

The Mount of God

Exodus 1 - 13.

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I separate these chapters because they present us, I judge, a distinct subject for meditation, and afford us some of the grounds on which it is that Horeb, or Sinai, in Arabia, is called in scripture "the Mount of God."

They open with Israel in Egypt, and that land is seen in her guilt before God, for it is here written of her, "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." That land was thus the ungrateful, the rebellious. She had departed from Joseph, and so from God Himself, from Him who had filled her storehouses with plenty, and her throne with honour and strength. Thus Egypt was in miniature the world — the great apostate from its rightful Lord and gracious Benefactor. And the Lord had no sanctuary, no altar, there. His people would have sacrificed the abomination of that land (Ex. 8: 26), and therefore they must go into the wilderness to hold their feast, or do their service to the Lord. All was apostate and ripe for judgment. Joseph's memory had been despised, and all that remained to Joseph was put to the brick-kilns (Ex. 1).

But in such a place the Lord has a cluster, and in the cluster a blessing. The cluster of Israel in the vineyard of Egypt at this time savoured, it is true, too much of the soil where it grew; for as the one had forgotten Moses, so does the other now refuse Moses, saying, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" But God has His remnant even in such a generation, His blessing in such a cluster (Isa. 65: 8), and it is found in the tribe of Levi, to which this second Joseph (the offered, but rejected, deliverer of his nation) belonged. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

But the name of this child, this predestined deliverer of His people, has its meaning. Pharaoh's daughter, as we know, called him "Moses," because she had "drawn him out" from the waters. But God had His purpose, it appears, in that name also, for it is from henceforth to the end owned by the Spirit of God. He was another Noah. Noah had been "drawn out." An ark had kept him in the waters till the dry land again received him; and that was, as we are divinely taught, a like figure with baptism of death and resurrection (1 Peter 3: 20, 21). And so Moses now. He had been kept in an ark through the waters, that place of death, till he stood again in the place of life, as one that had died and had risen (Ex. 2).

Thus was he mystically the dead and risen man; and he acts, "when he was come to years," in the power of resurrection, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing affliction with the people of God; that is, disclaiming his advantages in the flesh and in the world, and walking by faith, seeing Him who is invisible, and having respect unto the recompense of the reward.

Such an one is he, thus, both in his person and character, ere he goes forth to run his appointed service, whether among strangers or in Israel. Through their present unbelief, rejecting this deliverer, the children of Israel are left for a time longer at the Egyptian brick-kilns. But he whom they thrust from them is accepted in another place, and seated, not at the head of a nation, but of a family, enjoying intimacies and affections sweeter and closer than ever he had known before among his own kindred. A stranger receives him. Jethro, the Midianite, opens his house to him, and gives him his daughter in marriage, because he had been her deliverer, though, in spite of the same grace towards them, Israel had just refused him.

This family of strangers is mystically the church taken from the Gentiles during the Lord's estrangement from Israel, as has been often observed among us, beloved. I do not therefore stop to look at it particularly. But (as we generally know) the blessing is not to be spent on this family of strangers. Israel is had in remembrance still, though they have once refused the deliverer. Accordingly Moses, in due season, is called forth to change the scene of his action again, and bear God's redeeming love and strength back to Israel in Egypt. For He is their only hope and channel of blessing. If in their distress Israel cry to the Lord, the answer must come by the hand of Him whom once they refused. The Lord has no other help for them. From the outcast Joseph alone is the Shepherd and stone of Israel. But He can and will answer. The ears of the Lord of Sabaoth have heard the cry, and Moses is immediately put in readiness to return from Midian into Egypt for the help of Israel.

The burning bush is now the symbol of God's constant care of Israel, though in the furnace of Egypt. It tells Moses how in all their affliction the Lord had been afflicted, and how the angel of His presence had still preserved them. And it is in connection with this mystic bush that Horeb is first called "the Mount of God." For now it is that the Lord is first telling of Himself there. He "who dwelt in the bush" had a "goodwill" towards them, for if the Son of God be in the furnace with His people, it is to preserve them. And this same spot which now thus testified of grace should by-and-by testify of glory to them, as is here said to Moses, "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God on this mountain" (Ex. 3; 4).

Thus was it now between the Lord and Moses at this holy mount. Then by miracle upon miracle, in the sight of Egypt, and with plague upon plague, and fury poured out, this deliverer rescues Israel from under the hand of their taskmasters. It was the day of judgment to Egypt, as afterwards it was to Canaan. For Egypt was the world, as I have said. She had filled up her sins. She had despised the day of grace in Joseph, and now comes the day of judgment by Moses. It is as the wrath of the Lamb coming on those who refuse the blood of the Lamb. Pharaoh said he knew not the Lord, but Pharaoh must know Him (Ex. 5: 2; Ex. 9: 14). If Pharaoh would disown Him in goodness, he must know Him in righteousness, for His judgments were now to be made manifest, and "the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth." As His holy prophet says to Him, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." God would be known in grace; but if that lesson be refused by Egypt, she must know Him in the uplifted hand of power, as she now does, till the strength and flower of her people lie on the banks of the Red Sea (Ex. 5 - 15).

But I desire, in the midst of these scenes which these chapters give us, to look for awhile at the children of Israel between the Paschal night and the banks of the Red Sea.

The blood on the lintels had secured the first-born, and the Egyptian had then allowed Israel to pass out of the land. But the Egyptian himself was not yet destroyed, neither was Israel clearly beyond the borders of the enemy. These results waited till the Red Sea was reached and crossed. And till then they are not at ease, nor have they any song. The Egyptian has gone out after them, and they judge, as it were, that it is nothing but death before and behind. They see the cloud, and they cannot but remember the shelter of the blood, and that they have, in some sense, left Egypt. But in some sense also they judge themselves to be in a worse state than ever. And such often is a stage in the history of a converted soul. There is the quickening, the rising up as out of Egypt, the sudden new direction which the soul takes, with some sense of the value of the blood of Christ. But withal, this quickening, this rising up, does but lead the soul to judge worse of its condition than ever. A new sense of death comes in, guilt by trespasses and sins is apprehended, and no adequate assurance of the completeness of redemption. There is a shutting in between Jesus and God, if I may so speak. The soul can look to Jesus — His blood on the door-post has told of His love, but God has not been so apprehended as to give certainty

and ease of heart. All the virtue of the cross is not known, as all the virtue of the cloud and the rod is not known by Israel here. For the cloud had virtue not only to lead the redeemed, but to overthrow their pursuers. It could change its ground, and stand between the two camps, and while it was light to the one, be darkness to the other; as its companion, the rod could make a passage for the one, and bury the other in the mighty waters.

And so in like manner has the cross its full and double virtue. It rescues the sinner and silences all his accusers. But until those virtues be understood, the soul will be kept as in the interval from the passover to the Red Sea. Let, however, the cloud and the rod fully display themselves — let the cross of Christ publish all its virtue in the ear of faith, then Israel can sing their song, and the believer can say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" God as well as Jesus can then be triumphed in, the whole character of the cross being made known to the soul. The enmities are seen to be all abolished (Eph. 2) - the law to have found its end (Rom. 10) — sin to have paid its wages, and thereupon discharged (Rom. 6) — the great enemy to have been led a captive with all his powers (Col. 2) — death to have been abolished (2 Tim. 1) — and the flesh to have been found out, rebuked, and discharged also (Rom. 7, 8). And as the enemy is thus seen dead on the shore, so the believer sees himself fully rescued accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1) — happy in the adoption and love of God (Rom. 8) — treated as in the Spirit, and not in the flesh (Rom. 8) safe in that hand out of which none can pluck (John 10) — dwelling in that love which leaves no room for fear (1 John 4). Israel has passed the waters.

Thus is it oftentimes still with the soul, as here it is with Israel. Of course the full victory of Jesus for the sinner may be understood at once, for the gospel publishes it without reserve. But till it be, the song is not learnt, the redeemed one is on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea.

But the sea once crossed, Israel understands the cloud and the rod, and Egypt and its enmity are gone for ever. Ere, however, they reach "the Mount of God," where they were to hold their feast, they are to learn the hand that would lead them, as well as the arm that had just saved them. For there is to be a journey from the sea to the mount, as there had been from Egypt to the sea; and on this second journey we would also linger with them a little space (Ex. 15 - 17).

Five distinct lessons are taught the people on this journey, the value of each of which the soul of the saint still also enters into. The song has already instructed them in the Lord's victory, and that song should be kept alive in their hearts all through, whatever other lesson they might learn, for that was a deathless victory, and the fruit of it they were gathering every step of the way. But after it we get the healing of Marah, the wells and palm-trees of Elim, the manna, the water from the rock, the discomfiture of Amalek. These five distinct actions, displaying the Lord's varied grace and power, pass before us in this interval from the Red Sea to "the Mount of God." And each of them tells us of His care for His congregation in the wilderness. The healing of the waters of Marah by the tree tells us of the consolations which are provided to meet the sorrows of this evil world. Paul gathered of that tree, when he could say, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." The wells and palm-trees tell us of the occasional refreshings which the saint gets through communion and ministry. The camp passed them, and saw them no more, after taking, as it were, one repast of them. So the apostle could sit down at them for awhile, when comforted by the mutual faith of himself and others. The manna, in its turn, tells us of blessing also. It speaks of Jesus, the bread of life. Unlike the provision of Elim, it remained. It waited, morning and evening, for forty years on the camp, and fed them till they reached the land of corn and oil — as the true bread which the Father gives can feed us, let the place of the desert be what or where it may. The water from the rock tells us in due order of the Holy Ghost, the abiding Comforter. Unlike the wells of Elim also, this water follows through all the way, as the Giver of the true water says, "that he may abide with you for ever." And, lastly, the overthrow of Amalek tells of the strength of the right

hand of the Lord over that which would dare to withstand the way of that ransomed people over whom the Lord of the glory was hovering.*

*When the people murmur for water, Moses knows not what to do (Ex. 17). But when Jesus stands in the same connection with the poor sinner of Samaria, without delay or any sense of difficulty, He undertakes to give her water (John 4). For He was (and knew Himself to be) that rock which Moses saw, and which was ready still with its living streams to wait on the thirst of every poor sinner along the paths of this wilderness world. But what infinite distance personally does this show between Jesus and Moses! Moses was indeed but the servant, Jesus the Lord of that living rock.

Thus they learn the sufficiency of God's grace and strength for their necessity. He has the bread and the water for them, the healing tree, and, the palms of Elim, though the place be desert and dry, and victory for them when the enemy appears.

And here let me say that the Lord acquires His holy honours by all those acts and mercies which He accomplishes for His poor people. Thus His memorials are engraved on our blessings. Wonderful grace and perfection of goodness this is, that God should be celebrated by and in that which blesses us! He got the title of "Jehovah-jireh," because He graciously provided a ram in the place of Isaac; He was celebrated as "a man of war," because He got the victory for His people in the Red Sea; He was "Jehovah-rophi," because He healed the bitter waters for the camp; He was "Jehovah-nissi," because He was their banner against the face of Amalek. And so I might show still farther. But this is enough to tell us how the Lord makes himself a name, as Jeremiah says (Jer. 32: 20), by doing for us, and acquires (such is His grace) His own praise and honour by that which secures His people their blessing. The victory of Christ was over our enemies. If we believe His victory, we must believe our own salvation. To question our blessing is to refuse Him His praise. And it is a blessed economy of goodness that thus weaves the two inseparably together.

But the last of these lessons has large instruction in it, and I would look at it a little more particularly. Amalek was the grandson of Esau, and Esau, as we know, was the profane one — the man of the world. And Amalek appears before us in this place as one in that long line of wilful ones who run their course across the face of the earth, "mighty hunters before the Lord," or defiers and rivals of God Himself. At this moment the glory was seen over Israel and the rock was following them with its streams. But what was all this to Amalek? What did he care for the glory? Such as Isaiah or Daniel might learn their own vileness from it, and Peter in its presence might know himself to be a sinful man, but the glory had no lesson of holy fear for such as Amalek. He comes out the rather to measure strength with it. He is as the one who by-and-by will dare to plant his idols on the battlements of the holy city, and his tabernacles on the glorious holy mountain. What is the glory to such as these? "Our tongues are our own," say they. Their standards may rival the Lord's pillar. But the hand that holds them shall wither, as Amalek here falls, and as the last of the race shall hereafter fall (Dan. 11), with none to help him.

This may be fearful, and it is so; but it ends the trial and discipline of Israel. As in that future day also, when the last Amalek falls, Michael will stand up, and every one found written in the book shall be delivered, so here the discomfiture of this enemy makes full and easy way for Israel to "the Mount of God." That place, out to which they had been called from Egypt, under promise that there they should serve the Lord, and hold their feast to Him, is now reached, their toil and discipline and danger all over.

And this long promised and now attained mountain is again called "the Mount of God." The first time Moses is seen there, the burning bush, as we then saw, told him of grace; but now there is to be

something to tell him of glory. Then he saw the pledge of redemption, now he is to see the pledge of the kingdom (Ex. 18).

Zipporah and her children had been sent home to her father's house; and, as far we can judge, immediately after the circumcision of the child (Ex. 4), and naturally so. For there was something in that action that was not according to the mind of a Gentile wife. But Moses, when returning in connection with Israel, should have owned the circumcision of the God of Abraham. Coming back to his kindred in the flesh, he should have remembered the legislative national token in the flesh. The reproach of Midian should have been put away then, as the reproach of Egypt was afterwards (Joshua 5). But Zipporah, who had no fleshly kindredness with Israel, could not have been prepared for this, and therefore with her the Lord had no controversy. It was Moses or his child, and not Zipporah, whom the Lord would have slain at the inn, according to the ordinance (Gen. 17: 14). And his life being forfeited to that ordinance, it was grace that spared him. And it is altogether likely that it was just at that moment Zipporah was sent home. The Spirit, however, has left it without certainty. And justly so, as I judge, because her departure home to Midian is typically the hiding of the Gentile, or heavenly family, in the Father's house, till the Lord, the true Moses, conducts those judgments on this Egypt-world, which are to issue in the deliverance of His earthly people and the kingdom.

But Egypt being judged, Israel redeemed, disciplined, and led to the borders of the mount, the due time had come for the reappearance of Zipporah, the Gentile wife. She is now manifested, led out by the hand of her father, for reunion with Moses at "the Mount of God," when all the action of judgment and redemption was now gloriously and fully accomplished.

The scene here is thus strikingly beautiful and significant. We have here (as another has justly called him) "the mysterious Kenite," for Jethro is a type or mystery, a sign of that which is especially the mystery. He here meets the redeemed heirs of earthly blessing till now a stranger to them. He comes from regions unknown to Israel. But when they meet there is no want of full companionship. A common hand seems to have led them towards each other. The deeds of the Lord, His famous deeds for Israel, are rehearsed, when Jethro and Moses had kissed each other, and the family affection had taken its course. The strangers congratulate the earthly tribes on their recent rescue and prosperous journey to "the Mount of God," and now the union of the great deliverer of Israel, with this distant unknown family was made manifest. Hitherto this had been a hidden union. But now the wife and the children, led forth by the father, appear in the presence of his fleshly kindred, and take a place nearer to Moses, the great centre of the whole scene, than any of them.

The stranger likewise soon takes the highest dignities, as well as fills the place of nearest affection. He occupies, as it were, both the throne and the temple, giving direction to the lawgiver, and offering sacrifice in the presence of the priest. The last is first — the younger before the elder — the stranger in higher honour than the kindred.

But what is all this but in figure the dispensation of the fulness of times, the gathering together in one of all things in heaven and in earth? What is it less than the raising of the ladder between heaven and earth? Do we not here listen to the intercourse of the priestly stranger with redeemed Israel, rejoicing in their blessing, but holding still the place of holiness and honour? Jethro assumes the place of Melchizedek. In no less glories than those of king and priest together does he here shine before us. He offers the sacrifices and spreads the feast for Aaron, and sits as chief in the seat of judgment with Moses. And when he had thus displayed his glories, rejoiced in the prosperity of God's chosen, and led their praise for the mercy, "he went his way." As was said of the God of Abraham before, "and the Lord went his way as soon as he had done communing with Abraham" (Gen. 18). So now Jethro,

having rejoiced with Israel and displayed his glories, goes his way. For both were as strangers in the earth, and a distant way led them to their proper home.

Thus we have great things in this chapter, The opening of it shows us the heavenly One descending, and the close of it show us His return or ascending in figure, as the angels of God once ascended and descended on the mystic ladder, and will again upon the Son of man. And it shows us also in figure all things in heaven and earth gathered in that one who has connection with the two great households, though in different ways, while they themselves were unknown to each other till now. All this tells indeed of the dispensation of the fulness of times (Eph. 1: 10). This mount, where all this is seen, is now again called "the Mount of God," as being in this manner the place of glory, as before when it was called "the Mount of God," it was as strikingly the place of grace, or the burning bush. It well deserves the praise. It surely is the mystic holy ground where the trees of the blessed God are thus to be seen, and where we learn those ways of His, that establish the heart both in faith and hope.

This intercourse between the heavenly and earthly families having one great centre, as it will be enjoyed in the coming kingdom, so has it been typified in many past shadows. The ladder which Jacob saw, and to which I have alluded, gave it in figure to us. The passing and re-passing of Moses from the cloudy tabernacle to the camp of the congregation (Ex. 33), was another expression of this intercourse between the place of the glory and the earth. The vision on the mount of transfiguration, where the glorified family were seen, and also the representative of Israel, gives us another pledge of it. The interviews between the risen Lord and His disciples, still in their earthly places, is a like figure: for then at seasons He showed Himself to them, but His place was more duly in heaven, His word being "touch me not," though at times He would eat and drink with them as before. So, the notice that is taken of the ascent, by which Solomon went up to the house of the Lord, and which was one of the principal objects that rested on the vision, and filled the spirit of the queen of Sheba, is another intimation of the same (2 Chr. 9); for it looked somewhat above, and apart from, the mere earthly places, to which the sitting of the servants, the furniture of the tables, and all the royal magnificence and fulness pertained, and would probably have drawn her thoughts upwards. And so this our closing chapter shows the same. Here is the ladder again, the communion of the heavens with the earth in the days of glory. Moses's estrangement from Israel for a season, his secrecy among the Gentiles with his father, his wife, and his children there, then his return to Israel, and their redemption and discipline under his hand, the overthrow of the great enemy who dared to affront the glory of the Lord, and finally, the place of peace, "the Mount of God," where the strangers and Israel (both, though differently, having found their union with Moses the common deliverer) meet for the first time to rejoice together, while the stranger fills the nearer intimacies and the higher dignities: all these tell out the mystic tale of the heavens and the earth in the coming kingdom or fulness of times. The union of the bride and the bridegroom, which before had been hidden, is now published, and the Gentile stands nearer to Moses than all his kindred in the flesh.

There is a voice in all this, beloved, that we cannot but hear. For thus will it be in the kingdom, surely. Is not all that is royal and glorious to be on the earth then, with the ascent to heaven from Jerusalem? Is not the true ladder to be there, and the ministers of the kingdom passing and re-passing upon it? Is not the glory then to be a covering on the dwelling-places and assemblies of Zion? "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad." Tales of mercy and salvation will then be rehearsed, as here; and the church will learn the joy of Israel's deliverance, though they never knew each other before, for the church's path had been heavenly, and Israel's earthly, and thus they lay not in the same regions at all. But then they will find that all the while they have had a common centre in the true Moses, the true Bridegroom of the true heavenly stranger, the true deliverer and leader of the tribes of Israel. And then

as Jethro here spreads the refreshments and gives the blessing, so the golden city, the city of the heavenly strangers, will pour forth its light and its waters, the effulgence of its glories and the streams of its fountains, to gladden and refresh the earth, and Israel with her attendant nations shall be blest in the millennial kingdom of the Son of man.

The next chapter (Ex. 19) introduces us to other scenes and thoughts altogether, so as to allow us to look at this scripture (Ex. 1 - 18) by itself. And it is, as it were, one of the title deeds of Horeb to the holy dignity which it bears. It shows us why it should be called "the Mount of God." For grace and glory, as we have now seen, both display themselves there, and they belong to God. The next scenes are still, however at the same meant, and they will give us to read again, though in other lines (the Lord giving us grace and His blessing), the title of that mount to bear the same holy inscription upon it. And if we still linger upon it, beloved, may our souls get some little increased strength to rise above the level of this corrupted earth, and all its low ambitions and vanities.

Exodus 19 - 40.

I have already looked at Horeb, "the Mount of God," as the witness of grace and glory, or of redemption and the kingdom, being the spot where the Lord of Israel first showed Himself in the burning bush, the symbol of grace or salvation, and afterwards displayed the glories and joys of the kingdom in the intercourse of Jethro with the ransomed tribes of Israel.

But though all this has passed, the congregation are still in the same place; and the place, as we shall now see, is still giving us to read its title to be called "the Mount of God."

In the opening of our present chapters we reach the third month since the exodus. A new era is thus noticed by the Spirit, and accordingly new scenes and new thoughts will be found to unfold themselves. The heart of the people is here called into exercise. Moses the mediator passes and repasses between them and the Lord; and all this tests the mind that was in them, and ends in proving the security of the natural man, and his confidence in himself to do all that the Lord shall command (Ex. 19).

But this their way was their folly. They had been brought out of Egypt by Him who dwelt in the bush, "the God of grace," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the same hand had led them through the desert up to the mount where "the God of glory," had in figure shown His kingdom and joy to them. But now, as soon as the Lord, having thus shown, what He was, turns, as it were, to inquire what they were, and whether they would now trust in themselves rather than in Him, the ground of the heart is discovered. Man is found to be selfconfident and boastful, ready to enter upon terms with God, rather than be simply debtor to Him for grace and glory.

Accordingly this mount, where all so lately was the peace and honour of the kingdom in the presence of Jethro, now on the departure of that mysterious stranger becomes the fiery mount. It puts on new attributes altogether. It is preparing itself to consume the sinner, a mount of blackness and darkness and tempest, where the voice of God is heard in righteousness, where the ten words (or the covenant of the law of works), putting man to the trial which he had too confidently submitted to, are now to be published.

But what will such trial end in? It must leave all their comeliness as rottenness. The burning mount of the law here gives them at once to know the terribleness of that righteousness which they had challenged, and they can but cry out in the fear of it (Ex. 20).

This, however, so far was as it should be. This cry of fear was the proper seasonable fruit of the

ground on which Israel now stood, as the Lord Himself afterwards says (Deut. 5; 18). And according to this fear they stand afar off. But the mediator draws near to the thick darkness where God was, and there, as between the Lord of Israel and His people, he receives the statutes of the kingdom which were to make Israel the Lord's nation — a separated people, who were to have the Lord for their God and King, bearing His image and superscription upon them. And he is promised also an angel to go before him, presiding, as it were, over this covenant of the nation, in whom the name of the Lord of Israel was to be; so that if they obeyed Him they should be blest, but, if they refused, He would not pardon their transgressions (Ex. 21 - 23).*

*This was the angel of that conditional covenant which was now established. Therefore while he would make good all God's promises to the people on the one hand, he would on the other punish the transgressions of the people against God. Accordingly we see him afterwards appearing at Bochim, there to avenge upon them the quarrel of this covenant (Judges 2: 1).

The mediator having thus received the book of the statutes of the realm, and the promise of the angel of the covenant, the covenant itself is solemnly sealed. It is dedicated with blood (Heb. 9: 18, 19). The altar and the twelve pillars are raised, and the altar is sprinkled. Then the book of the covenant is read; and, on the people undertaking obedience, they are sprinkled likewise. Thus Jehovah and Israel are joined in the conditional covenant, the blessing of which rested on their allegiance; and the representatives of the nation are called up to eat and drink in the presence of the God of Israel. For all as yet is reconciliation, the blood of the covenant being upon them, and no trespass as yet committed. It was the sight of "the God of Israel" they now get. They may look unhurt and unalarmed. There is no danger of gazing here, as there had been when the law of the ten words was delivered (Ex. 19: 21). It may last but for a short moment, but this is a sample of that day when the God of Jeshurun shall be known as riding on the heavens for Israel's help, and in His excellency on the sky (Deut. 33); when the King shall be seen in His beauty, when Zion shall be a quiet habitation, a city of solemnities, and the glorious Lord shall be there, Lawgiver, Judge, and King (Isa. 33). The glory did not make them afraid, the hand of such an one was not heavy upon them. There He was in all His honour, but they could eat and drink before Him (Ex. 24).

Thus the covenant in which the nation was now to stand is settled, the parties to it bound, and the whole avouched and concluded. Moses is then called to take up another position. And this is done with due solemnity also. His minister, Joshua, accompanies him a certain stage, but he goes upwards to the mount where the Lord was. The glory was still there, as devouring fire in the eyes of the children of Israel, but the cloud covers it for six days. Then on the seventh (expressive, it may be, of the rest into which Moses was now about to be conducted, beyond all the terror of the fiery mount), the voice of the Lord out of the cloud calls him, and Moses goes up into the midst of it, and gets him into the mount. Hitherto he had been either on a level with the people, while the ten commandments, the moral law, was delivered, or a little separated from them as the mediator of the nation, while the statutes of the realm were published. But now he enters into further intimacies with the Lord. He is called to the top of the hill, beyond the region of darkness and thunder altogether. The heads of the nation are left in the camp, the vision of the God of Israel is folded up, and he is called to the very midst of the cloud, where the Lord was dwelling and shining.

But he is not long there before we learn the secrets of that holy place, and how it was that he got there, and in what that virtue lay which could enable him to pass, as it were, all the devouring fire unharmed. He is there in company with Christ. That is the secret. The shadows of good things to come there pass before him, and one by one tell out the glorious truth — that God can be a just God, and yet a Saviour — that He can conduct a sinner safely up the fiery mount, without the smell of it passing on

him. For Christ is the end of the law to every one that believeth. God's claims in righteousness are all answered in the person and obedience of Jesus. The brazen altar, with all that intervened from that to the mercy-seat itself in the holiest, is shown, he re to Moses. All pass in review before him. And the minister of the sanctuary, in his mystic garments, is shown, to him also. And thus he learns Christ in His fulness; and, learning this, he learnt how he could stand in such peaceful communion with God beyond the summit of the fiery mount. He saw in Him that mercy could rejoice against judgment; that provision was made in Him, and by, Him, for the discharge of sin, for the magnifying of the law, for the acceptance of the sinner, and for the letting out the full flow of the boundless and unmingled goodness to save and to bless us (Ex. 25 - 31).

All this, however, was to Moses only. The people were still within view of the mount as a mount of devouring fire (Ex. 24: 17). And they speedily show themselves to be material fit for such fire, vessels fitted to destruction, incurring the vengeance of that holy place, by refusing the very first voice that had issued from it. For instead of having none other gods than the Lord who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, they take a golden calf, which their own hands had made, to be their god. This was entire forfeiture of all blessing under that covenant; and in token of that, Moses, on returning down the hill, breaks the tables of the law to pieces, and never puts them into their hands to keep and to do them (Ex. 32).

This was a great moment for the discovery of what man was. O how differently the path of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had ended, the God of grace and salvation, who dwelt in the bush! He had led them forth in entire safety out of Egypt, the place of the taskmasters. Not a dog had wagged its tail against them, not a hoof was left behind, not a feeble person was among their tribes; all harnessed and full-handed they had gone forth; and He never left them, as we saw just now in our previous paper, never forsook them through the drougthy desert, till He had planted them in the joy and glory of "the Mount of God." But they then trusted in themselves and took their own way; and all now is closed and disaster and ruin, the very pledges of their covenant, the ground of their confidence, being shattered to pieces. This was sad and shameful indeed. But while we thus mark their sin, we are called to see their repentance also. They mourn on hearing the word and anger of the Lord. They put off their ornaments. They go outside the camp, as conscious that the place of convicted sinners or unclean lepers became them. They watch the ways of the mediator, and stand adoring. And, may I not add, that they feel unable to stand before the bright light of righteousness, so that Moses has to veil his face? (Ex. 33, 34)

All this was repentance, the way of poor convicted, self-condemned sinners. And while they are thus, the Lord is preparing something blessedly suited to them. He makes known to them His secret. Moses delivers the patterns of heavenly things to them. And all that they have to do for their full comfort is to follow by faith this unfolding of God's counsels concerning them. They have only to do according to the patterns, and they shall soon read their title to unmixed blessing. Just like Noah. He had only to build an ark according to God's command, and he should soon find he was building something for his own safety. Obedience was his blessing. And so here. They have but to render the obedience of faith by just giving forms and substances to the patterns as Moses commands, and then they will see in the sanctuary a refuge and relief for guilty sinners destroyed by the thunders of Sinai, as they now were.

And so they do. Blessedly are they here seen rendering the obedience of faith and of a changed mind. They do all for the tabernacle, as Moses commands, and that too with willing hearts, so that he has to restrain their zeal and devotedness. And with all this willingness, there was no wilfulness, for they are careful to follow the patterns in all things that all may be according to God's purpose, though

rendered willingly by them.

All this was further proof of repentance. I do not know that in any period of their history we see them in a healthier, happier, condition of soul than now during their making of the tabernacle. The materials were supplied by the willing offerings of the people, and the silver half-shekels which they had paid as atonement-money. These materials were then fashioned by workmen divinely skilled, according to patterns divinely exhibited. And when all was finished, they brought it to Moses; and Moses had but to say of it, that it was good, all according to God, and to bless them. Judgment they reaped before (Ex. 32: 28), but now blessing (Ex. 39: 43). Then after all had been finished for the sanctuary in this obedience of faith, the mediator presents the whole in due form to God, compacted, as it were, and fitly framed together; and then the Lord has only to crown and quicken it all with His presence. The cloud rests on it, and the glory enters into it (Ex. 35 - 40).

And other fruit of repentance continues to be produced, while they remain round "the Mount of God." Thus their waiting on the consecration of Aaron (Lev. 8, 9), their clearing of themselves of the blasphemer (Lev. 24), their dedication of the altar (Num. 7), their surrender of their brethren, the Levites, to the service of the house of God (Lev. 8), their keeping of the passover (Lev. 9), and, finally, their quitting of the mount in holy order, the light and approval of the Lord resting in full satisfaction upon them (Lev. 10): all this evidences their state of faith and obedience. And there is no public trespass committed from the day of the golden calf till they leave Horeb. They maintain their place and allegiance all through, and finally move onward to the land of promise under the unfurled banner of the Lord God of Israel.

Thus it is indeed that the Lord now meets them; not as obedient servants, but as pardoned sinners. As debtors to obedience under the burning mount, they did not stand for a moment; but in His own grace the Lord provides a sanctuary of salvation for them, and there they rejoice as pardoned sinners, debtors to mercy. And how truly blessed their new standing is! They come into vision of things altogether differing from the fire on the hill. The form of something that Moses himself had seen, in regions far higher than that of the lightning and thunder, now fills their vision also. They now get into his secret. If he then stood in peace beyond all the reach and terror of the law, so may they now. Christ in His fulness and grace, and not the law in its judgments, was here. Here was an altar shown to them that could attract the fire from the mount, and let it spend itself on the victim that was there, and not on the people around. Here was provision in God Himself for all the mischief which man had wrought, and all the penalty he had incurred. Mercy was here heard to rejoice over judgment.

This is what "the Mount of God" now tells us; and thus telling of God Himself and His ways, it shows us again its title to be honoured with such a name. Here God first showed Himself in the burnings and thunders of this mount, to tell us of the terribleness of righteousness; but then bore He showed Himself also in the shadowy tabernacle pitched at the foot of it, to tell us of His provision in Jesus to let mercy rejoice over judgment. And thus

He is still declared here. His name is still written on this holy hill, the name of the just God, and yet the Saviour. The tables of testimony, as we find here (see also Deut. 10: 1-5), are now laid up in the ark, that is, magnified and made honourable in the person of the Lord of the temple, while sinners who come up to worship see only provision for their sins in the various furniture of the sanctuary. And if sinners now (as the tribes might have read their names on the priest's breast-place) will by faith only see themselves borne on the heart of Jesus before God, they may know at the same time, to the full repose of their consciences, that the law is there before them. "As he says, "thy law is within my heart." So that the sinner's blessing and salvation is thus kept in closest intimacy and company with God's

fullest praise and honour in righteousness. The sinner is borne on that heart in which God's law has been kept and treasured up. These tales of redeeming grace, which are here told out at this mystic mount, are indeed wonderful, beloved. The glory now changes its place. It had seated itself, as we have seen, like devouring fire on the top of the hill (Ex. 24: 17), but now it comes down to fill the tabernacle that was pitched at the foot of it. In its first place it was death to approach it. If so much as a beast did then but touch the border of it, it was to be stoned or thrust through. But now it is life to come up to it. If a poor trembling sinner now do but touch the hem of it, she shall be made whole.

And we may well know the readiness with which the glory thus changes its place. It was its own delight to do so. As our hymn says, beloved, "'Tis His great delight to bless us — O how He loves!" To quit the fiery mount, and seat itself in the sanctuary; to put the place of judgment behind it, and to fill the place of grace; this was its happy path. As afterwards, when it came to occupy the house which Solomon built for it, it took its throne there with full complacency. "Arise into thy resting-place," said Solomon. "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it," answered the Lord. It was the good pleasure, the desire of the glory, to fill the place. And so when it does come down actually (as we see here, and also in 2 Chronicles 5), it spreads itself, if I may so speak; it stretches itself out as though it felt itself at home. The holy and most holy places are filled, and its train so flows forth into the courts, that neither Moses now, nor the priests then, could stand to minister.

But what comfort this is to the poor sinner, that the Lord delights to take those paths which thus bring Him into the midst of His people in grace and with blessing; They are not strange or uneasy to Him. And what have we sinners to do, but to let the blessed Lord take His own way of grace with us? It is true that we have, like Israel, with our golden calves, sinned away all right to blessing. But it is as true that the Lord has spread out before us His golden sanctuary, furnished with its altars, its laver, and its mercy-seat, to tell us of His abounding grace, and Christ's victory for sinners. I learn salvation in Jesus from that same word which tells me I have destroyed myself. And there is not a thing in God's sanctuary that does not tell of mercy through Jesus. No trace, no voice, of judgment or of death, is there. And we have to shout, like Israel, at the door of this sanctuary (Lev. 9: 24). And this is faith. Love may bring services afterwards to testify obedience, but faith first tells God of His goodness. The glory has taken its path from the fiery top of the hill to the mercy-seat in the sanctuary; and we have only by faith to follow it — to follow it as simply as it has moved willingly, and thus to meet our God, not in the fires of judgment, but in the dwellings of love and peace.

This we get here in these chapters, and thus read, though in other lines, the title of this mount to be called "the Mount of God." For here God is thus still revealing Himself. Grace and glory has passed before us on this hill in the previous chapters, as we saw — grace in the burning bush, and glory in the assembly of the strangers and Israel. Judgment, and mercy rejoicing over it, have now in their turn passed also before us at the same place — judgment in the fire at the top of the hill, mercy in the tabernacle at the foot of it. And thus the Lord, in these ways and at this place, makes Himself known to us, and Horeb is indeed "the Mount of God."

Thus I have with desire surveyed this holy hill. But I cannot finally leave it till I have another little meditation at the foot of it.

All that we have seen is REVELATION of God. This hill is the place for God's showing Himself. Now our obedience to revelation is faith. If God reveal Himself, faith is man's obedient response. And on faith I would now in closing say a little.

There is a peculiar character of excellence in faith, and no wonder the scripture so much speaks of it. It glorifies God above everything, just because it takes God's account of Himself, and lets Him do

His pleasure — "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." Adam ought to have been a believer, for God to him was a revealer. God had revealed Himself in a warning, and Adam should have had faith. But Adam failed in that; and through unbelief, or making God a liar, he sinned and fell.

We now, in like manner, are called to have faith in God, for God has revealed Himself to us also — in another way, it is true. But still God is a revealer of Himself to us sinners now, and we have now to render the obedience of faith. And "without faith it is impossible to please him." Just as with Adam: all his joy in the garden was as worship. If Adam delighted in the flavour of its fruit, the scent of its flowers, or the singing of the birds there, all might be counted as worship. But Adam should have believed also, and his faith would have been the highest act of worship. For the heart would have rendered its service to God by faith or confidence in His word, while the eye and the ear and other senses would have been exercising themselves in the garden of God as in the holy places of a temple,

Thus Adam was called to faith, and faith would have been his best service and worship. Sin having entered does not at all change this. Faith still renders the best service, and performs the highest acts of worship. Only we sinners have other objects proposed to faith than untainted Adam had. Necessarily so. One threat of death was revealed to him. [Not life only but] union with the Christ of God, and all its consequent glory and joy, is made known to us. Our circumstances give opportunity of returning to God larger service and worship, through faith, than Adam's did. If faith gives to God His highest glory from the creature, we, by our circumstances as sinners, being called to larger exercise of faith, have competency to yield larger praise. There is more, much more, in our condition than there was in Adam's to exercise faith. Sin and its necessities and sorrows have induced this. This world is the very place for the largest possible exercise of faith in the blessed God: and if we indeed desired God's praise, we should rejoice in such opportunities of giving Him the worship and honour of faith.

And such an one in this world of ours was Jesus. Without sin, He was made sin. He came into this world of sinners. And how did He carry Himself here? "I have put my trust in him," says He. All through He was rendering to God the obedience and worship of faith. He trusted Him, and trusted in Him. He believed and was confident. Nothing weakened or disturbed His cleaving by faith to the living God. He had laid hold on Him, and nothing slacked His hand. With all against Him, He trusted in God. This was glorifying God beyond all glory that God had ever received. The life of faith which the Man Christ Jesus led in this world was constant worship of the highest order. Angels could never have so glorified Him, or rendered such worship. But that was worship and praise indeed which was brought by the faith of this "wondrous man," in scenes which our fallen world alone could have afforded. For "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It deals with such things as are neither enjoyed nor visible. And it is our circumstances in this world that admit of such most abundantly. Adam has present things to which he might give himself, and through the joy of which he might glorify God, and only one warning or threat revealed to his faith. Angels, too, have their full visible present delights. But the saint is in a world where all that is present is more or less astray from God, and against Him, so that he must go forth from them by faith towards things hoped for and unseen. This calls faith into the most varied and constant exercise, and this makes the saint a competent worshipper of God in the highest order of worship. And Jesus valued this opportunity of worshipping Him, for He loved God perfectly. He waited in such a temple continually. But we (with sorrow may we learn to say it!) want a heart to value God and His praise.

But while we thus look at the principle of faith, grieving that we know it so poorly, we may also look at the object of faith, and there we shall find abundant cause for joy. For God is good,. unspeakably good. God is love. His delight is in mercy, and accordingly that which He reveals to our hearts, or that which He proposes as the great object of faith in this fallen world, is salvation. He offers

this to our faith, that our hearts may at once rejoice before Him. The apostle says, "we have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle:" a strong testimony to God's salvation, or the object of the sinner's faith. The servants or worshippers in the tabernacle were not made perfect in the conscience. The very place bore witness that the way to God was not then made manifest; and the sacrifices, with which the worshippers dealt continually, kept their sins in remembrance (Heb. 9; 10). For such sacrifices could never dispose of sin. There was no such blood in them as could ever, let it be applied again and again, take it away. But now the saint has a purged conscience, because on his altar he sees blood which has obtained eternal redemption. His altar witnesses remission, and not remembrance of sins.

This is the mighty distance between them. This keeps the worshippers in the tabernacle and the attendants on the New Testament altar, as the apostle tells us, asunder. The one cannot stand in company with the other. To understand the virtue of the altar is of necessity to quit the tabernacle. Assurance of heart in the remission of sins, or a purged conscience, is the due attribute of him who waits on the one, constant sense of sin the due condition of him who serves or worships (λατρεύοντες, Heb. 13: 10) in the other. And this being so, what offering is that which the worshipper at the altar brings? Having apprehended the virtue of the blood there, what sacrifice does he in return pay? The answer comes, "by him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually." (ver. 15). Praise is the due fruit of a heart that has learnt salvation, or the value of the altar — not prayer, but praise. A sinner has not prayer to make, but praise to render. A saint has many and many a prayer, it is true; daily weakness and short-coming and necessity lead him that way. But a sinner in prayer denies the value of the altar. Praise suits salvation, and it is as God the Saviour that our altar reveals God to faith.

And what has faith to do but to let the blessed God take His own way, and show Himself in His goodness and glory? The heart that believes is silent before Him while He passes by. He is pleased by this altar which He has raised and revealed to provide for sinners; and who are we that we should stay His hand or narrow the flow of His rich mercies? Let Him do His pleasure: He is the Lord. If the gospel propose to let us sinners see Him in the exercise of unspeakable goodness, it is the duty of the sinner just to look at Him; it is the way of faith to do nothing else. Faith thus in filthy Joshua allowed change of raiment without a question. He never broke silence, but just accepted the blessing and the glory (Zech. 3). Faith in the convicted adulteress was silent while Jesus passed by in the still small voice, writing the memorial of her shame as on a sandy floor, which the next breeze would efface for ever (John 8). Faith in the camp of Israel, as we have now seen, after they had now sinned away all their blessings by the golden calf, followed the patterns which were, one after another, unfolding the pledges of God's salvation in the golden sanctuary (Ex. 35 - 40). All this was faith, which ever lets the Lord take His own way with the sinner, taking His own blessed revelation of Himself without a question, and thus honouring Him above everything, allowing that He has a right to bless even sinners if He please, and us ourselves as well as other sinners.

And this was the voice of the basket of first-fruits (see Deut. 26). On the nation being settled in the land, they were to fill a basket with the various fruits thereof, and offer it before God's altar; acknowledging at the same time that all His promises had been made good, that He had accomplished all the goodness and mercy of which He had spoken to them, of which this mystic basket was now the witness and sample. And then they were to rejoice before the Lord their God, the nation thus simply owning all He had done for them, and all that He had been to them, and that they, poor perishing Syrians in themselves, could indeed rejoice in Him.

And this is just the pattern of a perishing sinner's faith, be he Syrian, Greek, or Jew. We have to

lay out our baskets before the Lord. This is faith. Conscience may confess sins that we have done; love may bring services and obedience: but faith tells what God is, and what He has done, in a rich and varied and overflowing witness. Liberty of conscience, joy in God, assurance and ease of heart, hope, largeness of desire, with other exercises suited to a soul consciously brought home to God, these should be the holy fruit to fill our baskets before the Lord. Affections, such as our altar may well awaken, should fill the heart and run over; affections that become pardoned sinners, the due fruit of that land to which the Saviour brings us. This is our "first love," our basket of first-fruits. Ephesus lost it. The fruit in the basket there had withered a little. For let come what other sacrifices may into God's house, this first offering should be always there in its freshness. Faith should always rejoice in what God has done, that thus the first love may be ever young and lively.

But this is far from being the way of the natural heart of man. His mind is not of this order. He clings to the law. Grace is too great and generous a thought for Him. Work, rather than faith, is his master-principle. And this separates between his mind and God's mind. And this principle in man shows itself at times in God's choicest servants. For it is of the flesh, which is in us all. Look at David in 1 Chronicles 17. He thought to do something for the Lord. But in that he wronged God. He did not think so, or mean so, but so it was; by that he was wronging God's love. For shall David be before the Lord in kindness? Shall David be better than God? Will David think of building God a house before the Lord has built him a house? That must not be. God will be God in His love as in everything. He will be better as well as greater than we. And therefore that very night, as though He could not rest under such a thing, the Lord tells Nathan to go and stop this purpose of David's heart. God's love had been wronged by it. The Lord would build him a house first, and then David or his son (in this sense the same) might build the Lord a house. And when David hears this through Nathan, the whole temper and current of his soul is changed. He at once sits before the Lord as a receiver, and does not act for the Lord as a giver. He does not talk any more of building a house for God, but rejoices in the thought of the Lord building a house for him. He leaves Martha's place, and takes Mary's more excellent place (Luke 10: 38).

And this was faith again — faith that ever allows God to take His way and show Himself. What right has man to stop the way of the Lord? Shall he say to the Lord, when the Lord rises to unseal the sources of the river of life, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther"? If goodness will glorify itself, shall unbelief dare to dim it? Who shall close the hand of the Lord of the vineyard, if He be pleased to give the penny? If they talk of law, is it not lawful for Him to do what He will with His own? God is the Lord of the well of life, and may He not turn its streams, if He please, to water the dreariest lands? He owns the springs themselves; and therefore let His rights as such owner be tried and weighed and tried even in the balances of law, and it will be found that it is lawful for Him to use them as He may — He has a right to bless sinners if it please Him.

Faith simply gives Him His rights, and allows the lawfulness of God acting in grace to us; yea, even to ourselves, as well as to other sinners like us. For the less is blessed of the better; and as God justly claims for Himself the place of the better, faith fully owns the claim, and receives the blessing from Him, even the richest blessing, the blessing of eternal salvation, life and glory.

Thus it is faith which chiefly glorifies God, for it sets Him in the place of "the better." Service renders to God, faith receives from Him, and thus faith honours Him in the holiest place that He graciously fills for us. In a sinner walking before Him, in the artless liberty and confidence of faith, God is especially honoured. For "God is love," and to glorify such an one we must be free and happy in Him. Love can be satisfied by nothing less than that. Of course, love knows how to "comfort the feeble-minded;" and where is "little faith," it can well come and "support the weak," for it tells us to do

so. But still our joy in Him is His will, and even His commandment. The bread of mourners was not to be eaten in the sanctuary; it would have defiled the presence of God, as the offering of an unclean heart would have defiled it. For if holiness become God's house, so do liberty and joy. And it is faith that brings in this liberty and joy, for it apprehends the altar of which I have spoken; it apprehends God engaged for the sinner in a love that is perfect, so as to have nothing in the soul inconsistent with itself, as the bread of mourners would be. It casts out fear, and fills the temple within with its own clear, free, and refreshing element.

May our faith, then, beloved, grow exceedingly! May we know the repose of heart, the silence of conscience, the triumph of hope, and the song of praise in the spirit, which it gives, more and more! The revelation which our God has made of Himself is so blessed, that it is only such a faith that can duly honour it. O that in connection with our subject we were, beloved, more in harmony with the spirit of those sweet words which we sometimes have sung together

"Look forward to that heavenly place,
Beyond the bounds of time and space,
The saints' secure abode:
On faith's strong eagle-pinions rise,
And force your passage to the skies,
And scale the mount of God!"