

## External Appearances Deceptive

### The Unchangeability of God's Law as Depicted in the Psalms.

There is nothing by which man can be so easily deceived, ourselves included, if we are not careful, as by outward circumstances.

Very early in the life of the Psalmist this lesson was brought home, for we recall that, upon his anointing as King of Israel by the prophet Samuel, God declared that it was one of His attributes that he sees "not as man seeth, for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart."

Many years later, when time had brought its trials and sorrows, David petitioned God,

"Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth. . . . I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not until I have shown thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to everyone that is to come" (Psalm lxxi. 9, 18).

In the days of evil we are exhorted by the apostle to sing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs, and therefore to this wonderful collection we can go for encouragement. A careful perusal of Psalm lxxiii. will give us that right perspective and correct balance which is so necessary in our walk in the Truth. There the Psalmist reviews his feelings as he saw the wicked rise up on every side, besetting his footsteps and attempting to bring about his downfall. He wondered at the meaning of it all, and was ultimately able to view it in the right light.

Unlike the devout lady, of whom the story is, that when distresses and troubles came upon her she viewed them as God's chastening hand for her good, but when similar difficulties beset her neighbours it was Divine judgment for their wickedness, let us be careful how we view our own experiences. David had a ripe experience of those who are termed wicked. No doubt his faith often weakened under the trial, but at length, goodness and mercy having followed him all the days of his life, he looked back and, despite appearances to the contrary, the things which he describes as too painful for him, he realised for what purposes it all was, for when he went into the sanctuary of God, then he understood their end (v. 17).

The foundation of faith, says the apostle, "is the evidence of things not seen," and amongst many whom he enumerates there comes before us a picture of righteous Abel, of whom it was said "that he being dead yet speaketh." No doubt, in the eyes of many, Abel's life and sacrifice were a failure. His brother Cain, murderer, materialist, and vagabond, went out to build a city and prospered, laying the foundation of the "cities of the nations" from then onwards. The Patriarch Joseph languished in a prison, the prey to the machinations of an evil woman, but God reserved him for greater work with his people Israel. He rose to the eminence of the throne of Egypt. The prophet Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon, and his enemies said of him that "he seeketh not the welfare of this people, but their hurt" — just the contrary to what actually was the case. John the Baptist, whom Jesus said was one of the greatest of the prophets, fell under the chagrin of a woman whose unlawful alliance with Herod he had condemned. Then follows the greatest example of all, whose zeal for His Father's house was paramount, the Master Himself, who went about everywhere doing good, uttering such words as never man before had uttered, yet condemned to hang upon a cross, between two thieves. These are described as 'they whom the Lord heareth,' 'the poor, the prisoner whom He despiseth not, for whom is reserved the possession of Zion and the City of Judah.' (Psalm lxix. 33). The condemnation of error never wins many friends; the witnesses for the Truth are always in the minority; judging by numbers, might would be right, but they who are the true children of God are counted the off-scouring of all things. Great religious systems have always dominated the earth, spreading under their influence a liking to things carnal. (Read *Eureka*, iii. 638-9.) Outwardly appearing to be righteous, they come under the condemnation pronounced by Christ upon the leaders

of His generation, whom He castigated, "graves which appear not, and they that walk over them are not aware of them" (Luke xi. 44). To many with only a superficial insight in the things of the Truth, the many divisions of the Household have been a cause of stumbling. Recently it was reported that one had left an ecclesia with whom we are associated and joined those with whom we have now no fellowship. It is recorded that she "left the Bereans because she saw no cause for separation." Comment is superfluous.

The Psalmist describes the best and most powerful remedy against the strong temptation to envy the prosperity of worldly people. Temptation is undoubtedly excited by seeing wealth and honour in the hands of infidelity, while the faithful servants of God are oppressed and often in poverty. We can understand the cry: —

"O God, how long shall the adversary reproach, shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand; pluck it out of thy bosom, have respect unto the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitation of cruelty. O, let not the oppressed return again, let the poor and needy praise thy name.

" Arise, O God, plead thine own cause, remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. Forget not the voice of thine enemy, the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually" (Psalm lxxiv. 11, 20 and 23).

These are the affectionate expressions of a mind perfectly reposing at ease with assurance upon the loving kindness of God. The wicked say, "How does God know, and is there knowledge with the most High?" (Psalm lxxiii. 11).

To all appearances He does not. The outsider passes off and leaves the matter by saying, God is in heaven—all is well with the world.

There are times in the life of each one when to test our faith we wonder what is going to happen next. On such occasions there comes before the mind the picture of the bewildered and anxious Elijah on Mount Carmel. There is the strong fierce wind which rends the mountain, breaks the rocks and uproots the trees, and drives our bewildered minds in the wild hurry of its restless flight. We struggle and cry out, and seek to stem its blinding force in vain. We scan the whirling dust for the presence of the Divine, but God is not in the wind. There is the earthquake, the terrific cataclysm which overthrows everything in its insatiable greed, and in one hour undoes the work of centuries of labour and devotion—so are our mental castles hurled to destruction, but God is not there.

There is the fire of devouring flame scorching all our hopes, leaving but charred remains of a devastating ruin—but God is not in the fire.

Then out of the silence a still small Voice is heard, a gentle stillness bringing balm to spirits crushed and deafened by the roar of existence.

We all have our sufferings, our anxieties, our bereavements, our despairs. They may buffet like a mighty wind, overwhelm like an earthquake, sear and burn like irresistible fire, but they will spend their strength and pass away. Then will be known the test of endurance and we shall say,

"Thou, O God, which hast brought me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again and bring me up again from the depth of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness and comfort me on every side" (Psalm lxxi. 19-21).

A few words from the pen of our bro. Roberts will help us here:

"This double-sidedness of events," says he, "will be found running through the whole course of scriptural narrative. Considering these things are written for our instruction, the value of this is apparent. It enables us rightly to interpret our experiences if we be of those who

commit our way to God in well doing and constant prayer. It enables us to take suffering from the hand of God even when nothing but human cause is discernible to the natural eye. Successful malice and pitiless disaster are thus deprived of half their sting.

"We can say of the Shimeis: 'Let them alone, God has sent them,' or of prevailing trouble, 'It is of the Lord; it may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction and bring me again to His habitation.' We do not get to this point all at once, but a study of the ways of Providence will bring us to it step by step."

So David the Psalmist looks back: —

"Remember the congregation which thou hast purchased of old, the rod of thine inheritance which thou hast redeemed, the Mount Zion wherein thou dwellest."

"For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."

"I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old." (Psalm lxxiv. 2 and 12; Psalm lxxvii. 11).

God's laws were in force long before the days of David or of Abraham. The heavens and the earth were created by His Spirit, and kept in being by those natural laws which we know so well, and to which David alludes in Psalm lxxiv. 16/17 "The day is thine and the night also is thine, thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth, thou hast made summer and winter." The idea of eternity is beyond our human ken; to think that God always was, is and will be, that so far from any change coming upon Him, not even a shadow can fall upon Him, and we exclaim with Moses:

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm xc. 1-2).

Whilst man is constantly changing—not the same to-day as he was yesterday, or as he will be to-morrow, not the same at night as he was in the morning, something is gone and something is added—Jehovah is the same: He is everlasting and will be to everlasting: His years fail not. This is scarcely conceivable by us, living in time when our days are numbered by recognised barriers, where the day has scarcely dawned before the shadows of evening are upon us, where the things we love and delight in to-day are to-morrow numbered with the things which are gone; but that there is a state of things which is changeless, fixed, immutable, eternal, is a fact upon which hinges the very Truth which we believe, for it is on the immutability of His counsel that "our strong consolation" rests.

"I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6).

He is a Sun always shining in His meridian splendour; there is no rising, nor setting; His eternity defends us from all risk of change. His word, His law, is as sure as His existence.

Because He is Eternal, He is immutable, He is infinitely perfect, Almighty. No enemy shall pluck us out of His hand. These are the things revealed to us for our consolation, because we are in covenant relationship with Him by sacrifice, partakers of the everlasting covenant "ordered in all things and sure."

The words with which Moses closed his blessing of the children of Israel seem to be a fitting conclusion to this subject:

"There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heavens in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms, and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

"Israel then shall dwell in safety alone; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine—  
—(prophetic of that glorious time spoken of in Psalm lxxii.)—

also his heavens shall drop down low.

"Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help and the sword of thy excellency." (Deut. xxxiii. 26-29).

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