

The Divine Programme of The World's History Chapter IV. The Mosaic Programme – Part I.



Continued from [Chapter III. The Abrahamic Programme – Part III.](#)

Nearly five centuries had passed since the days of Abraham when the next great crisis in the history of redemption occurred. It is associated with the name of Moses, one who is more notable as a founder than as a father. His "seed," his own personal descendants, were of small account. The programme of the future given through him relates, not, as in the case of Abraham, to his own posterity, but to the people of Israel to whom by birth (though not by education) he belonged—the people whom he was commissioned by God to constitute and train into a nation, and to lead to the borders of their promised inheritance. It was when he had done this, when his long and marvellous life had reached its close, when he was just about to commit to Joshua the leadership of the people who were destined to become the world's benefactors, that he was inspired to foretell their future—in that fourth section of the Divine programme of the world's history which we have now to consider.

In order to its right appreciation, we must briefly review the interval which had elapsed since the age of the patriarchs treated in our last chapter. We must endeavour to realize the character of the times in which Moses' lot was cast, and recall the main features of the romantic, heroic, and most extraordinary life which he himself lived—a life unmatched among those of the sons of men for the sublimity of its incidents, the striking contrasts of its experiences, and the everlasting importance of its results.

As regards the interval since the days of Abraham, the remark made as to the days of the patriarch himself, that it is not now a *terra incognita* (new or unexplored field of knowledge) to historians, is even more appropriate to this period. Authentic monumental and documentary evidence takes us back to B.C. 2200 or 2300 at least, and possibly even further; so that we can now supplement and illustrate the Biblical narrative, fill in the *lacunae* (missing part) which it leaves, and obtain from independent sources contemporary information as to the world's condition during those early ages. It has given its own account of itself in the monumental records which it has left, and that account often throws interesting sidelights on Bible history.

Though Scripture confines itself mainly to the story of the chosen people, yet Israel at this period came in contact with a variety of other nations—with Amalekites, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Canaanites, and above all Egyptians —among whom they dwelt for centuries, and their sojourn among whom had important results of various kinds. The better we know Israel's surroundings in Egypt, the better we understand their subsequent conduct in the wilderness and in Canaan; and the more we appreciate Egypt's own condition, the more we perceive the power and wisdom of God in the Exodus.

When Jacob first responded to Pharaoh's invitation, and went down with his family to Egypt, the seed of Abraham had already multiplied considerably. Seventy sons, or male descendants of Jacob, are named, and there were doubtless a similar number of daughters. But the whole party was much larger, and numbered probably some thousands; so that it was a tribe rather than a family which in Joseph's day took up their abode in the land of Goshen. The covenant with Abraham included his entire household, which, as we have seen, was very numerous. Jacob's was probably quite as large, and his twelve sons being all married men with families, would also be at the heads of separate households.

The entire migration consequently must have numbered several thousand persons. That such a large party should receive a hearty welcome and liberal grants of land in a strange country would be surprising, and can be accounted for only by the popularity and power which Joseph had deservedly attained. After his death, the political position of the country secured them continued royal favour and protection for one or two centuries. We learn from the monuments that about this period Lower Egypt was, conquered by the strange dynasty known as the Hyksos, or shepherd-kings, a cruel, semi-barbarous, nomadic Asiatic race of rulers, which invaded and subjugated the land of Zoan, destroyed its cities and temples, massacred all the males of adult age, and reduced to slavery the women and children. Manetho gives a terrible, but perhaps exaggerated, account of their cruelty and barbarism; but the period of their occupation of the Delta (which is of uncertain length) was undoubtedly one of misery and confusion in the once mighty and united empire of Egypt. Native Pharaohs continued to govern the upper country from Thebes during the Hyksos period,— indeed, there is reason to think that several dynasties ruled sections of Egypt at this period; in any case, it was a time of great confusion.

The monumental remains of the dynasty of foreign rulers are very curious. They represent them with countenances wholly unlike the rest of the Pharaohs.¹ This dynasty was intensely hated by the Egyptians, who never lost the memory of their cruel tyrannies, and loaded them with the most ignominious epithets. Lower Egypt was probably in subjection to these detested foreigners during the greater part of Israel's tarriance (sojourn) in Goshen. Before it was over, the Hyksos conquerors had been expelled and the native dynasties restored, so that the Pharaoh of the Exodus was a true Egyptian. As the Egyptians were never reconciled to the rule of the shepherd-kings (though the latter quickly imbibed and adopted the civilization of their subjects, just as the Manchu Tartar emperors imbibed the Chinese

civilization after they had conquered China), the antipathy between them and their people kept the Hyksos monarchs in constant fear of revolution, and the presence of such an Asiatic pastoral tribe as that of the Israelites in the land of Goshen would be welcome and regarded as an advantage. *They* were sure to be friendly subjects, on whose sympathy dependence might be placed.

¹ "The visage, sooth to say, is singularly plebeian (relating to the common people of ancient Rome), and as unlike as possible in its type to the pleasant, ingenuous look of the earliest European-like Egyptians of the pyramid age, or the stately calmness or the attractive kindness of the courtly twelfth dynasty. The noses are pitifully marred, the cheek-bones are high and prominent, the upper lips long and drawn downwards, the mouth sad, heavy, and anxious, the lower lip projecting beyond the chin, which is poor and ignoble, the eyes small but not near together; the whole aspect severe, but not without a sorrowful earnestness and force.

"Four sphinxes belonging to this dynasty, of unique type, were uncovered at San, sculptured with great vigour, though in a style of art different from the Egyptian. The heads are surrounded with a hairy fringe, from out of which look the stern features of these Hyksos monarchs, as full of gnarled strength as the great sphinx of Gizeh is instinct with superhuman serenity. . . . The brows are knit with anxious care, the full but small eyes seem to know no kindly light; the nose, of fine profile curve, yet broad and squared in form, has its strongly chiseled nostrils depressed in accordance with the saddened lines of the lower cheek. The lips are thick and prominent, but not with the unmeaning fullness of the negro; quite the opposite. The curve is fine, the "cupid's bow" perfect which defines so boldly the upper outline; the channeled and curved upper lip has even an expression of proud sensitiveness, and there is more of sorrow than of fierceness in the downdrawn angles of the mouth.

"'I stand astonished,' says Dr. Ebers, 'before these outlandish features, which in their rough earnestness form the sharpest contrast to the smiling heads of the Egyptian Colossi.'"—("Life and Times of Abraham," pp. 135-139.)

There were two kingdoms in Egypt in those days. The grand days of the old twelfth dynasty, in which Abraham visited the land, rich and peaceful, and under one of the later kings of which Joseph acted as beneficent regent, had passed away. The empire was divided; aliens were in possession of the Delta. The native monarchs, who continued to rule in the upper country, had not for some centuries the power to drive the invaders out, but were indeed seriously threatened by them at times even in their own dominions. Meanwhile, Israel was multiplying and prospering peacefully under the to *them* friendly government, occupying the whole fertile district of Goshen, none making them afraid.

But the Hyksos dynasty came to an end in the reign of Apepi (or Aphobis). In his later years this monarch attacked the native king of Thebes, engaging in a war in which he was completely defeated. He was pursued by Aahmes (or Amosis), the first king of the eighteenth dynasty, to Lower Egypt, and ultimately expelled from the country with the greater part, though apparently not all of his people. (There is a tribe still dwelling around Lake Menzalach, supposed from their countenance and from other indications to be descendants of the Hyksos.) His *protégés* the Israelites do not seem to have been called

to engage in the war; their quiet pastoral pursuits probably disinclined them to take up arms; and thus not having made themselves obnoxious to the conquerors, they did not suffer either extermination or expulsion. The victorious Theban monarch left them in quiet possession of their pastures in Goshen. "But he was emphatically 'a new king'; of him it might be said, 'he arose up over' Egypt; he was, in the true sense of the word, like the Norman William, a conqueror.

The name of Joseph, whether as a minister of the ejected dynasty or of one more ancient than that, would probably be unknown to him. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt as to the feelings with which a king in his position must have regarded the Israelites. They were there as the subjects, apparently the favoured subjects, of the expelled dynasty, under whom they retained undisturbed possession of the richest district of Egypt, commanding the eastern approach to the very heart of the land. The first point that would naturally strike him would be their number (Exod. i. 9), which, after the expulsion of his enemies, would bear an alarming proportion to the native population of the Delta. A prudent man under such circumstances would not be likely to provoke rebellion by proceeding to extremities, but nothing is more probable than that he should do just what Moses tells us the new king actually did—deal with them craftily, prevent their increase, utilise their labour, and cut off all communication with foreigners.

The most advantageous employment which would suggest itself would of course be the construction of strongly fortified depositories of provisions and arms near the eastern frontier. This, we learn, was precisely the work to which the Israelites were set, and the ruins of the very treasure-cities and fortresses which they erected under the lash of the taskmaster have recently been discovered. Pithom, in Egyptian Pa-chtum, was built just about this time, and the name means "the fortress of the foreigners or sojourners." It is also well known that during the latter part of his reign, Aahmes was occupied in building and repairing the cities of Northern Egypt.

In an inscription lately deciphered, dated in his twenty-second year, certain "Fenchu" are stated to be employed in the transport of blocks of limestone from the quarries of Rufu (the Troja of Strabo) to Memphis and other cities. These Fenchu are unquestionably aliens, either mercenaries or forced labourers. According to Brugsch, the name means "bearers of the shepherd's staff"; and he describes their occupation as precisely corresponding to that of the Israelites.

Their rapid multiplication would in any case have caused the land of Goshen to be too narrow for the Israelites after a time, and they would be forced to scatter among the great towns and cities where they could get employment, and to hire themselves out as labourers in the flourishing country.

The very rapidity of their increase must have caused a certain difficulty in obtaining subsistence, and have driven them to engage in uncongenial occupations and to accept low wages; so that, even before their heaviest affliction began, their position in Egypt must have become a painful and humiliating one. The Egyptians would dislike them because of their connection with the shepherd-kings, and would treat them probably somewhat as the poor

fellaheen are now treated by the Turks—with contempt and injustice, if not with cruelty. As in spite of their hard fate they continued to multiply.

The political problem began to look serious. Egypt's dangers always came from the northeast at that time. On all her other borders she was safe, but the Isthmus of Suez was a weak point. Invasions of the Ilittites were especially feared, and it was evident in such a case that the Israelites would be likely to throw in their lot with the enemy, or else endeavour in the confusion of war to escape from Egypt altogether. It would be in their power to welcome Hittite invaders to the land of Goshen, and so to give them a position from which they could threaten the important cities of Tanis, Heliopolis, Bubastis, and Memphis. It was natural under these circumstances that the stern and selfish monarch should adopt the course he did—deprive the Israelites of freedom, and impress them into the royal service as forced labourers or slaves, especially as he had at the time an unlimited need of such for the erection of his new fortifications.

Then commenced the most severe sufferings of the period of oppression. To the heavy and unhealthy task of brickmaking a portion of the people were assigned; others to agricultural work, or, as it is called, "service in the field," and this service was made more severe than it need have been, on purpose to break down the people both morally and physically. One great object of the king being to diminish the numbers of the Israelites in the interests of his own safety. Hence we read:—

"And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour " (Exod. i. 13, 14).

The traveller in Egypt is familiar with the sight of naked peasants working in a burning sun throughout the day, lifting buckets of water from the level of the river for the irrigation of the fields. They seem like mere substitutes for machines; and when this sort of work is done under the lash of the taskmaster, it is easy to conceive the misery inflicted. "It fills the mind with horror to think of the thousands of prisoners of war, or forced labourers and workmen, who must have died under the blows of the drivers, or under the weight of privations and toil too great for human endurance, in raising these innumerable creations."

Men preferred death to the horrors of slavery. The monuments give us ample evidence of the terrible tyrannies and cruelties by means of which canals were dug, towns were built, and colossal structures erected. War was often undertaken for the mere object of procuring slaves, as still in Central Africa. Even the native population had to suffer, much more the Israelites.¹

¹ "A letter of the period is still extant, which tells how the tax-collector arrives (in his barge) at the wharf of the district, to receive the government share of the crops. His men, armed with clubs, are with him, and his negroes, with batons of palmwood, cry out, 'Where's your wheat?' and there is no way of checking their exactions. If they are not satisfied, they seize the poor wretch, throw him on the ground, bind him, drag him off to the canal at hand, and throw him in, head first, the neighbours running off to take care of their own grain, and leaving the poor creature to his fate. His wife is bound, and she and his

children carried off."

Egypt in all ages has been marked by the oppression of its toiling thousands, and that oppression was probably never more severe than in the days of the Pharaohs who succeeded the shepherd-kings. All the details of Hebrew slavery are illustrated by the monuments, and the account in Exodus is strikingly confirmed by existing inscriptions.

"An old writing on the back of a papyrus, apparently of the date of Seti, the founder of the Nineteenth Dynasty, brings vividly before us a picture of the brick-making, which was part of the labours of the Hebrews. 'Twelve masons,' says the writer, 'besides men who are brick-moulders in their towns, have been brought here to work at house-building. *Let them make their number of bricks each day.* They are not to relax their tasks at the new house. It is thus I obey the command given me by my master' These twelve masons and these brick-makers, thus taken from their own towns to build this house, at a fixed rate of task-work daily, may not have been Hebrews, but their case illustrates exactly the details of Hebrew slavery given in Exodus."—(Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," p. 83.)

The over-ruling providence of God, however, caused the Israelites to multiply, in spite even of severe oppression. "The more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew, and the Egyptians were grieved because of the people of Israel." (Exod. i, 12) Pharaoh then attempted infanticide on a large scale—at first by a crafty endeavour to corrupt the midwives who attended the Jewish mothers; and when this failed, he openly issued a proclamation commanding the drowning in the Nile of the male children, and probably represented it as a sacrifice required by the Nile god. It is not likely that this edict was ever rigorously enforced, but it led to the remarkable incident by which Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

The court seems to have been residing at the time at Memphis, which was built on the Nile, near the site of the modern Cairo. The child Moses, who according to tradition was singularly beautiful, would, as he grew up there, be surrounded by every luxury. From his character in after-life we cannot doubt, however, that his own mother's influence continued long after the period when as an infant he was placed in her care. Intercourse with her and with his family connections among the Hebrews would naturally be very influential in the formation of his character, and it is to it probably that we must attribute the fact that he grew up a worshipper of the true God instead of an idolater. From his mother's lips he learned the traditions of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and his earliest and strongest bias would be towards monotheism. He would also thus early have been brought into sympathy with his own people. Had he become wholly Egyptianized in Pharaoh's court, he would never have won their confidence as he did at a later period.

As a growing lad he would have every possible educational advantage. We are told that he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," and that wisdom was very considerable at the period, even according to modern notions. The library at Thebes, over whose gate was inscribed, "For the healing of the soul," contained, it is said, twenty thousand books. The principal scene of

Moses' education, according to tradition, was the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis, then the chief university of Egypt.

"Shady cloisters opened into lecture rooms for the students, and quiet houses for the professors and priests, in their many grades and offices; there being room for all in the corridors of the huge pile. Outside these, but still within the precincts, were the cottages of the temple servants, keepers of the sacred beasts, gate-keepers, litter-bearers, water-carriers, washermen, washerwomen, and cooks; and the rooms of the *pastophoroi* (priests) who prepared the incense and perfumes. The library and writing chambers had their host of scribes, who all lived in the temple buildings, and there were besides also, as members of this huge population, the officials of the counting-house, troops of singers, and last of all, the noisy multitude of the great temple school—the Eton or Harrow of the time—from which Moses would pass upwards to the lectures of the various faculties of the university." (Geikie, p. 103.)

Poetry, astronomy, law, medicine, the philosophy of symbols, composition, trigonometry, mensuration, geometry—all were studied by the highly civilized Egyptians of the period. Astronomy had been cultivated to a considerable extent. Egyptian astronomers were acquainted with the obliquity of the ecliptic, and had determined an exact meridian line. Their knowledge was rather practical than theoretical, however—the result of observation, and not of science, or mathematical inquiry. The practice of law was also taught at Heliopolis, together with medicine.

His university course completed, the question came to Moses which must come to every young man sooner or later—the question on which the future of his race hung. What was he going to do with his life? He did not all at once come to the decision which has immortalized him as one of the heroes of faith in the eleventh of Hebrews. He did not "refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" at three or four and twenty, not indeed until he was forty years of age. How were the intervening years spent? In his position as a "Royal Highness" and a member of Pharaoh's court, his choice was necessarily limited. Official life, which absorbed an immense number of the upper classes in Egypt, would have been trying to one who was known to belong to the despised Hebrew race; priestly life he could not of course contemplate; literature would have been unsuited to a man of his activity; and ordinary professional or mercantile occupations would have been below his dignity. Tradition is probably tight in its assertion that he selected the profession of arms and became a soldier. The Pharaohs were all practical soldiers, and many of them great warriors. Stephen speaks of Moses as having been not only learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but "*mighty in words and deeds.*" (Acts vii. 22) How could he have been the latter save in the career of arms, and by distinguishing himself in war? How could he have marshalled the hosts of Israel as we know he did, without some military experience? The probability is that he spent many years in acquiring and exercising the military profession.

Josephus gives a full account of his subsequent conduct as *leader* of an expedition into Ethiopia, which was victorious and successful, and from which he returned with an established reputation. Such success would raise him high

in the opinion of Egypt and of Pharaoh, and give him the opportunity, had he wished to embrace it, of securing official appointments which would be practical sinecures, and enable him to lead an easy and honoured life.

It would be at this crisis in his life that Moses had to take *the great decision*. Amid all his personal success and prosperity, he seems never to have forgotten that he was a Hebrew, and he seems moreover to have firmly and heartily believed what he had learned from his mother and his Hebrew friends, rather than what he had learned at Heliopolis and heard in the court circle to which he belonged. His faith showed itself by works. The Hebrews were the people of Jehovah, and they were suffering affliction; he had the honour of being one of the chosen seed of Abraham, and he had influence and power at court. Could he not help them? Might he not devote his life to alleviating their burdens? Any representations he might make would surely meet with attention! He would look into their condition, investigate their grievances, inspect the various districts in which they lived and worked, and try to be of use to his nation. He took this course; "he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens." (Exod. ii, 11) In doing this, the misery of which he had *heard* no doubt from his family before—the misery which he had perhaps seen at a distance, the slavery which he may have contemplated in statistics on paper—became to him for the first time a terrible *reality*. He witnessed the oppression of his brethren, he heard their groans, he saw their tears, he watched the cruel oppressions to which they were subjected, he noted the lash of the taskmaster and the blood of the Hebrews; the iron entered his soul, and his faith, humanity, and piety all prompted him to a momentous and noble resolution. He "refused" to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God."

"As an Egyptian, it was evident that he could do nothing. If he remained an Egyptian, if he clung to his court life, if he maintained his position as the adopted son of princess, he must be content to resign the hope of being ever his brethren's deliverer (Acts vii. 25), or of in any way ameliorating their life. The alternative was for him to cast in his lot with them, to make himself one of them, to ingratiate himself with them, so that they should accept him as their leader, and then, when occasion offered, to put himself at their head, and break the Egyptian yoke from off their shoulders.

"The time had arrived, as it arrives to most of us in the course of our careers on earth, to make the great decision—for God and conscience, or against them. On the one side were all the temptations that the world and the flesh can offer: first, 'the treasures of Egypt' (Heb. xi. 26), not the mere gold and silver that would naturally fall to his lot, if he lived on as prince in the royal palace, but the luxury, the culture, the enjoyments of the court, dainty fare, and grand banquets, and the charms of music, painting, and statuary, and sports and hunting parties, fishing and fowling, the chase of the lion and the antelope, and soft sofas and luxurious couches, and rich apparel, and chain and collars, —proofs of the king's goodwill, and all the outward signs which mark off those on whom society smiles from the crowd of those who are of small account; and, secondly, beyond all these, 'the pleasures of sin for a season' (Heb. xi. 25), the seductive charms of a

court circle not over-strict in its morals, the feasts that turned into orgies, the sacred rites that ended in debauchery,—all these spread their tempting array before the lower nature of the prince, now in manhood's full vigour, and drew him towards the life of ease, of pleasure, of softness.

On the other side were conscience, and honour, and natural affection, and patriotism, and that keen longing for the higher and the nobler life which is an essential part of all great natures, and makes itself felt in crises with an irresistible force. The path of self-sacrifice will always attract the heroic portion of humanity, and the choice of such men will always be 'the choice of Hercules.' 'To scorn delights and live laborious days,' is the instinctive resolve of every strong and noble character. . . . He quitted the palace, gave up whatever offices he held, returned probably to his father's house, and therein once more took up his abode, so making it clear to all that he renounced his Egyptian citizenship, and would henceforth only be known as one of the outcast Hebrews, one of the oppressed, downtrodden nation which had for above forty years been suffering the bitterest and most cruel persecution." (Rawlinson's "Moses : His Life and Times," pp. 56, 57)

We may not linger on the incident of the rash and injudicious attempt to which the sight of injustice to one of his brethren aroused Moses. Oppression maketh a wise man mad, and it was in a fit of such temporary madness that he committed the homicide which led to his forty years' exile in Midian. The evil was overruled for good; for that training in Midian was a most essential part of his preparation for the great task that lay before him.

"No region more favourable to the attainments of a lofty conception of the Almighty could have been found. Nature, by the want of water and the poverty of vegetation, is intensely simple, presenting no variety to dissipate and confuse the mind. The grand, sublimely silent mountain world around, with its bold, abrupt masses of granite, greenstone and porphyry, fills the spirit with a solemn earnestness which the wide horizon from most peaks and the wonderful purity of the air tend to heighten. . . . In a city there is no solitude: each is part of a great whole on which he acts, and by which he is himself affected. But the lonely wanderer in a district like Sinai is absolutely isolated from his fellows, and must fill up the void by his own identity. The present retires into the background, and the spirit, waked to intensity of life, finds no limits to its thoughts.

In a lofty spiritual nature like that of Moses, the solemn stillness of the mountains and the boundless sweep of the daily and nightly heavens would efface the thought of man, and fill the soul with the majesty of God. As he meditated on the possible deliverance of his people, the lonely vastness would raise him above anxious contrasts of their weakness compared with the power of Egypt, which might have paralysed resolution and bidden hope despair. What was man, whose days were a handbreadth, and whose foundation was in the dust, before the mighty Creator of heaven and earth—the Rock of Israel? . . .

His wanderings would make him acquainted with every valley, plain, gorge, hill, and mountain of the whole region; with its population, whether native or that of the Egyptian mines; with every spring and well, and with all the

resources of every kind offered by any spot; an education of supreme importance towards fitting him to guide his race, when rescued from Egypt, to the safe shelter and holy sanctuaries of this predestined scene of their long encampment. Still more, in those calm years every problem to be solved in the organization of a people would rise successively in his mind and find its solution; and, above all, his own soul must have been disciplined and purified, by isolation from the world, and closer and more continual communion with God." (Geikie, pp. 111-114)

Whether, during his forty years in Midian, Moses ever contemplated returning to Egypt as Israel's deliverer, we know not. It seems likely, yet there is no intimation of the fact; and the call of God, when it came to him, took him apparently by surprise, and found him unprepared and almost unwilling for the work of confronting Pharaoh, and demanding Israel's liberation. Yet he must often have pondered over their miserable position, and probably also over the Abrahamic predictions and prophecies; and the quiet years of his exile must have been in some respects irksome ones to the active, richly endowed, and highly educated man, accustomed to the court and the camp, and the busy life and refined society of Egypt.

An old Egyptian story of a somewhat similar character, that of Saneha, exists still, which ended very differently from that of Moses. This fugitive received hospitality from the chief of Edom, who gave him his daughter to wife. But though Saneha prospered greatly in his exile, and children were born to him, yet he could find no rest away from Egypt. He was miserable. An irresistible longing to return to his native land possessed him, and at last he manages so to do, and is restored to his place in Pharaoh's court. (This story is assigned to the twelfth or thirteenth dynasty. See "Records of the Past," vol. vi. pp. 135-150.)

The fact that Moses was the Divinely selected deliverer of Israel shows that he not only had the faith and natural and acquired talents which fitted him for the great work which he accomplished, but that God saw that he had also the *heart* for it—the deep, tender sympathy and compassion which would be needed to save *such* a people from such a position, and the self-sacrificing devotedness which would make him willing to risk his life for their sakes. Though modestly and even reprehensibly reluctant to undertake the great task, Moses was not unwilling. The gracious God of Israel saw that only his hope and courage needed strengthening, and promise after promise of eventual success was given for the purpose. He was assured that the time was come for the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, (Gen, xv. 13-16) as to the deliverance of his people from Egyptian bondage, and that he was privileged to be chosen as the instrument by whose means the Almighty would effect the long-predicted purpose.

"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt." (Exod. iii. 10)

Miracle-working power was committed to him as a credential of his Divine commission, and, thus endowed, he returned to the Nile valley, whence forty years before he had fled for his life.

And now he was to enter on an enterprise so gigantic that it may well have appalled him! What was it? To require and compel a proud, selfish, self-willed, and mighty autocrat—one leading passion of whose life was to be the greatest of Egyptian *builders*—to surrender for ever the hundreds of thousands of slaves by whose forced labours only could the great works he had in hand be completed; it was to induce, moreover, a poor, degraded, spirit-broken horde of slaves to rise and seek, at the risk of their lives, liberty and independence; to lead them with their wives and little ones, their flocks and herds, to forsake the rich and fertile land in which they had dwelt for centuries, and exchange it for a wandering life in the wilderness; and this at the bidding of the God they had well-nigh forgotten, and for the sake of a faith they had forsaken; it was to lead these quiet pastoral people, who had never learned the art of war, to the conquest of Canaan; to recover them from the ignorance and idolatry into which they had sunk to a knowledge of Jehovah, and to train and fit them to take their place as a nation selected to be His witnesses in the world.

In order to all this, Moses himself had, in the first place, to break up the home associations of forty years, and to return to a land where his life was forfeited. Nothing less than a Divine revelation,—nothing less than the burning bush, and the words which fell upon his ear from amid its sacred flames,—could have nerved the shepherd of Midian to address himself bravely to the task set before him, and to adhere to it with dauntless resolution for forty long years. It was no youthful enthusiasm which sustained this servant of God. He was already eighty years of age when he entered on his life-work.

On his return journey to Egypt he is met by his brother Aaron, from whom he had for forty years been parted. Had they corresponded from time to time through the caravans constantly passing from Sinai to Egypt and back? Had Aaron been seeking to revive Israel's faith in Jehovah, to keep in mind the Abrahamic covenant, and to impress on the minds of the people that the time of the promise drew near? It seems likely—at any rate, he had no difficulty in putting himself in communication with the people. A kind of tribal organization under elders still existed among the Hebrews, even at the lowest point of their social degradation. "Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel;" and the people believed when they heard that Jehovah had visited Israel, and bowed the head and worshipped.

Then commenced the memorable struggle between the slaves and their oppressors, between the idol-worshipping king and the servants of the true God, ending in the first great national emancipation on record, and in such a vindication of the might and majesty of Jehovah as has never been forgotten from that day to this. It afforded also a lesson of the care of God for His people, and His power to deliver them, which could not be equalled, and which is referred to in all the after-pages of their history. We must not here retrace the thrilling and tragic episodes of the ever memorable Exodus, but we may say that the Bible account of it is so full of local colouring and of harmonies with the time at which it occurred, that its exactitude and truthfulness are self-evident.

The Pharaohs, accustomed themselves to be worshipped and regarded as of

superhuman power, were likely to resent commands issued as by a superior. But the miracles which accompanied the mission of Moses left their rebellion without excuse. Scripture lays the scene of the plagues in Zoan: "Marvellous things did He in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. . . . He wrought His signs in Egypt, His wonders in the field of Zoan." Those plagues had a double object: to manifest to Pharaoh and all Egypt the superiority of the true God over all their false deities, His absolute and almighty power; and to teach Israel not this only, but the covenant relation which Jehovah graciously sustained to *them*, the reality of His merciful interference on their behalf, and His *present* purpose to deliver them and lead them to their long-promised inheritance.

The plagues were very specially directed against the *idolatry of Egypt*. The first—turning the Nile to blood—was conspicuously so, for eminent among the idols of the land of Ham was its one all-important river. A long and elaborate hymn (as old as the days of Moses) is still preserved, in which this god was praised in the chant. It was the great Osiris of Egypt, and the turning of its waters to blood was a public manifestation of the utter folly of the national creature-worship.¹

The first and last verses are as follows:—

"Hail to thee, O Nile!
Thou who hast revealed thyself to this land,
Coming in peace, to give life to Egypt!
Hidden god! who bringest what is dark to light,
As is always thy delight !

* * * * *

O Nile, hymns are sung to thee on the harp;
Offerings are made to thee; oxen are slain to thee;
Great festivals are kept for thee; fowls are sacrificed to thee
Incense ascends unto heaven:
Oxen, bulls, fowls, are burned!
Mortals, extol him! and ye cycle of gods!
His Son (the Pharaoh) is made Lord of all,
To enlighten all Egypt.
Shine forth, shine forth, O Nile, shine forth!

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