

THE DRAMA OF CREATION.

SCENE SIXTH.

Living Creatures—Man.

THE orderly march of life and beauty proceeds farther when the curtain of darkness rises and shows the lighted stage for the sixth scene of the drama. What was created first was peopled first, the dry land with its carpet of grass and trees and fruit for the support of other life, the sea with its hosts of inhabitants, and the firmament of heaven. There is a manifest order in this march of life towards something yet unknown and unseen, but rising higher in the scale of being, and foreshadowed before it appears. The prophet who sees and reports this progress passes no comment of his own on the marvellous scenes that are transacted on the lighted stage. In other cases when the curtain is lifted, and a drama of heaven is acted in the sight of man, the throne is seen, the audience is described, and the speakers are heard speaking. It is not so here. All these parts of the drama, though understood to be in view of the seer, are overshadowed by the glorious presence of the One Worker. In that presence the scenery sinks into nothing. It makes no addition to His greatness or to His glory; for the grandeur of the piece is the One Worker and His work, the loving Father and His regard for man.

The movements in the drama proceed; the fulfilment of promise or prophecy continues from scene to scene. "God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so." There is no philosophic or priestly speculation regarding the lower creatures; there was none in the previous scenes. Everything is so simply told, and the words are so common, that it is evident the drama was intended to teach the common people in the

most attractive and most easily remembered style. Of priestly or philosophic influence there is no trace whatever. Written for the people by one of themselves, may most truly be said of this ancient drama. Systems and beliefs, that have worked untold woe in the world, are struck at or shoved aside, are ignored or condemned. The passing of a sinful human soul into the body of a beast, there to be punished and purified, as other ancient creeds taught mankind, finds no place in this drama. The wisdom of ancient Egypt held that the soul, "when the body dies, enters into the form of an animal, which is born at the moment, thence passing on from one animal into another, until it has circled through the forms of all the creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame, and is born anew in three thousand years." Pythagoras accepted this nonsense; even Plato seems to have half believed it too. What horrors of darkness have been escaped by the simple utterances of this drama! What untold terrors! A father, a mother, a brother, a sister, might be prisoned in the body of a brute a man had slain, or was preparing to eat. Yes, a wife, a son, a daughter! What shudderings of humanity at this risk of awful horrors! The chains of bondage, thus wrapped round man's sensitive soul by priestly guile, are broken in pieces by the words of this sacred drama. Freedom from superstition in the light of truth, the peace of God, the golden age of humanity, are its grand characteristics. Yet this faith, grotesque as it appears to us, is accepted by millions of men to the present day.

Earth and sea and sky have thus been prepared for some great event that has still to come on the stage. Earth was a palace, a magnificent palace, without a king: its manifold tribes were subjects without a lord. A palace and a court were provided; where was the king? The grand

abode was ready to receive a master; the court was set, waiting for its monarch to enter. As becomes the dignity of a lord so exalted as this waited-for king, he comes last on the stage of life. "Let us make man," is uttered by the commanding voice of the Creator. He is the only creature singled out from all the tribes of life as worthy of a special name. The others are slumped together in an undistinguished mass; they are the many, the mere multitude, as we speak to-day, or they are "the great whales," whatever the words mean. Man is *the one*, standing apart, royal in his isolation. He stands apart from other earthly life; but he is akin with heaven and its inhabitants, even while he belongs in one sense to the earth. The voice tells us the relationship: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." The gift of dominion was thus made to man at his birth.

There are two things remarkable in this last creative act: Man is made in the image of God, and is crowned with the right of universal dominion. That the two are one and the same is evident; but a single gift is sometimes better seen, and is often more valued, when looked at from two sides. It is so here. Without the gift of the image of God, the kingship, given at the same time, would mean a throne shorn of its magnificence. Man, the likeness of God, takes the place of his creating Father in intellectual and moral relationship to the lower creatures. As the Father bends and trains the tribes of life to His will, and for His honour, so man, His child and His likeness, is gifted with sparks of this intellectual power to subjugate and to use them for his welfare. The intellectual power of man is kept in check, or enhanced by the moral power. Where the intellectual power alone is allowed to sway

man's action, the king becomes a despot and a tyrant, stained with deeds of cruelty towards animal life, which may fill even his fellow-men with horror. When the moral power asserts its supremacy, man becomes a kingly friend, whom the lower tribes of life recognise as their loving head, whom they follow, whom they obey, often to the delight and wonder of onlookers, to whom is not given the happy gift of winning their subjects' affection. "Be a King," a true King, is plainly set down here as God our Father's command to man.

But the gift of dominion and kingship is distinctly stated by the speaker in this drama. As man walks upon the scene, surrounded by the glories of the new court over which he is set, the seer or prophet tells what he saw, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." A blessing is added, and the terms of the blessing are peculiar: "God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." How far this gift of dominion extended is not said. It is man's charter to rule earth and every living thing that is in it; and, if the terms of the charter stopped at this point, or if they were not supplemented by another charter at a much later period, we should be in doubt what view to take. The supplement to this charter was added after the Flood: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things."¹ In the drama there is a second charter, a charter conveying to man and beast alike a right to live, which must be taken along with this right of dominion. It is in these terms: *First*, the commanding voice speaks to man: "God said,

¹ For the renewal of the original charter see Genesis viii. 17, 19; for the supplement Genesis ix. 3.

Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree, yielding seed : to you it shall be for meat. The *second* part is in similar terms, and is given to the living things of earth, "To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat : and it was so."

The scene, presented to the eye of the prophet, is a scene of royal life and peacefulness. Death to living creatures has not found an entrance into the King's palace : nature, red in tooth and claw, is unknown in this drama ; the King and his subjects live together in harmony under separate charters from their sovereign lord. We are told that, as God looked abroad on the kingdom of peace He had called into being, "He saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." There can be no doubt that the drama is a picture of the lost golden age of the world, restored again in the Book of the Revelation.

The concluding words of the sixth scene open up a farther development of the purpose of the drama : "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." Angels and archangels, we are told, stars of the morning, shouted their gladness in hymns of praise at the completion of this wonderful work. It was like their Lord and like themselves, a triumph of light, a magnificent work of peace. What the angels sang to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and the return of the golden age to earth, "Glory to God in the Highest, peace on earth, goodwill to men," may have been also sung at the beginning of man's reign on earth. It was meant to be a reign of life, of peace, of righteousness. Peace resting on order, resulting in beauty, and covering earth with a lighted glory, is the main end of creation according to the drama : peace between God and man, peace between man and the subject tribes of life. The lighted

stage in this drama shows peace and gladness prevalent on the new or renovated earth. It reveals the golden age of time, whatever preceded and whatever followed. It is the bright youth of humanity; it is the dream of later and of degenerate days. What the Bible begins with, and shows was lost by man, it shows him also striving, but striving without success, to regain. The golden age of peace and truth was gone from earth: it had fled to heaven. All ages bewailed the terrible loss; all poets, heathen as well as Hebrew, sang its glories and hoped for its return. Prophets spoke of it, described its peaceful ways, and assured mankind that it would come again to bless the world. What the drama showed at the beginning of the Bible, another drama showed at the end, the golden city and the golden age returning from heaven—no death, no night, no tears, no sorrow, perfect peace. This is the thread that guides our footsteps through the labyrinth of man's history, and this longing for the return of the golden age is the thread that connects every book of the Bible with every other from Genesis to Revelation. The drama of creation in Genesis is a drama of the golden age of earth, what the world then was, what prophets, poets, apostles, and heroes hope it will become again—perfect peace, gladness without alloy.

THE SEVENTH SCENE.

Peace and Rest.

When light flooded the stage on the seventh day, there was silence on the throne; no commanding voice was heard speaking, and the audience was wrapped in the attentiveness of an overpowering awe. Creation was ended; the march of a new or renovated world was begun; the day of man's reign had opened on time. The Great King on his throne, the courtiers around, and the seer, to whom this view of the heavenly court was vouchsafed, are all represented as calmly contemplating the wonderful results of the

six scenes that were past : to use the words of the drama of the new Creation in the last book of the Bible, " There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." The city described in the Book of Revelation may be imagined to reproduce in man's thoughts this world of the golden age—" Having the glory of God, and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal ; . . . and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass . . . and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie . . . and there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light : and they shall reign for ever and ever." When the drama of Genesis was shown to the prophet-seer, it represented a time when jasper-stones, and crystal, and pure gold and glass had not been called into use by the inventive faculty of man, and when defilement and lies and candles were still unknown. Words and things, which were most suitable to enter into a description of the new golden age in the Book of Revelation, would have been wholly out of place, and would have carried with them an air of intense unreality, had they been employed to decorate the language in the drama of Genesis. They are not found in that drama. Nothing is found there but the severe simplicity of truth in its description, expressed or understood, of the original golden age.

The work, then, is ended ; the golden age of peace and happiness has begun : " On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made ; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it ; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God had made." There are two things in this last scene of the drama—the rest of the Worker, and the blessing on the day. Every-

thing about the drama is so simply human that we feel we are in the presence of man and are speaking of man, while we are aware all the while that it is God who is speaking and working. The illusion is complete. We are carried away by it, and are quite satisfied so to be. But what we do feel above all other things is that, as we are, so this loving Father was. He worked to make a world; He rested after the world was made. We work to dig or to plough, to build or to fashion, and it is an inspiring thought that when we rest after such work, we are not giving way to idleness or laziness, but are following the example of our Maker and our Father. Rest after work was the example and the rule set to mankind by God. From the beginning God is represented as descending to man's level for man's welfare.

The second thing said about the last scene of the drama is that "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." He pronounced a blessing on the day, and He set it apart from all other days as a holy day. To bless the seventh day is a singular phrase, of which no example besides occurs in the Old Testament.¹ To bless a man, or a field, or a family, are common enough expressions, but not "to bless a day." It is called the seventh day in the drama; it is called the Sabbath or Rest-day in after ages.² That this blessing of it meant imparting to the day a peculiar dignity above other days is unmistakable. What that dignity was, and how it was handed down or maintained in the world, are nowhere told us. The setting apart of the Rest-day is a fact beyond dispute; the usefulness of it to worn and wearied men is another acknowledged fact, and the fitness of one day in seven over any other proportion of man's time is also generally allowed. Was it chance or a poet's dream or a romancer's fancy that invented this Rest-

¹ Lev. xxv. 10 is the nearest approach to it.

² Exod. xx. 11.

day, that discovered this best proportion of one day in seven, and that led men to number by weeks of seven rather than by weeks of ten or twelve days? Let us say or think what we please, it is plain that there is something unearthly about this drama of creation, something that penetrates into every fibre of man's being, and finds a response in every arrangement of man's social order. A document, not containing so many words as are found in one hundred lines of Homer, or in a speech from an Athenian tragedy, has taught the world by direct statement, or by a wise silence, practical and theoretical truth for man's guidance in life, which the wisest and most civilised nations of antiquity failed to grasp, far less to apply. The brevity of this incomparable drama, the simplicity of the language, the loftiness of the ideas, and their gracious influence on man's welfare and progress might have saved it from the sneers to which it has been frequently exposed. What poets and prophets said of their compositions may most truly be said of this drama—"Hear ye the word of the Lord."

The challenge thrown down by this drama is thus a challenge to the science of the ancient world, to its degrading conceptions of God and man alike. No challenge is implied to modern science, and none is given. In fact modern science is at one with this drama in calmly setting aside the follies of astrology, of sun worship, of moon worship, and of transmigration of souls. On the picture of the creation of living things, seen in general outline and briefly portrayed by the prophet spectator, he would be a critic hard to please who would say that there is error or flaw in its brief descriptions. There is marvellous accuracy of outline; there is also marvellous beauty. This miniature, with its high moral purpose and its lofty teaching of a personal God and a loving Father, is at once a supreme work of art, and a piece of literature worthy to be called

“The Word of the Lord.” In fact, “to examine the meaning of the sacred Scripture, and see ‘how far its modes and figures of representation are merely vehicles of inner truth or are of the essence of the truth itself—to understand the human conditions of the writers, and appreciate how far these may have influenced their statements—to give to past theological language its proper weight, and not more than its proper weight—to trace the history of its terms so as not to confound human thought with Divine faith’—all these processes are essential to the theologian—some measure of them is required in every educated man who will think rightly on such subjects.”¹

JAMES SIME.

¹ *Culture and Religion*, J. C. Shairp, Principal St. Andrew's University, p. 90.