

of the Three Persons by name, not only by Dante and Beatrice, but by the spirits of the blessed. The name of Christ occurs several times,<sup>1</sup> though not so frequently as the name of the Holy Spirit. The expression 'Divine Justice,' including the whole relation of God to man, is used by Dante when he calls upon the image of the Eagle to solve his doubts, since, by the Eagle, 'Divine Justice is apprehended without a veil.'

But words signifying that God is Love, is the Highest Good, crowd upon the pages of the *Paradiso*, and show that in the knowledge of God's Love the spirits rest in perfect content and bliss. 'In His Will is our peace,'<sup>2</sup> is one of the

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, *Par.* xiv., xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. It will be observed that the expression 'The

most beautiful expressions of this rest in God, but there are many others. In Beatrice's words, God is the 'Highest Good,' the 'Divine Goodness,' the 'burning brightness of Love'; to Dante He is the 'Highest Good,' 'Eternal Joy,' 'Love which rules the Heavens,' 'the Primal fire of Love'; to the spirits God is the 'Highest Good,' 'Infinite Goodness,' 'sweet and sacred Love,' and again 'Love'; till all the varying notes are attuned to this music, and, in the end, Dante, with the blessed spirits in Paradise, feels his own desire and will 'swayed in eternal measure by the Love that moves the sun and all the stars.'<sup>3</sup>

Will of God,' although it occurs in all three divisions of the poem, is identified in the first with Power, in the second with Wisdom, and in the third with Love.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xxxiii.

## The Parables of Zechariah.

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### IX.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE CHARIOTS (CHAP. VI. 1-8).

THIS is the eighth and last of the parables of Zechariah. It is generally supposed that the entire series of visions was presented to the mind of the prophet in a single night. He speaks of being awakened out of sleep to find that a new vision is before his eyes; and probably we are to suppose him falling into a slumber after each, and then waking, refreshed, to face the next; unless, indeed, these transitions be merely the machinery of the literary artist, to frame the successive pictures, and so render them more distinct and arresting.

We do not understand the prophet at all unless we realise what must have been the state of his mind before the series of visions commenced. He was thoroughly absorbed with the condition of his native land. The grandeur of its destiny had taken possession of him; but at the same time he was profoundly and tremulously conscious of all the impediments. The numbers of the returned exiles were slender and their resources small; worse still, there were few among them inspired with any intensity of patriotism or largeness of ideal; and worst of all was the dread arising from the designs of the surrounding tribes, which might

at any moment combine to attack them or, by secret information and whispered insinuations, bring down on their heads the irresistible power of Babylon. These mingled elements of depression and fear, of faith and hope, were struggling in the mind of the young prophet, till, in the silence of an inspired night, when the hour was ripe, God, with a touch, reduced the confusion to peace, and out of the chaotic elements of his thoughts evolved the series of visions, in which the prophet saw how the divine love and wisdom were behind all the disturbed forces of the time, and were able to construct from them a future of glory for his country.

It may be worth while, at this point, to recall the succession of the visions, as this is the best introduction to the final parable.

First, there was the vision of the Horsemen, coming in from all points of the compass, after traversing the earth, on the behest of Jehovah, for the purpose of ascertaining the state of the world. Their report was a gloomy one—that the power of the enemies of God's people was strong and stable. This was only the echo of the view entertained by the prophet and his contemporaries of the situa-

tion. But the vision closed with a divine declaration that this peace would be broken, because God was about to shake the whole world and so inaugurate a new age.

Then followed the vision of the Carpenters, in which the brutish strength and cruel violence of the enemies of Israel were represented by four pushing horns. This was only an imaginative equivalent for the trepidation with which the returned exiles contemplated the political forces arrayed against them. But the vision disclosed the forces by which these were to be met—the four carpenters, who were to fray them and cast them out.

Next followed the vision of the Wall of Fire, in which the prophet was permitted to see the city which they were building, and which looked so small and mean, expanding to such an extent that no wall could contain it, and no wall was required, because God Himself was to be both the wall which formed its circumference and the temple which formed its centre.

These three first visions may be said to have exhausted the political situation; the two that followed related to the religious condition of the community.

The fourth vision was that of the High Priest, who appeared clothed in filthy garments and standing at the bar in the position of a criminal. This was only too accurate a representation of the guilty state in which all the more sensitive consciences of the community felt themselves to be, on account both of their own sins and the sins of their fathers. But Jehovah's command to strip off the filthy garments and substitute for them robes pure and priestly, was an intimation that sin had been removed and perfect pardon granted.

The fifth vision—that of the Golden Candlestick—was the counterpart of the fourth; for it was a promise that to the repentant community was to be granted not merely the negative blessing of forgiveness, but the positive blessing of the Holy Spirit, whose reviving energy was to burn brightly in every department of the national life, and to be maintained from an inexhaustible source, as the lamps of the golden candlestick were fed from the living trees.

Thus the first five visions covered the political and religious state of the community; but another pair of parables were required for the moral situa-

tion. Certain vices and abuses which had been allowed to infect the community were eating out the strength of its manhood and womanhood, and preventing the mind of God from resting with complacency on His people. These corrupting and blighting influences were to be carried forth, in order that there might be scope for the free play of divine grace; and this process of removal was represented in the sixth and seventh visions—that of the Flying Roll and that of the Ephah.

Such was the magnificent programme of the prophet's dreams. It might be looked on as a programme of reform, to which he was summoning his fellow-countrymen to give their thought and energy; and this undoubtedly it was intended to be. But, in accordance with the spirit of Old Testament prophecy, it was conceived by Zechariah not as a programme submitted to man, that he might take it up and accomplish it, but as the work of God. To the modern politician man is the factor that counts, but to the ancient prophet the supreme agent was God; to us beneficent change is reform, to the prophet it was salvation.

From this point of view it is not difficult to understand the eighth vision. It describes the going forth of the divine energy to fulfil the programme sketched in the preceding visions. With its chariots sent away in different directions it resembles the first vision, in which horsemen are introduced as coming in from all quarters of the world to report to Jehovah what they have seen. And, indeed, the connexion is close. The first vision describes the messengers of God reporting upon the state of the world at the close of an era which has terminated; the eighth describes the divine agents going forth to shape the new era just beginning. It does not seem, however, to be implied that the messengers who come into the presence of God in the first vision and those who go out from it in the last are identical; for the colours of the horses in the two visions are not alike. Perhaps the difference is meant to draw attention to different offices which the messengers of heaven fulfil. As modern science teaches us that in the human constitution there is one set of nerves by which information is conveyed to the brain from the outside world, and another by which the purposes of the brain are transmitted to the organs of action, so the prophet conceived the universe as furnished with two sets of invisible

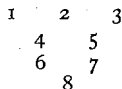
powers, by one of which all events were made known to the divine mind, while through the other the divine purposes were carried into effect. Or perhaps the prophet varied the colours of the horses merely from the consciousness that the Almighty has multitudes of agents whom He can employ in His work.

Let us now, however, look more closely at some of the details of the vision.<sup>1</sup>

I. The place from which the divine messengers issue is noticeable: 'There came four chariots forth from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass;' and, before they thus issued forth, they had been 'standing before the Lord of all the earth.'

Much ingenuity has been displayed in endeavouring to determine which two mountains these are from between which the chariots appeared. As Jerusalem is, in Scripture, the city of the Great King, it is supposed that it must have been from the holy city that the messengers went forth. Accordingly, two of the hills on which Jerusalem was built—Zion and Moriah, for example—are supposed to be intended, or the reference is taken to be to the rocky walls of the valley of Jehoshaphat, which is intimately associated in Scripture with the judgments of God. But the fact that the mountains seen by the prophet were of brass proves that the scene is ideal. No earthly mountains, that can be pointed out on the map, were those which the prophet saw; rather were they the pillars, lofty and massive as mountains, which guarded the entrance of the divine palace; and between them, no doubt, in the prophet's mind there was also a gigantic gateway of brass, within which the chariots stood, till their hour arrived. Perhaps the recollection of the gigantic entrances of the palaces of Babylon suggested this imagery to the prophet. At all events the suggestion caught hold of the religious imagination, and in the apocryphal writings between the Old Testament and the New we find descriptions of the abode of God as a palace, in which everything is on a grandiose scale as to size and grandeur.<sup>2</sup> But the prophet's idea is the stability

<sup>1</sup> Ewald gives this as the scheme of Zechariah's visions:—



<sup>2</sup> See the remarkable description of the divine palace in the Book of Enoch, ch. xiv.

of the divine purpose. Behind walls which no earthly power can penetrate or wisdom overleap He has prepared His designs, to be revealed in due time; and it would be as easy for the hand of a mortal to overturn a mountain of brass as for any combination of human strength or skill to frustrate the will of the Eternal.

II. The messengers themselves are worthy of note. They are described as four chariots; and they are drawn by horses of different colours—red, black, white, and grisled. No charioteers are mentioned; and some suppose that none were seen by the prophet, or rather that God is Himself the charioteer. The interpreting angel explains the chariots thus: 'These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth;' but the more literal rendering is 'four winds'; and, as the wind is frequently in Scripture spoken of as the chariot of God, the meaning is supposed to be that God is going forth Himself in His chariots. It would, however, be an awkward mode of speech to describe even God as riding forth in four different chariots at the same time, and, as the four spirits are said, before they issue from between the brazen mountains, to be 'standing before the Lord of all the earth,' it is most probable that we are to conceive the chariots as driven by angels, whose function it is to execute the divine decrees in the different quarters of the globe.

Though angels are the invisible messengers of God, they act through visible means, and it has been thought that these four chariots portended the appearance on the stage of history of the four world-powers—the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman—with which the fortunes of the people of God were to be intimately bound up. Others have considered this reference too remote, and maintained that the going forth of the four together indicated that the events which they signified were to take place simultaneously.<sup>3</sup>

The colours of the horses have been taken by some to indicate the different forms of fortune by which nations or individuals are made happy or miserable, rewarded or punished. The horses of the first chariot were red, and this colour denotes slaughter; those of the second were black, and black points to calamity in general; the white colour, on the contrary, of the horses of the third

<sup>3</sup> Marti presses this point.

chariot signifies victory and gladness ; while the mixed colour of the horses of the fourth chariot points to mixed fortune, partly good and partly bad.

This may, however, be too definite ; the different colours may be introduced merely in a general way to indicate the variety of means which God has at His disposal for carrying out His purposes. The broad lesson is that all the forces of the universe, invisible and visible, belong to Him, and He can never be at a loss for agents and instrumentalities. Even the wrath of man is made to praise Him, and those who are in rebellion against His will have unconsciously to act as His servants.

III. The last point to be noted is the action of God.

The horses 'sought to go, that they might walk to and fro in the earth.'<sup>1</sup> They were impatient to be off, like high-mettled steeds, which paw the ground and champ at the bit ; but God restrained them. He has His exact moment, and, till it arrives, He does not move.

So far from lacking agents to do His will, He has everywhere to exercise restraint on the forces of the world. This is evident in the physical world. Who has experienced a storm such as sometimes convulses the sea or terrifies the inhabitants of the land without feeling that a hand was keeping the elements in check, and that, if it let go, everything would rush down into ruin ? In the more terrific manifestations of the powers of nature only a little more would be required, and all that man has laboriously created might be swept off the face of the earth, and man himself with it. The materials are stored in abundance in the recesses of nature by which the whole frame of things might be rent in pieces ; and what the Scripture says about the earth and the things that are therein being burnt up is easy to believe. Who that through the windows of history has looked into the heart of man, or by introspection has looked deeply into his own heart, has not trembled to think what might happen if the restraints placed by Providence were removed, and the passions of men allowed unrestricted scope ? The possibilities of human nature are immeasurable ; and they are in the hands of Him who in secret fashions the

<sup>1</sup> In ver. 8 this is attributed only to the bay horses ; but there is obvious confusion in vers. 6, 7, 8 ; and the impatient fretting to be off belongs probably to all. So Wellhausen reads.

substance of everyone and breathes into each, as he enters the world, his own pinch of the breath of life.

The other point to be noticed in the action of God is His satisfaction with the work of His messengers when it was accomplished : 'Then He cried upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country have quieted My spirit in the north country.' The north country in the prophets means Babylon ; and God was sending His messengers to Babylon to execute the purpose, often announced, of punishing her for all the misery which she had inflicted upon His people. This is said to have given His spirit rest.

The rest intended is that of the artist in his work accomplished. It is the glory of mind to set before itself an end, and to find the means for its accomplishment ; and, when this is achieved, it rests in it. The more intricate the means, and the more arduous the labour, the greater is the satisfaction with the final result. The musical composer carries the minds of his hearers through one stage after another of his theme ; he encounters difficulties, but he surmounts them ; he introduces discords, but they are resolved into an ampler harmony ; and at the close he gathers all up into one final effect in which the mind is brought into the mood of delighted and exultant rest. In the same way the poet follows his hero through adventures and dangers ; at the critical points the soul of the reader is distracted with uneasiness and harrowed with terror ; but at last every knot is disentangled and every discord reconciled ; and the action winds up with a conclusion in which the mind enjoys æsthetic satisfaction.

God's poem is the world ; He is the supreme artist. Chequered is the world's history ; innumerable are the forces which enter into it, and they meet and clash in bewildering opposition ; the whole often seems a hopeless mass of confusion ; but it belongs to God ; He will straighten it out ; and the end will satisfy Him and all rational beings. 'We are God's poem,' so says St. Paul ; in the English Bible it is, 'We are His workmanship' ; but this is the literal rendering. What a mass of confusion life seems to be ! within, what imperfections ; without, what contradictions ! But, however great a failure the past may have been, and however hopeless we may be of ourselves, if we only commit our life to God, He will take it in hand, and out of its errors and discords He will evolve a result fine, musical and perfect.