

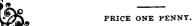
PECULIARITY OF OUR CALLING.

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THE PECULIARITY OF OUR CALLING.

A GREAT principle of God, which runs through all dispensations and times, is the very distinct way in which the eye and hope of the saint is transferred from all here to what is in God Himself, as soon as a condition of things presents itself in this world with which God cannot connect Himself. Of course it will be found more distinct and marked in a moment like the present than in any preceding time.

I shall refer to three instances in this principle in the Old Testament, and contrast them with one in the New.

The first in the Old Testament is to be

found in Genesis xi., xii. Chapter xi. details the history of the building of the tower of Babel, and the consequent scattering of the nations. In the plain of Shinar man set up a would-be independency: God is either refused or unrecognised in His own creation: man's best and highest thought was to enrich and ennoble man—" let us make us a name." The name of Babel marks man's boasted independence, as well as the judgment which fell upon it, "because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth." Now it is connected with this that chapter xii. gives us the call of Abraham; and Stephen, in Acts vii., tells us it was the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.

And here I would seek to press the fact that this call of Abraham was not only away from what was unsuited to the blessed God; it was this, but much more; it was a call into a path and testimony positive in itself,

and not only becoming the person so called, but suited to the blessed God amid a scene of wilfulness and independency of man; even as the apostle tells us in Hebrews xi., "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." It is important to mark the expression, he went out and he sojourned. What else, may I ask, was becoming one who was looking for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God? The maintenance of this distinct and new calling is incumbent on one in a scene marked by Babel; and it is important to note how Abraham, when for a moment he surrenders it, as it were, and in a famine seeks help from Egypt, is obliged to retrac his steps to the very place which marked

at the first. He builds no altar in Egypt, but when he retraces his path and reaches Bethel, there Abraham called on the name

of the Lord. There is another truth of the very first moment connected with this; it is as Abraham maintains his call that he is preserved from the entanglements by which Lot is ensnared; and not this only, but it gives him the position of deliverer of Lot himself. And here let me press, that now the surest way to be superior to the entanglements and enticements of a scene like this, is to maintain the distinctness and peculiarity of our position as heavenly men walking through it. It is only as a people who are connected with Christ outside of it, that we are empowered and qualified to walk apart from it, as well as because ourselves delivered, we are able to deliver

others. I turn now to another illustration of the

principle I have enunciated, in 2 Kings ii. It was a dark moment in Ísrael's history; Baalzebub, the god of Ekron is sought after by Ahaziah, as if there were no God in Israel. Elijah's rapture is to precede the mission of Elisha, but ere the course of the one is closed, and that of the other is opened, there is to be a distinct break with all that which was associated with the Lord's name and power in Israel. Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, Jordan, were spots that could not fail to wake up reminiscences of better days in Israel.

Gilgal was the place of separation to God, but long ere this, Bochim had taken its place.

Bethel, the place of Abraham's altar, of Jacob's altar, had ere this become the scene of Jeroboam's calf, the witness of the people's apostasy from Jehovah.

Jericho, the scene of their first conquest and victory, then destroyed, had been, ere this, re-built. Jordan, representing resurrection-victory, and crossing which they had passed from

the wilderness to the land, is now crossed in a reverse order, putting Elijah and Elisha on the wilderness side of Jordan. How solemn in connection with all this the words of the prophet: "But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba, for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought." (Amos v. 5.) Now it is important to observe, that it is outside this condition of things Elisha is called in his day, ere he is sent back into it as a witness and servant of Jehovah; and therefore it was at the other side of Jordan, when they had crossed over, that Elisha sees

Elijah's rapture, sees him taken away, receives a double portion of his spirit, and Elijah's mantle. Another order of things has opened upon him, another scene has, as it were, dawned upon his eyes: he is now empowered, qualified, equipped to return to a people who have forsaken Jehovah for

Baalzebub, to a scene where the water is nought, and the ground barren. Let me here ask upon whom first does the effect of his power tell itself? Of course upon himself. He rends his own mantle, and sets his face for Jordan; and then, returning to a blasted, blighted place, he becomes, in the power of the thought of what he has received, a contributor to it, diffusing healing and blessing around. What a picture of what the saint now ought to be, one who is in the resources that are in Christ the triumphant One-one who has seen Him taken away, as it were; and more than all this, what you do not find in the picture here, one who is united by the Holy Ghost to Christ where He is—a part of Christ. Wondrous thought! Alas, how little we seem to have any divine sense of what we are in Christ, and the peculiarity and distinctiveness of our path and testimony as such, in a world which has not only refused and rejected, but also crucified and slain our

Lord; and because we have such feeble sense at best of what we are, we are correspondingly short in our apprehensions of the wondrous resources and power which is ours in Christ, to walk through this world for Him.

I turn now to Exodus xxxiii., where we shall find another illustration of the same principle. Then also it was a cloudy and dark day in Israel; the people have made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped a molten image; they have changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass, and have forgotten God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt. What a cry that is which is heard now in Horeb, "These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." What will Moses do? The people of God's elec-

will Moses do? The people of God's election, salvation, preservation, have turned aside from Jehovah. Where can the eye of God rest in a scene like that? and where can Moses turn for solace and repose?

Moses will be no exception to God's principle, of which we speak. If Abraham is called out by the God of glory to be a stranger and witness for God in a day characterised by Babel; if Elisha is the companion and witness of the rapture of Elijah in a day characterised by Baalzebub; so in the day of Israel's calf and Israel's captain-for they said at another time, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." (Num. xiv. 4.)-Moses, in separating from the guilty camp, says to God, "I beseech thee shew me thy glory."

The scene of his hopes and expectations is transferred, and "thy glory" becomes the object and desire of his heart. What else could meet Moses in an hour like this? Where will his eye turn, and where will his heart rest? He says, as it were, I have seen enough of man to turn away from him for ever; "I have seen an end of all perfection," "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

I turn now to the scripture in the New

the same principle, only intensified and extended to the fullest. Why do I say so? Because now the Son of God has been actually cast out and put to death. It is this two-fold blot, if I may so say, upon the page of man's history, that determines the saints' singularity and peculiarity at this present time. Christ has been rejected out of the world, and the Holy Ghost, the witness and evidence of the world's guilt, is dishonoured and denied in the world and by the world. Where will Stephen, the

dishonoured and denied in the world and by the world. Where will Stephen, the witness and servant, turn his eye in a moment like this, and surrounded as he is by the most terrible circumstances? Now, mark it well, for nothing could be more distinct or unique. Previous to this the lingering love of God could thus express itself: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you to heaven, shall so come

in like manner as ye have seen him go into

heaven." Directing, it was in fact, pointing the eye down to earth, and finding for them there even yet, faint though it be, a hope; but is it so now? how changed! "But he [Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." O, what a sight! It is not now heaven opening on any object here: there was once one, and only one object upon whom it did open to Stephen; the Holy Ghost directs the eye, and shews the object there; "he saw the glory of God and Jesus." What a contrast this to the revelation to Moses in Exodus xxxiii. To him God said, Thou canst not see my face; I will cover thee with my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts. But now there is nothing of this; it is the full unveiled glory, and Jesus in it, that meets the eye of Stephen; the first man has been put out in judgment, the second Man has gone up into glory, and nothing is there now to hinder

the eye of the saint and servant from gazing with unveiled face on that blessed One where He is; and not this only, but now to find its home and its rest where Christ is. And here let me press what an immense difference it makes in the path and history of saints, as to whether they are looking for heaven to open upon them, or gazing up stedfastly into that heaven which is open to them. Alas! how little fixedness of purpose, how little vigour of soul, as implied in that word stedfastly; and, consequently, so little of what appears so marked in Stephen's case, and so little of power to persevere. Though surrounded by the most terrible circumstances, suffering at the hands of the very chief of his nation, he can kneel down in all the quietness of confidence and repose,

and spend the moments that are left in praying for those from whom he is receiving all this appalling hate, and commit his spirit to the One whom they had cast out and crucified. Such, then, is the path of the saint and servant of God. The Holy Ghost is as true to-day as He was then in keeping the eye directed to Christ where He is, in order that the saint may be for Christ where He is not; as true in maintaining the saint in practical association with Christ in glory. To sum up, then, the saints, singularity now consists in—

- (1.) Being united by the Holy Ghost to Christ in heaven.
- (2.) Being maintained by the Holy Ghost on earth, in such practical association with Christ, that the eye is turned away from earth to heaven.
- (3.) As a consequence of the former, reproducing Christ down here: being like Christ where He is not; a messenger from heaven, walking in the power of divine resources and heavenly springs, above everything and apart from everything; a light amid surrounding darkness, shining all the brighter because of the darkness; able to help everybody, succour everybody, support

everybody. Does anyone allow for a moment that I am propounding impossibilities? To such an one let me say, If in the One who has gone up above every one and everything, all fulness dwells, and if in the saint here, weak and feeble though he be, the Holy Ghost dwells, is there any limit as to capacity and power for enjoyment personally of Christ where he is, or for distinctness, singularity, and boldness of walk and testimony for Him where He is not?

"We all, with unveiled face beholding the Lord in glory, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18.)