

## Chapter 27

### Elijah on Carmel and Afterwards

AT THE end of three years and a half, the time had come for the return of the rain and the close of the famine; but this, like the commencement of it, was not allowed without the interposition of Elijah, in a way that would serve the ends of its occurrence, and leave no uncertainty on the issue to which it stood related. It might have happened otherwise. The rain might have arrived like any rainy day, without prelude or explanation; but this would have been inconsistent with the object of the miraculous interference through Elijah. That object was to manifest God to Israel as the God of their fathers, in opposition to Baal of the Zidonians, whom they were following. Had the rain arrived in a natural way, this would not have been accomplished. The way would have been open for the people to think that as the rain had returned fortuitously, its suspension was also fortuitous. With this view, the point of the visitation would have been lost. In all Bible miracles there is a rational object—an object unattainable without them.

The prevalence of the drought for three years and a half, in harmony with Elijah's word, had given Elijah a commanding influence in the land, which paved the way for the effectual application and interpretation of the event at the right moment. Elijah, having received the command, "Go, show thyself to Ahab: and I (Yahweh) will send rain upon the earth," Elijah sought an interview with the king, who had vainly endeavoured to find him for years past. He did not go direct. He sent word by a messenger where he could be found. It did not suit the dignity of Yahweh's prophet to go further than this in approaching an idolatrous king of Israel. Ahab came to the place of appointment. When he saw Elijah, he said, "Art thou he that troublest Israel?" It was Ahab's benighted simplicity to imagine that the famine was due to Elijah's magical power as a wizard. Elijah went to the root of the matter in a sentence: "I have not troubled Israel, but (it is) thou and thy father's house in that ye have forsaken the commandment of Yahweh and followed Baalim." He did not stay to debate the matter with Ahab personally, which would have been of no advantage. He hastened rather to the business of his interview to ask a public assembly of Israel at which it might be canvassed with some effect. Elijah proposed Mount Carmel, and a large muster of the priests of Baal. Ahab assented, and issued the necessary mandate, in virtue of which, on an appointed day, an immense multitude of Israel came together on Mount Carmel, with Ahab himself, accompanied by "the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the grove, four hundred, which ate at Jezebel's table." Without needless prelude, Elijah addressing the multitude in loud voice, went straight to the heart of the subject: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Yahweh be God, follow him: if Baal, follow him." The people stood awed and silent in the presence of Yahweh's stern and faithful messenger. Then Elijah advances to a proposed test. Calling attention to the fact that he was a single-handed prophet of Yahweh against a multitude of the priests of Baal, he proposed that he should have one bullock, and they one bullock; that they each should slay and offer their respective bullock without putting fire on the altar, and that they should each call on their respective deities. "Call ye," said Elijah, "on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Yahweh, and the god that answereth by fire, let him be God." The people were struck with the reasonableness of the

proposal, and said, "It is well spoken." And it was agreed the test should be proceeded with. There was, in fact, no getting out of it. The priests were all there, with Ahab at their head, in the presence of the multitude, and any refusal of the test must have been disastrous to the national superstition.

Elijah gave the priests of Baal the first chance, and they accepted. They killed their bullock, dressed it, laid it on the wood on the altar, and called upon Baal to make known his reality by sending forth fire to consume the sacrifice. "But there was no voice, nor any that answered." They called loudly, and leaped upon the altar, and lacerated their bodies after the foolish custom of idolatry: but all in vain. Elijah gave them plenty of time. He advised them to try again. He even ventured upon banter. He suggested that perhaps Baal was wrapped in contemplation, or hunting, or travelling, and wanted loud prayers to arrest attention. Considering that the issue was, "Is Baal a reality or a myth?" this was not the pure raillery it might appear. It was relevant to the situation. At last, as evening began to draw on (the priests of Baal tired out and covered with shame), Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." He then prepared an altar of twelve stones in their sight, dug a deep trench round it, put the wood in order, and the dressed bullock on the wood. When all was ready, and the people were expecting him to pray, he surprised them by asking them to pour water plenteously on the bullock and altar. When they had done so, he asked them to do it a second time: and they did it a second time; and a third time, and they did it a third time. When they had done it the third time, the trench was full, the sacrifice drenched, and the water running all round about the altar. The object was to exclude the possibility of fire being humanly applied. Then Elijah addressed himself to Yahweh in few words, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." The crucial moment had arrived. Would Yahweh answer by fire, or would there be the failure there had been in the case of Baal? The people were attent. They had not long to wait. Immediately fire fell from heaven with an intensity that consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. The test was completely triumphant. Baal's imposture was laid open, and Yahweh's reality, for the hundredth time, demonstrated in the sight of Israel, with an effect that thrilled the onlooking assembly, yea, that covered them with shame in their own eyes that they should have been so duped and bewitched. They fell on their faces and cried: "Yahweh, he is the God: Yahweh, he is the God." Elijah, with a divine fervour, ordered the impostor priests to be seized then and there, and put to the sword, which was done by the willing people submissive under his hand.

The object of the miracle was precisely the same as that associated with the Mosaic and subsequent miracles—the demonstration of the existence and power of God as the basis of His claim to obedience. In no other way (than by miracle of some sort) could this demonstration have been made. The demonstration has been made hundreds of times in the history of Israel—the last the most effective of all—the resurrection of Christ and the marvels of the apostolic ministry. It is upon these demonstrations that faith rests, supported collaterally by the miracle of fulfilled prophecy, and the literary miracle of the Bible, and the adaptation of all to man's supreme need. That many cannot discern the demonstration is no matter of marvel in the pre-occupied state of the universal human mind, and in the prevalence of general incapacity in spiritual directions. Israel on Carmel had forgotten the Mosaic marvels through the influences of the Baalite priesthoods; and the present generation is insensible to the glories of the past by reason of a like ascendancy. Ecclesiastical puerilities and paganised speculations have taken the place of the wholesome realities of Scripture history. But the realities are there for all that. And Christ will

come, though all the world has sunk into indifference. It is not with the hope of effecting any change in the wretched state of things now existing in the world and the church so-called, that these things are written; but merely in discharge of a duty that belongs to the believer in every age—in the nineteenth as well as the first century. There is no hope of a public vindication of truth, and the unmasking of the successful impostures of all sorts that cover the world in their deadly shadow, until means akin to the Carmel incident are employed. The re-appearance of Christ will be marked in this way. The spiritual slavery of mankind will be abolished by weapons more potent than argument and moral suasion. The truth will be manifested in a way that the people can see with their eyes; and their misleaders, in the pulpit and platform, are not likely to meet a fate vastly different from that of the prophets of Baal at the hands of Elijah. The prophetic word is unmistakable on this point. The deliverance of the world could not be accomplished without the removal of all obstacles.

Yahweh having been glorified again in the presence of assembled and repentant Israel, a return of the rain was granted; not, however, without intercession on the part of Elijah, who “went to the top of Carmel, and cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees.” On the appearance of a speck of cloud on the seaward horizon, he sent a message to Ahab to make haste, so that he might not be overtaken by the rain. In a short time, “the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.” Ahab got ready quickly, and rode to Jezreel as fast as his chariot-encumbered horses could take him. What became of Elijah in the midst of the pouring rain? Did he stay on the summit of Mount Carmel? No. When Ahab departed, “Elijah girded up his loins” and ran before him at a surprising pace: and when Ahab arrived at Jezreel, about forty miles off, Elijah was there. The explanation of this pedestrian feat is to be found in the record of it: *‘The hand of Yahweh was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel’* ([1 Kings 18:46](#).) We may suppose that Elijah was in haste to confirm Ahab in the lesson learnt on Mount Carmel, before evil counsels should prevail; and the Lord worked with Elijah. The forty miles’ run would not distress him as it would distress a man depending solely on the unaided resources of the human physiology. A man in the latter case could not have run the distance and outstripped the proud horses of a king. But with the “hand of Yahweh” upon a man, he can do anything: the muscular force is replaced as fast as it is used, and the man can “run and not be weary, can walk and not faint.” This is possible in the mortal; what limits can be set to human faculty and human power when “this mortal is swallowed up of life,” and is no longer dependent upon the feeble supply of force generated by the animal organisation?

Elijah’s hurried journey was unavailing if its object was to hold Ahab in the mood inspired by the Carmel meeting. Ahab reported to Jezebel what had happened: particularly the slaughter of the priests, which stirred Jezebel’s indignation beyond all bounds. She sent word to Elijah that he should pay with his life for what he had done. When Elijah saw that he was in danger, he fled from Jezreel and sought refuge in the wilds of Beersheba. Here he wandered about a whole day, and sat down at last under a juniper tree, tired and vexed. Vexation was natural to a man in such a situation: but we should not have known that it touched Elijah so deeply unless it had been recorded that he “requested for himself that he might die.” He said, “It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers.” This is an interesting glimpse into Elijah’s inner man. It reveals a degree of disappointment which shows that he had been expecting great things as the result of his mission to Israel. Instead of that, he finds his mission a failure, and himself a hunted fugitive. No wonder he wished himself dead. In the midst of his bitter feelings he fell asleep. While he lay asleep, an angel touched him, and told him to arise and

eat. He awoke, opened his eyes, and found close to him a fire, and on it a newly-baked cake, and near by it a cruse of water. He had evidently wandered into this solitude without provision of any kind, and the food before him was acceptable. Who had brought it? The angel. "How wonderful" some exclaim: others mock. There is no occasion for much marvel and none at all for scorn. If a man can kindle a fire and bake a cake, it must be much easier for an angel: but our scornful friend rejoins "Who ever saw an angel?" The answer is ready; names and dates and all particulars have been supplied in previous chapters: but our scornful friend is incapable of receiving the information, because it refers to times somewhat remote, and rests upon evidence which he lacks the power to discern. So we let him alone in his foolishness and pass on.

Having eaten of the cake, and drunk of the water, Elijah lay down again to rest. Shortly, he was roused the second time by the angel, who asked him to eat and drink again, adding that he (Elijah) was about to go a long journey and required to be strengthened for it, which was the explanation of this angelic visit in the wilderness. Elijah did as he was told and then started on his journey, which was long, even to Sinai, in Arabia in the wilderness. It lasted just as long in days as the journey of Israel in the desert took years—forty days and forty nights. During this time, he had no further food. He went all the time in the strength of the food prepared by the angel—a wonderful thing in the eyes of mortals who have partaken of no such food, but which would cease to be wonderful to them if they experienced it. It is the perversity of human nature to consider a thing impossible unless they can see it. God shows them many marvels in the animal and vegetable worlds. These they take as a matter of course because they are accustomed to them (though little do they consider or appreciate them). But when God speaks to them of "greater things than these," they dare to mutter presumptuous words of unbelief merely because they have not seen! Oh, insulting levity of the human race! Oh, unspeakable patience of the High and Lofty Possessor of all things! The day will come when the insult will be purged with works of devouring judgment, when the patience long tried will end in the destruction of myriads, whose cries and shrieks will avail not to avert the storm.

On Elijah's arrival at Horeb, he was commanded to stand upon the Mount: and Yahweh displayed His power before him in appalling forms. A tempest rent the mountains, and hurled mighty rocks from their place: an earthquake shook the framework of nature as if it would shake it to pieces: and fire blazed and rolled and darted in the deep valleys around him. Elijah retired into a cave to shelter from the awful storm. When the tumult had subsided, a voice (still and small) addressed him, hearing which, he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave in which he had taken refuge. There he received a variety of directions (including the order to appoint Elisha as "prophet in his room.") We are not told what the object of the terrible display was. It was probably personal to Elijah himself. We have seen that he had become despondent concerning the work of Yahweh in his hands. Yahweh was about to remove him shortly, and reserve him for future labours. It was needful that his heart should be thoroughly fortified in God. Nothing would be more likely to have this effect than the display of the terrible power of Yahweh in the control of those mighty forces of nature, in whose presence man feels so powerless.

When the sublime interview was over, Elijah returned to the land of Israel, and attended to the several little matters, about which he had received instructions. We pass over the interesting interval in the absence of those miraculous features of which we are more particularly in search. In a short time, Ahab, having met his death at Ramoth-Gilead, Ahab's son, Ahaziah, succeeding him, fell sick. Anxious about his recovery, he sent messengers to enquire of "Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron." By divine direction, Elijah intercepted these messengers, and rebuking them for

going on such an errand, informed them from Yahweh, the God of Israel, that Ahaziah would not recover from his sickness. The messengers returned with this message to Ahaziah, who despatched a military company to arrest Elijah. Elijah sat on the top of a hill. The captain of the company delivered the king's mandate to Elijah, addressing him as "Thou man of God." Elijah's rejoinder was stern: "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty." And the fire came, as at Carmel, and consumed not the carcass of a bullock, but the living bodies of fifty-one soldiers. A second company sent on a like errand shared a like fate. A third was saved by the reverential attitude of the captain.

Moderns feel a difficulty in understanding or even receiving this matter. The difficulty is in themselves: it does not belong to the subject. The transaction was a divine one. Elijah could not bring fire from heaven. It was God's doing. If so, where is the difficulty? Israel had forsaken Him and abandoned themselves to all the abominations of the heathen—not only abominations of worship, but all the abominations that come in their train. Israel had broken the national covenant of Sinai, under which, death and evil were the penalty. God had sent Elijah to bring them back to their fealty. Instead of surrendering to the evident demonstrations of reason by his hand, they sought his life, and here was a company of men whose express business it was to hand him over to the tender mercies of a Baalite worshipper. Was it out of keeping with such a situation of things that God should show His power in the retributive consumption of the rebels? So far from this, the marvel was that the catastrophe was not extended to multitudes besides, which it doubtless would have been, had not God's further purpose with Israel required the deferring of His anger, as explained by Isaiah (48:9). The Bible represents the divine point of view throughout: adopt this, and all is easy to comprehend. Take up, instead, the human point of view and all is confusion. This is the source of all the difficulty in modern times: man and not God is the ruling factor; by man's feelings and notions, they judge transactions which originate in God's views and purposes. It is not reasonable. Man is a creature. The Bible is not man's book, though it is for him, and his best blessing, when he receives it as a little child. It records God's doings and God's wisdom, for God's purposes, which will all be found to have the most perfect reason at the foundation.