleasure in His works; He stamped on man's mind the same feeling of pleasure, the same idea that it was good. As He saw at first we see now. As He proclaimed at the first that the light, the severance of land from sea, the clothing of the land with

greenness, and the kindling of sun, moon, and stars were good, we publish now in prose and in poetry that they are all good, and whoever makes this proclamation in choicest and most striking words is pronounced likest God by being classed of men among the immortals of our race. What the Father of us all said at the birth of things we, His children, continue to say as the ages roll past, God saw that it was good. A man of genius is astonished at the good and beautiful work of his hands. Is it with this human feeling of astonishment at the growing beauty of creation that the Almighty Maker is said to pass on His works the praise, It was good? Truly, man is made in the image of God.

But, as order, beauty, and life spring up at the commanding voice of the Creator, they are found to be more than good. They call down a blessing. A machine may be good, it may even be very good. Nature is a machine, a very good machine. But a machine does not always call down a blessing. It must be very good to attain to this honour. Such, then, is the next step in the round of honours blazoned forth in the drama of creation: "God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth," or dry land.¹ Not a word is yet said of any check on this increase of animal life. The stage is gay with living creatures, filling earth and air in ever-increasing multitudes. Nature, "red in tooth and claw," is not presented to view; nothing is seen or heard of but its wonderful power of peopling sea and air with varied life. The blessing is working; no curse has been uttered; death is hid from view, or is unknown. "God saw that it was good," with the goodness of the golden age.

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¹ Compare verses 9 and 22.