

The Laver and the Molten Sea.

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The laver of brass (or perhaps copper) which stood in the court of Israel's Tabernacle, and the molten sea which Solomon placed in the court of the Temple, have each their own word of instruction for our souls. In contemplating the laver, it is important to observe the place given to it in the Divine specifications for the Tabernacle. These may be divided into two parts, as follows: — Exodus 25 — Exodus 27: 19; Exodus 27: 20 — Exodus 30, the first part being occupied with God's manifestation of Himself, the second with the means whereby His worshippers might have to do with Him. The first part, accordingly, begins with the ark, the well-known symbol of Jehovah's presence, and the highest manifestation of Himself in that age, and from thence the mind travels outward until the court is reached. The second part begins with the oil for the light (Ex. 27: 20-21), for the first lesson God would impress on those who desire to draw near to Himself is that He is light, and dwells in light. Next follows the priesthood (Ex. 28, Ex. 29) for how can faulty and feeble man have to do with a holy God save by such means? The golden altar, the place of priestly worship, follows appropriately (Ex. 30: 1-10); then, after the notice of the atonement half-shekel, we have the laver, on which we would dwell a little.

The laver was provided for the use of the priests, for the removal of the defilements that were contracted daily in the handling of the external things of the Tabernacle. Aaron and his sons typify Christ and Christians, for all who believe have been constituted a priestly family — "a holy priesthood," as Peter tells us (1 Peter 2: 3). It was not enough for God's priests that they had undergone a total washing at their consecration (Ex. 29: 4); they must wash their hands and feet day by day. The total washing (referred to, doubtless, by the Apostle in Heb. 10: 22) typifies the new birth, which every believer in Jesus has experienced through grace. This has made us *in nature* meet to draw near to God, but the laver teaches us that we must be meet also in *practice* in order to really enjoy His presence. As the psalmist said, when confessing his affection for Jehovah's house, the place where His honour dwelt, "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord " (Ps. 26: 6). God demands purity of thought and life in those who approach Him. We are reminded, too, of the Apostle's words, " I will, therefore, that men . . . lift up *holy* hands " (1 Tim. 2: 8).

The laver was made of the mirrors of the women who served in connection with the Tabernacle (Ex. 38: 8). This is suggestive of self-renunciation on their part, for the mirror is an important item amongst a woman's possessions. Another lesson is, therefore, stamped upon the page of Scripture for us — the abasement or setting aside of self is looked for in those who would have to do with God. Before Him, flesh finds itself unable to glory: where fleshly boasting is found, it is evident that the soul knows but little experimentally of the presence of a holy God. The mirror is used by James as a symbol of the Word of God (James 1: 22-25), which faithfully shows the man who looks into it what he is. What a merciful provision for us in our wilderness circumstances! When we come to the Word, and lay ourselves open before it, every secret of the heart is exposed, every impure motive is detected, every bit of defilement in the practical life is shown up, and that in its true character as God sees it. The Word is both the detector and the cleanser of evil. What the water of the laver was to Israel's priests, the Word of God is to us to-day. Hence the words in Ps. 119: 9: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word." Hence, too, the instruction of the Lord in John 13: 10, when washing the feet of His disciples before He suffered.

God *insisted* on purity in the priests of Israel — "that they die not" (Ex. 30: 21). Are we exempt from this because we live not under law but under grace? By no means. Where personal holiness is neglected, God's holy hand in government descends upon the offender. Why? Because He loves us not? Nay, but because He *does* love us, and will have us in a practical way to be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12: 10). It was because of their trifling with evil that the Apostle had to say to the Corinthians — "Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11: 30). The command is still as imperative as ever — "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52: 11).

It will be observed that in the specifications for the laver no measurements are given. This is very remarkable, because in connection with the various parts of the Tabernacle details of size and measurement are given with great minuteness. Surely the omission in the case of the laver is as full of meaning as the omission of Melchizedek's ancestry in Gen. 14, of which the Spirit of God makes so much in Heb. 7! It is undoubtedly God's happy way of teaching us that the grace which forgives and cleanses us day by day is without limit or measure. It is always absolutely true, however deep and frequent our failures may have been, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). Well may we sing, therefore: —

"Who is a pardoning God like Thee,

Or who has grace so rich and free?"

We turn now to Solomon's molten sea (2 Chron. 4: 2-5). This being a development of the laver, we have necessarily the same thought of priestly cleansing connected with it, but not this only. There are further thoughts also. Solomon's reign is remarkably typical of the future reign of the Lord Jesus. It was a period of peace and glory for Israel, all foes having been put down. The Temple arrangements accordingly suggest to us various

Millennial features. Thus we have the Cherubim looking "toward the house" (2 Chron. 3: 13, *R.V.*), *i.e.*, outwards, toward the people, telling us of Divine righteousness looking abroad in blessing to men. Compare Psalm 72: 2, 3; Isa. 32: 1. Then the two great pillars called Jachin and Boaz,; meaning respectively "He will establish" and "in Him is strength," teach us that Christ in the day of His kingdom will establish all things in power for His earthly people, and will uphold and preserve from ruin that which He will establish for them. He is the true Boaz, the Kinsman-Redeemer.

But what place has the molten sea in this connection? If we observe a few particulars, this will become clear. "It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward" (2 Chron. 4: 4). This is very interesting. The ox is always the type in Scripture of the patient labourer for God (1 Cor. 9: 9, 10); twelve is the number of Israel's tribes. In all probability, there were pipes running downward through the mouths of the oxen whereby the water, when needed, flowed forth. Here, then, we have the word of the Lord flowing through Israel in the coming day for the blessing of all the nations, for the oxen looked towards every quarter under heaven. Under the powerful impulse of the latter-day outpouring of the Spirit, from their inward parts will flow "rivers of living water." In the past, the seed of Jacob have been a coldly conservative people. Even the Gospel, which they did not desire for themselves, they sought to hinder going out to others (1 Thess. 2: 16; Acts 13: 45; Acts 14: 2-19). But when the Redeemer comes to Zion, and their hearts are wrought upon by Divine grace, they will realise the purpose of God in their election, and will gladly throw themselves into the current of the Spirit's operations, thus spreading blessing far and wide. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2: 3). "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as a dew from the Lord, as the

showers upon the grass" (Micah 5: 7). Notice, also, the prayer of the remnant in Ps. 67 — "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations." Like the stream (doubtless a literal one) that will flow forth from the sanctuary in that day, fertilizing wherever it goes (Ezek. 47), so will the blessings of redemption flow into the remotest corners of the earth in the day when Israel's heart is turned once more to God. For Israel's conversion the world's blessing waits.

In the brim of the molten sea were wrought flowers of lilies. This carries our minds into the Song of Songs, where we have the various fruits of grace that will be displayed in Israel consequent upon their reconciliation. In that book the King repeatedly likens His people to lilies (Cant. 2: 2-16 etc.) A beautiful simile, assuredly, telling of purity and lowliness, two features ever delightful to the eye of the Lord. The reverse of this is seen in Isa. 45: 2-5 — gross corruption combined with Pharisaical pride. These odious characteristics will yet give place to the lily character; in the school of affliction, in the day to come, God's holy lessons will be learnt.

We cannot close without a brief reference to Rev. 4: 6. Here we see the whole company of the heavenly saints, under the symbol of twenty-four elders, at home in glory with the Lord. They are shown to us, not clad in armour, with sword in hand, as in Eph. 6, but as wearing the priestly ephod, each one crowned and enthroned. Wilderness dangers and needs are past for ever. "Before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal." The allusion to the molten sea in the earthly sanctuary is too obvious to be mistaken. But it is not a sea of water, as there, but of glass, a silent yet eloquent witness to the fixed and unalterable purity of the eternal abode of the glorified. On earth the water (of the Word) is often needed because of the defilements picked up by the way, and which come in between our souls and God; in the blissful scene to which we are going defilement will never be possible. The water gives place, in consequence, to the sparkling crystal.