

MOSES: The Servant of God

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SONG OF VICTORY

“Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea” (Exodus 15:21).

WHEN God’s cloud brings any of his children into a position of unparalleled difficulty, they may always count upon Him to deliver them. Our Almighty Parent, like the eagle of which Moses sang afterwards, delights to conduct the tender nestlings of his care to the very edge of the precipice, and even to thrust them off into the steeps of air, that they may learn their possession of unrealized powers of flight, to be forever after a luxury; and if, in the attempt, they be exposed to unwonted peril, He is prepared to swoop beneath them, and to bear them upward on his mighty pinions.

A conspicuous example of this is given here.

From his chariot-cloud their Almighty Friend looked down upon the cowering crowd of fugitives in their sore fear as they cried to Him. **“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them”** throughout that memorable night and day.

As Moses foretold, **“He fought for them, while they held their peace.”**

It would almost seem, from an expression in the Psalms, that the children of Israel yielded to more rebellion at the Red Sea than appears from the narrative of Moses. We are told distinctly that they **“provoked him at the Sea, even at the Red Sea, because they remembered not the multitude of his mercies;”** so that God saved them in spite of their rebelliousness, for his Name’s sake, and “that He might make his mighty power to be known” (Psalm 106:7, 8).

And this suggests the further thought that our deliverance does not depend on our deserts, but upon the Divine purpose. And even though it might be supposed that our behavior, in seasons of peril, must alienate from us the Divine helpfulness, yet it shall not be so; but notwithstanding all, He will work miracles of power for such as have no claim on Him, save that which his love gives. The one man who seemed unmoved amid the panic of the people was their heroic leader, whose faith was the organ of their deliverance. And therefore it is that in all after-allusions to this great event his hand is always referred to as the instrument through which the might of the Lord wrought.

“**Thou leddest,**” says the Psalmist, “**thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron**” (Psalm 77:20). “**He led them,**” says Isaiah, “**with his glorious arm , dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?**” (Isaiah 63:12).

The people, therefore, had good reason to remember the ancient days of Moses; for they were made famous by Moses mighty faith.

By his faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.

THE ROD

There is a limit to prayer. While Moses presented an appearance of unbroken fortitude towards the people, rearing himself among them like a rock, before God he bent like a broken reed, crying to Him.

That, however, was not the time for heart-rending supplication, but for action: he must give to the people the word of advance. Over the sea, on which the shadows of night were falling rapidly he must stretch out his rod; and by his faith he must afford the power of God a channel through which it should pass to the cleavage of the mighty waters.

That rod had already played many parts; it grew first in some watered glade of the Sinaitic peninsula, little witting of its destiny, till cut down by the shepherd for the purpose of guiding his flock, or clubbing some beast of prey; it was in his hand when God first met with him, and cast upon the ground it became a serpent, emblem of Egyptian pride.

Already it had figured in many of the Egyptian plagues; stretched over the waters of the river to turn them to blood; lifted towards Heaven to summon the storm; extended over the land to turn the very dust to lice; hereafter it was to win victory over Amalek, and to open streams from the heart of the rock; everywhere emphatically as “**the rod of God.**”

But never in all its history had it done, nor would it do, such marvels as awaited it that night, when at the bidding of God it was stretched over the waters of the Red Sea.

As the rod was in the hands of Moses, so Moses was in the hand of God; and so may each of us be, if only we yield ourselves implicitly to Him for service.

- By nature we may be of the coarsest texture, not pine, nor oak, nor cedar;
- By education, we may be uncultured and unpolished;

There may be many notches in us which mar our symmetry and beauty: but what do these things matter? the one essential is to know that we are being wielded and used by the hands that shaped the worlds, and built the arch of Heaven. The glass-blower has beside him on the bench the rudest iron tools to aid him in the execution of the most exquisite designs; but the dexterity of his touch more than compensates for their apparent inaptitude. Be a piece of iron if you will, or a rod cut from the forest tree; but be sure that you are in the right hand of the Master Workman.

THE CLOUD

Up till now the pillar of cloud had swept in majestic glory through the heavens; but at this juncture it settled down upon the ground like a great wall of billowy vapour, standing for a fence between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel.

- To the former it was dark and menacing, forbidding progress, and enshrouding the movements of the fugitives;
- To the latter it gave light, casting a sheen upon the sand and sea, and indicating, with unerring accuracy, the path that soon appeared.

All night through, those Heaven-lit beacon fires shone out; and in after-days the memory of the effect produced by the mingling of their light with the walls of glassy water, supplied the inspired seer with the imagery with which to depict the triumph of the redeemed, who stand on the shores of the **“glassy sea mingled with fire, having the harps of God.”**

It seemed as if inspiration itself could find no worthier emblem for that supreme event than the rapture and triumph of the host of Israel on the night, when the glory of the Shekinah flashed back from the crested billows, marshaled on either hand, as the pillared entrance to a mighty temple.

THE PASSAGE

At no point, following the lead of the Psalmist-historian, it is clear that a terrific storm broke upon the scene. The earth shook and trembled; the massy foundations of the mountains rocked; from out the darkness brooding overhead, the curtains of God’s pavilion, came the repeated flash of the lightning, followed by the long reverberation of the thunder. The Most High uttered his voice, which was followed by the pelt of the hailstones and the fall of fireballs. The east wind rose in fury, driving before it the retreating waters, which fled at the blast of the breath of his nostrils; then catching them up in its hands it piled them, wave on wave, until they stood up a wall of foam and tumult, from base to top, fretting, seething, fuming, chafing at the unexpected restraint, and wondering at the unwonted posture, but held steadily and always by the pressure of that mighty blast, that gave them no respite, but held them as in a vice; and all the water behind, backed up, leant upon that rampart, so strangely built, so marvelously maintained.

And on the other side the tide withdrew back and back towards the fountains of the great deep behind. It was as if every wavelet felt the pull, the suction of an abyss opening somewhere far down in the sea, and hastened to fill it, leaving the foundations of the deep naked in the headlong rush. Then the channels of water appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare, so that rocks and stones deposited in primeval times, and closely veiled from all prying gaze, awoke to find themselves discovered. Presently it seemed as if there was a pause in the speed of the retreating waters, and they began slowly to return; but as they did so they met with the restraint of the hand of God, which, leaving a pathway of sufficient breadth from the wall already formed, commenced to constitute a second, and **“so the flood stood upright as an heap, and the deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.”**

Shelving down from the shore between these two walls of water, a broad thoroughfare lay outspread, which the prophet compares to those mountain paths by which cattle descend from the heights on which they graze to the valleys where they rest (Isaiah 63:14). Was there ever such a strange comparison? And yet for the moment it seemed almost as natural; and at that moment the word which had sprung from the lips of the leader, and had been caught by those who stood closest around him, passed like prairie fire, though in a whisper, from lip to lip.

“Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward”; and immediately, without precipitate haste, but with glad obedience, the ransomed host stepped down, rank after rank, and passed between the walls of glass and fire amid the rattle of the storm, which made the withdrawal of their hosts inaudible to their foes.

Imagine, O child of God, if you can, that triumphal march: the excited children restrained from ejaculations of wonder by the perpetual hush of their parents; the almost uncontrollable excitement of the women as they found themselves suddenly saved from a fate worse than death; while the men followed or accompanied them, ashamed or confounded that they had ever mistrusted God or murmured against Moses: and as you see those mighty walls of water piled by the outstretched hand of the Eternal in response to the faith of a single man, learn what God will do for his own.

- Dread not any result of implicit obedience to his command;
- Fear not the angry waters which, in their proud insolence, forbid your progress;
- Fear not the turbulent crowds of men who are perpetually compared to waters lifting up their voice and roaring with their waves.
- Fear none of these things.

Above the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of the sea, the Lord sits as king upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth as king forever. A storm is only as the outskirts of his robe, the symptom of his advent, the environment of his presence. His way lies through, as well as in the sea, his path amid mighty waters, and his footsteps are veiled from human reason.

Dare to trust Him; dare to follow Him!

Step right down into the ooze of the sea, to find it rock; go down into the mighty depths, to discover that the very forces which barred your progress and threatened your life, at his bidding become the materials of which an avenue is made to liberty.

THE PURSUIT

As soon as the Egyptians became aware that Israel was escaping, they followed them, and went on after them into the midst of the sea.

There was a good deal of pride and obstinacy in this act, which tempted God and presumptuously dared him to do his worst; and, forthwith, when the host was between the walls of water, the whole force of the storm seemed to spend itself on them.

The Lord looked upon them through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and troubled them; a sudden panic seized them; their heavy chariots could make but ill progress amid the ooze of the sea bottom, and the wheels themselves became clogged and bound so that they could not move; and they turned to flee, conscious that a greater than Israel was engaged against them.

At this juncture the morning light began to break; and, at the bidding of God, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea from that further shore which he and Israel had by this time gained, and the sea returned to its strength. The Egyptians fled against it in vain; they were overwhelmed in the sudden rush of water toppling down on them from either side. They sank as lead in the mighty waters; they went down like a stone into its depths; and in less time than it takes to tell the story, not a trace of their proud array remained.

THE SONG OF MOSES

“Then sang Moses.”

The morning dawn revealed one of the most memorable spectacles of history. A nation of slaves, fleeing from their masters, had suddenly become a nation of freemen, and stood emancipated upon the shores of a new continent.

The proud people, which for generations had inflicted such untold griefs upon them, had suffered a humiliation from which it would take them generations to recover. The chivalry of Egypt was overwhelmed in the midst of the sea, there remained not so much as one of them left; and all along the shore lay the bodies of the dead, cast up from the depths of the tide.

At this day a significant blank in the hieroglyphed memorials of Egypt tells the story of that overwhelming disaster. And there was given to Israel for all subsequent time an evidence of the trustworthiness of God, which compelled belief, not only in their great Deliverer, but in his servant Moses.

It is thus, if only we are still, and commit to Him our cause, that He will vindicate us from the aspersions of our detractors, and bring out our judgment to the light. And we shall look back on the forms which once filled us with dread, dead upon the seashore; unable to pursue or hurt us more.

And from that ransomed host, congregated there in one vast throng, broke forth an anthem, whose sublime conceptions of language rendered it worthy of the occasion, as it has been the model for triumphal songs in all subsequent times. There is no thought of any but the Lord throughout the entire piece. The song was sung to Him and of Him. It was He that had triumphed gloriously, and cast horse and rider into the sea.

It was his right hand that had dashed in pieces the enemy. It was because He blew with his wind, that they sank as lead in the mighty waters. It was through the greatness of his excellency that they were overthrown who had risen against Him. All the honors of the victory were reverently laid at his feet. Moses is not once referred to.

And the ease of his victory was clearly accentuated. The waters were piled as walls by his breath. He blew with his wind, and a whole army sank as a stone into the depths. He had but to stretch out his right hand, and the sea swallowed the flower of the greatest army of the time.

Note the epithets heaped on God:

- **“My strength and song and salvation;”**
- **“glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;”**
- Whilst the men extolled Him as **“a man of war,”** and dwelt on the anguish that must take hold of the Inhabitants of Canaan when they heard the story of the overthrow.
- The women, led by Miriam, replied in a noble refrain, **“Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.”**

Whether or not this ode were composed beforehand in anticipation of this moment we cannot tell. It may have been; else how could it have been sung by those assembled thousands? But this in itself would be a striking token of the faith which dwelt so vigorously in the heart of Moses. It was his song preeminently; and in its closing notes we catch a glimpse of his forecast of the future, and the certainty of his convictions: **“Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance.”**

So does God turn our anxieties into occasions of singing weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning. The redeemed obtain gladness and joy; God puts gladness into their hearts, and new songs into their mouths.

Long years of waiting and preparation and obedience shall be rewarded at last, as certainly as God is God. If not before, yet surely when the eternal morning is breaking on the shores of time, we shall join in shouts of victory; which shall awaken eternal echoes, as with myriads beside we sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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