

JOSHUA'S PRAYER
SUN
STAND THOU STILL

A Paper read to
THE MEN'S LEAGUE
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In presenting to you this study and interpretation of a famous Bible story there are two postulates that must first be established.

1. That the writings of the Old Testament are not to be read as literal history, accurate records of natural events that happened precisely as described. The writings of the Old Testament are to be read as Revelations of Eternal Truths ; that is, Truths that relate to the eternal life and the spiritual experience of mankind ; and therefore of value at all times and for all men.
2. That the particular command or prayer uttered by Joshua, according to the narrative, is an interesting relic of ancient religious poetry ; a prayer that is still worthy of and necessary to every man who would overcome his spiritual enemies, and strive to bring into the world in which he lives "the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness."

As regards the Old Testament, the doctrine of the New Church may be simply stated thus —

The Divine Being has always revealed to mankind truth relative to man's spiritual origin, constitution and progress. Such Revelation has necessarily been made in such forms and language as could be understood by man ; and when an objective or written Revelation had to be provided, the forms and language in which that Revelation could be expressed or embodied were those known to and used by men. It is inconceivable that that which is unknown can be revealed otherwise than by means of that which is known. And therefore we affirm that when a written Revelation of Divine Truth regarding Spiritual Verities was made through the Israelitish people, it was made in their language and by the use of their national experiences. The literature and traditions with which they were familiar ; the geographical facts and features of their country and adjacent countries ; the stages of their national growth, development and expansion ; their internal economy and organisation ; their relationships with other races and peoples—all

became the material for the revealing to mankind of Divine Wisdom concerning man as a spiritual being. Concerning his spiritual creation or regeneration ; his spiritual trials, temptations and warfare ; the opening up of the moral, the rational, the intellectual degrees of his mind or understanding ; the activity of the several planes of his heart or will : concerning these matters man knows little or nothing apart from Revealed Truth. Yet very much more might be known if we accepted the full implications of the belief that the Bible contains The Word of God : for then it would be perceived that the Bible has not been written to inform us of the history of a particular people ; not to preserve the knowledge of how God dealt with a few individuals, or tribes, or nations, or the human race of three or four thousand years ago. It would be perceived that the Sacred Scriptures have been written to reveal the Working of the Divine Providence ; to reveal the Ways of God with all sorts and conditions of men of every age and of every clime ; to reveal the Word of God to men, that all men may know how to behave themselves, how to commune with the Lord God Almighty, how to avoid disorder and sorrow, how to find relief from their perplexities, salvation from their sins, and become reformed and regenerated beings attaining to the stature of true manhood in accord with the Laws of Life decreed and upheld by the Infinite, and as exemplified in the Perfect Man, Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE SUBLIME PARABLE.

Consequently, the Scriptures must be read as a sublime Parable, the basis or framework of which has been drawn from the history of the Israelites : the stories, the instructions, the laws and the rituals all being compiled and arranged for the sake of the spiritual truth. Eternal truth is presented under types and figures, emblems and symbols. Each and every person or place, object or happening being used as corresponding to a spiritual principle or state, a spiritual quality or experience that may be common to our human life anywhere and everywhere. This fact that the Word of God is so presented by the use of natural terms that have a spiritual counterpart or correspondence explains why there seem to be related discrepancies,

anachronisms, miracles and impossible phenomena. The narratives are not designed to inform us of materialistic, physical happenings and experiences of any men at any time ; they are designed to inform us concerning spiritual verities for the personal and collective use and blessing of all men : and we find that this style of Divine writing is of great antiquity and that Joshua's command or prayer to the Sun and the Moon is a most illuminating piece of evidence to that effect. For we find it is spoken of as a quotation from the Book of Jasher, or Jashar.

THE BOOK OF JASHAR.

Concerning this Book of Jasher, or Jashar, it is usual to find writers affirming, with Dr. Hastings in his Bible Dictionary, that the " data is too scanty and too obscure to determine either the character of the book or the meaning of the title." It is generally assumed that the Book of Jasher was a collection of poems that celebrated outstanding incidents in the early days of Israel's history, and that the collection was growing until the time of Solomon ; but it is now entirely lost except for the few extracts embodied in our Bible. As a matter of fact there are actually three different places in the Old Testament where the Book of Jasher is quoted.—(1) at this place in the Book of Joshua, (2) in 2 Samuel 1, 19-27, David's lament over Jonathan and Saul, (3) in 1 Kings 8.12, Solomon's dedicatory prayer, though this is a most obscure and uncertain reference and is found only in the Septuagint Version.

An American authority, Bewer, in his scholarly work on the * " Literature of the Old Testament " published in 1922, shows that " long before any of the Children of Israel thought of writing in literary form " the people " sang songs, and told stories, and delighted in riddles and wise sayings," and he writes " the names of two such early collections we know, The Book of the Wars of Jehovah and the Book of Jasher or the Upright," and he affirms that these collections were earlier than any Hebrew literature of which there is any known record.

* The Literature of the Old Testament in its Historical Development.
Julius A. Bewer Columbia, University Press, New York, 1922.

This view is supported by an English writer, Garstang,* in a recent work, and he quotes also Professor Langdon in the *Expository Times*, vol. XXXI, who surmises that the Book of Jashar may have contained also songs or poems relative to Larsa, Babylon and the Hittites, thus taking us to days long before the days of Israel.

Now, Swedenborg writing in 1763 collates passages from the Bible which testify to the existence of Sacred Scriptures that were in use with the peoples in the east long before the time of Moses and Joshua, indeed, long before Abraham. Remnants of these ancient Scriptures are to be found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and in certain passages in the Book of Numbers (ch. 21) where *The Wars of Jehovah* and *The Enunciations* are actually quoted, and also in these passages from the Book of Jashar to which I have already referred. It is interesting to know that Swedenborg says he was informed by spirits in the spiritual world that that ancient Scripture, or Word of God, was still extant in China in 1763 and that it might be found among the Tartars.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt whatever that there did exist in pre-Mosaic days a religious book known as the Book of Jashar, or the Book of the Upright. And there is no doubt that the quotation recited by Joshua at the battle of Beth-horon was an extract therefrom.

I think it will be agreed that the very title of the book, "The Book of the Upright," suggests that the command or prayer "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon" is to be read poetically or spiritually. Indeed, Bewer remarks that the quotation embodies not only the prayer but also the answer "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies." Bewer, appreciating the spiritual poetry of the passage, adds "the narrator who quoted it interpreted it prosaically: a stupendous miracle was the result." But you see Bewer by suggesting "a stupendous miracle" slips into the self-same error for he reads the narrative in the Book of Joshua prosaically, and fails to educe its genuine eternal truth.

* The Foundations of Bible History, Joshua, Judges, John Garstang, Constable & Co., Ltd., London, 1931.

THE STORY.

With those preliminaries, we may now attempt our brief consideration of the story as presented in the tenth chapter of Joshua, summarising our postulates thus : That we are studying a narrative compiled to reveal spiritual instruction relative to a spiritual experience that may come to us each and all : and, That the command or prayer that we should offer in such experience was revealed to men very many centuries ago, and is still and always will be worthy of the man who would be upright.

Let us first sketch the story sharply. Joshua had led the Israelites into Canaan : the city of Jericho and the city of Ai had been overthrown : the Gibeonites had made terms with Joshua, and this had aroused the fear and anger of Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem, who at once rallied four other kings to help him smite Gibeon and thus check the advance of the Israelites. The Gibeonites sent urgent appeals to Joshua who gathered his men of valour, suddenly went up from Gilgal, surprised the five Amorite kings and slew them with a great slaughter. A hailstorm added to the Amorites' discomfiture, and we read " Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon : And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jashar ? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man : for the LORD fought for Israel."

THE HISTORICAL FACTS.

Now, that the man Joshua actually lived and led the Israelites across Jordan into Canaan cannot be doubted ; and that the Israelites subdued Jericho and Ai and made a compact with the Gibeonites cannot be doubted ; and that Joshua overcame a confederacy of opposing kings cannot be doubted. The historian Josephus gives

some account of those happenings, and recent research has provided evidence that confirms the broad facts; but neither Josephus nor modern discovery suggests anything in the way of miracle, anything so extraordinary as the "inversion of the whole order of the world." The historian and the archaeologist merely testify to the intelligible, brilliant success of the Israelites as they invaded Canaan and found that the circumstances and the forces of nature were favourable to their cause—much in the same way as the English naval forces found the wind and the rain valued allies in the destruction of the Spanish Armada. And we can readily believe that Joshua, thrilled with his success would fervently sing one of the Sacred Songs of the Book of Jashar, and in prayer give thanks to Almighty God for the victory won—as many other generals have done, when success has been achieved.

But that Joshua actually invoked the Divine Being to suspend the forces and laws of nature—and in some way cause the sun and the moon of the physical universe to be still, or appear to be still—is not to be allowed for a moment. It cannot be assumed that Joshua was referring to the physical sun and moon, any more than we can suppose that the prophet Habakkuk referred to them when he wrote "the sun and moon stood still in their habitation" (Habakkuk 3.11); or that the prophet Isaiah referred to them when he wrote "the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion" (Isaiah 24.23); or when he wrote "Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light" (Isaiah 60.20). And when we sing,—

"Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,"

"It is not night if Thou be near:"

we know perfectly well that the Sun is a symbol, and the widely acknowledged symbol, of the Divine Love that is the very Source and Centre of our souls. So then, accepting the story as it stands, we may readily agree that Joshua, as a historical person, quoted from an ancient scripture that is now lost—quoted a piece of sublime poetry, a perfect prayer of hope and thanksgiving, that Everyman striving to be upright may likewise repeat.

THE SPIRITUAL MEANING.

But now, passing from the discussion of the historical side of the subject, let us reflect upon it as a Divine Parable of spiritual value, frankly recognising that only so can it be of use or instruction to us or any other persons—for none of us is ever likely to lead a small company of valiant men against five earthly kings, or come into any natural circumstances where such a physical phenomenon might be to our advantage. And our interpretation should not be difficult nor take us very long; for I shall assume that you all will agree that Israel in the Sacred Scriptures stands simply for Everyman—Everyman as a spiritual, immortal being—and that the journey from Egypt to Canaan represents Everyman's conscious progress, our progress—your progress and mine—from a naturalistic, scientific state of soul to a spiritual and heavenly state of soul.

FROM EGYPT TO THE WILDERNESS.

We all go down into Egypt—and spend one phase of our life in bondage to the rigid, materialistic regime of temporal ideals, worldly prosperity and earthly pleasures. It is a grand step forward when, under the inspiring leadership of Moses, the Lawgiver, the journey through the wilderness begins and we enter upon the life of religion—the acknowledgment that there is a Living God, and that His Commandments provide us with standards of life to which we must be loyal. This wilderness period is full of manifold experiences whereby we develop new capacities, acquire much knowledge of life and our own complex powers and qualities, and learn much regarding the Divine Providence which is ever operating to bless men and lead them on to larger, happier, freer states of life in Canaan.

Moses the Lawgiver is God's Agent throughout the wilderness journey: and it is found that obedience to the Law always brings security; always affords relief from the most difficult situations; always ensures restoration from the most foolish waywardness; and always results in prosperity and progress. It is well when men give serious heed to the Laws of God; they will surely be guided and protected in ways and by means they cannot comprehend.

But the wilderness journey leads to Canaan ; and there something more than Law is necessary : and so Moses gives way to Joshua, and Joshua leads Israel into the land where there are native inhabitants to subdue ; established interests to overthrow ; ancient customs to destroy ; idolatries and profanation to suppress ; injustice, unrighteous laws and inequalities to clear away ; where a new Kingdom—the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness—is to be set up.

ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN.

The entrance into Canaan represents for us that state of life wherein it is realized that true religion is constructive, though it involves first the definite removal of all that is evil and false from human nature and human conduct, and then the development of life, the re-building of human character and the cultivation of virtues and graces. To enter into Canaan is to enter into the positive, practical life of the Kingdom of God ; and that is always an advance from the wilderness period, when we simply learn the Law and follow it rather reluctantly.

Now, the story of Israel's entrance into Canaan teaches us and illustrates for us what we have all observed and found to occur again and again in the course of human history, and, I am sure, in our own life. The appearance of new truths, new ideals, new forces, always arouses and excites to activity evil and falsity. Vested interests, traditional conventions, familiar customs, and self-satisfaction are so very strong that they stir up enmity and opposition, and discourage, and often enough would bring about the death of, that which is New and True. The treatment of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish leaders and authorities is the outstanding instance of humanity's crass folly in relation to the Divine Solitude for mankind's well-being : and in a minor degree nearly every inventor, reformer, pioneer and prophet has been met with suspicion, opposition and very often violence, and has had to fight for the new, the true, the right, the wise and holy.

INHERITANCES.

And this story of Joshua leading the Israelites into Canaan reveals to us the eternal truth, That as men enter into the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, the inherited tendencies towards selfishness and love of the world; the traditional beliefs and convictions that have become confirmed in their minds; the ways and customs in which they have become fixed—all combine to oppose the advance into the Kingdom. The forces of evil and error attempt to block the way of spiritual progress; they rally to bring about the failure and destruction of Israel.

These native inhabitants of Canaan represent plainly the inherited, traditional, long-standing corruptions and disorders that must be rooted out. Modern physiologists tell us that there are tendencies, germs, nuclei, of disorderly or evil character that lie latent in the body in early life, but show themselves and become virulent as a person matures and enters upon new duties and new associations and into new environment. Psychologists are beginning to affirm the same in regard to the psyche or spiritual organism. And so, also, there are, lurking within the soul evil tendencies, unsuspected inclinations and desires, dormant passions and impulses, that reveal themselves at unexpected times and cause sudden conflicts within the soul, struggles between conflicting emotions, contentions between good principles and bad: between the ways of holiness and peace and ways of vice and war. The subjection of the land of Canaan and the setting up of the Kingdom of Israel therein is a long, arduous and vital warfare. So we find Israel under Joshua victorious over Jericho and Ai and making compact with Gibeon—stories rich in spiritual instruction for Every-man when entering upon the life of the Kingdom of God.

THE FIVE KINGS.

And then comes the battle of Beth-horon against the five kings.

Now, from a study of the names of these kings and the cities over which they ruled it seems quite reasonable to suggest that they symbolize

Lord fought for you. A new living influence from the Living God will flow into your soul in response to your prayer. God will again have hearkened to the voice of a man. And a shower of new thoughts, hailstones from heaven, will descend upon you and take all force and meaning, all vitality from the five kings that will trouble you no more. And with such experience will come a new and deeper reverence for the Sacred Scriptures of the Bible, and for the power and truth of God that they enable you to obtain.

OUR LORD'S PLAIN TEACHING.

In conclusion, may I very briefly emphasise one further truth? The name Joshua is another form of the name Jesus and means *Jehovah is the Saviour or Salvation* - and it is the case that Joshua is perhaps the chief and finest prototype of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who likewise seeks to lead us into the life of the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness. Now, all the stories about Joshua are stirring and instructive prophetic parables of the power, the enlightenment, the guidance, the victories over evil and error, the new life and joy that are enjoyed by the soul that presses forward in the new life, the regenerate life, under the Leadership of Jesus Christ our Lord. And the relevance of this affirmation will, I think, become plain when we recall these words of our Lord: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:21). Yes, alas they do. But we may take courage from the stories of Joshua's valiant Leadership of the Children of Israel. These evils do not come from within all together; they are met little by little, stage by stage; first Jericho, then Ai, now a few in combination. But they all may be overcome and the Kingdom of God set up, if we make the Lord our Leader, fight the good fight in His Name and by His Spirit, ever praying that "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His Wings"; until all evil and error shall be subdued; and the kings of the nations no longer oppose but welcome the King of Kings and bring all their glory and honour into His Kingdom.