

ANGEL VISITORS IN ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES.

AFTER THE MANNER OF JEREMY TAYLOR.

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him.—Gen. xviii. 1.

The sun, which even at this early period of history had grown old in shining, had now attained the highest point in the heaven, and Abraham was resting from his labours at the door of his tent, in the heat of the day. We may fairly conjecture, (though the inspired historian doth not so inform us,) that this was one of those bright noontides, when the fair face of nature wears that calm expression, which, as well as the stillness of evening, doth comfort the troubled soul, and entice it to the entertainment of devout contemplation, and lead it through the rest of earth, air, water, plant, and animal, to Him that always resteth. Every thing seems to have caught repose, as though overpowered by the heat of the sun, and as the old heathens said, "Pan sleepeth." It was a fit season for a visit from angels.

Since the noontide in our story, the sun in his journey through the heaven hath been witness to many a fair spectacle; and lent his light to many a lovely object, and shone upon deeds which history doth joyfully herald, and gladdened and solemnized many a sad heart. He hath shone on the palaces of kings and on many a brave temple, and the splendor of royal apparel and the brightness of princely beauty have been illuminated anew by his light, without which none might discern them from the commonest clay. He hath lent his brightness to many a noble spectacle of gaudy tilt and tournament, and serious encounter of bitter and cruel foes, and his rays have been reflected in ten thousand ways from glittering shield and spear, and borne witness to the iron firmness of many a lion heart; or with his milder radiance he has entertained the serious soul with the ravishments of that divine harmony of nature which, like the music of the spheres, utters no sounds. But never in all his shining was witness to a fairer scene than that which the inspired penman hath transmitted to us. The messengers of the Lord came to the lowly dweller in tents, and the Majesty of heaven and earth disdained not to converse with poor, fallen humanity. "The Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre." These were the days of open vision. God sent his messenger to bear good tidings to man. He whose dwelling-place throughout all generations is an infinite ocean of glory, is not un mindful of the poor being who some time obeyed him, but hath long since forfeited all title to his favour, and commissioneth his angels to lighten for him the heavy load of adversity, and sweeten the bitter cup of misery, and make straighter and easier the hard road of duty, and direct him in his blindness, and make him duly to estimate the dignity of his nature, and give him great joy for great sadness, and tell him of a future blessed redemption, and lead him from earth to heaven. The flaming sword and the bands of the Cherubim did not quite separate men from sweet converse with their Creator, for He though sinned against still loved them. The infinite Father looked with tender pity on the work of his hands, and in all times and nations found faithful doers of his will, and never suffered them to be without a witness; though some as Abraham and his posterity, he favoured with more abundant measures from that infinite sea of goodness, for reasons which we must acknowledge to be wise and right, though our finite and imperfect understanding may not attain to sound their depths; and the blessed messengers of heaven in their errands of mercy sometimes reached our planet, and the patience of faith was relieved, and the devotion of piety was warmed and elevated and strengthened in the delightful recreations of their divine society. There was no wide gulf fixed between earth and the abodes of the blessed, but there were bright spots in the darkness of the shadow of death which attracted kindred spirits. The angels of the Lord, as well as the angels of Satan, walked up and down in the earth. An instance of this peculiar intercourse is the case before us. Fit meeting in fit season.

But may men no longer converse with God's messengers? Has this bright chain between heaven and earth been severed, and been drawn up again into heaven, like the sheet in Peter's vision, that we should be entertained of it no longer? Truly, ours is not the day of "open vision," yet may we see God openly, will we without fainting employ the appointed instruments. God hath given some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and so on through the whole list of messengers, and to these, if we would be wise, we must give diligent heed, for they must be our angels. The Creator graciously maketh himself known in all time, not to Abraham alone in his tent, not to the Apostle to the Gentiles alone on his road to Damascus; but to all

that have received the rare and excellent title of sons, to all that glory in his fair image, and that have heard the sweet sounds that fell from the lips of Jesus. To all of us he speaks in the clear whisper of the still small voice. God would do us great wrong, should he appear to us before we have made within our hearts that fit preparation, and decked them out with that bright adornment of faith and charity, which shall make them fit mansions for the indwelling of that supreme Majesty, and change us into some faint resemblance of his image, from glory to glory. Of what avail is it to one who has heard Moses and the Prophets, whose ears from his earliest childhood have been charmed with the rich harmony of the divine inspiration of Jesus and his Apostles, and whose heart, harder than stone, has resisted the droppings of the sanctuary, to whom the teachings of the ministers of God have proved as an idle tale and a pleasant song—what advantageth it him though one rise from the dead, what advantageth it him though the angels that visit the earth rest under his roof? Nevertheless for him also, in the infinite mercy of God, the time shall come, when all the tumult and turmoil of this poor, noisy world shall have died away, and the peace of eternity shall reign undisturbed, and then that still small voice shall come to the guilty soul, more dreadful in its calm, unwearied, unceasing repetition than the thunder which makes the solid earth to shake.

Thus hath it pleased God to order his providence towards man. "The pure in heart shall see Him." To the simplicity and sincerity of the believer shall that realizing sense of the existence and presence of God be granted, which, as far as may be upon earth, shall turn the hesitation and anxiety of faith into the assurance of sight. And how should it be otherwise? God is a Spirit, and since he has fashioned us too in his image, and given us some share of the brightness of his glory, so that in our true estate the spiritual nature asserts its rightful authority over the corporeal and perishable, and since he never in his ordinary providence reveals himself but as a Spirit, how can any one who is encrusted with the clayey environments of sense, who has hid the beautiful jewel of a precious, immortal soul in the costly napkins of fine linen which he weaves in his Egyptian darkness, who is serving a cruel taskmaster that is ever crying "give, give," and lading burdens heavy and grievous to be borne, who is gratifying the eye of sense with the splendour and gorgeousness of this world, which seems so bright, but it is at best shining dust, and who differs from the brute only in having superior power to create objects which will increase and confirm his blindness, who in short hath forgotten that God exists, how can he expect to hold sweet converse with him who is essentially spirit, and in whose sight the bright heavens with their shining stars are not clean? He would be deemed highly unreasonable, who should expect to behold the clear light of day while he dwelt in subterranean caverns, and left not so much as a chink for its admission. And how shall he whose home is the earth, who looks for no continuing city in heaven, and who never turns thither a gaze of fond longing and delightful anticipation, except that messengers shall come from that home to visit their kinsman in the strange land of sin? Such an one might have sat with Abraham in his tent at Mamre in the heat of the day, he might have found within his heart some wakeful response which should have made answer to the still voice from without, but the Lord would have appeared unto him.

DREAM.

I slept. Methought the Angel of Death appeared and announced to me that from that sleep I should awake no more on earth. I shuddered. I thought of the pleasant things of this world. All the happiness of my life seemed concentrated in one instant of intense recollection. I thought of the still lake in the bosom of the mountain wood, by which I had been lingering beneath a glowing heaven. I thought of the good enterprises with which I had resolved to fill up a long life. I thought of the fond heart which shared my enjoyments and hope. How could I leave them? Again I remembered that the spirit of beauty pervades God's works, universal as His presence and love. I remembered that in any sphere I might be a minister of divine goodness to my fellow creatures. I remembered that God can soothe the anguish of an innocent heart into a solemn happiness. I looked on the Angel. A beautiful serenity sat on his pale brow. A gentle smile was on his lips. I obeyed. By one brief effort, my soul released itself from the body and followed him into the world of spirits.

Oh how shall I describe the vivid consciousness of being which that instant rushed upon my soul—the glowing thought, the intense feeling, the native activity of a pure spirit. It seemed as if I then began to be. I felt by a new sense the presence of Universal Love. I knew that it was above, below,

around, within me. I knew that it would eternally encircle me. The thought filled me with an infinite happiness—not a tumultuous, intoxicating joy, but a calm, deep, abiding bliss.

Our course seemed to be directed to the sun of our system. As we approached it with inconceivable rapidity, its splendor increased to an intensity which none but spiritual perception could bear,—then it appeared a shoreless ocean of light and glory,—then as we passed, gradually diminished till it shone a beautiful star,—then was lost in a galaxy of innumerable suns of other systems.

We arrived at one of those centres from which the order of the heavenly motions is discerned. A scene of unimagined beauty and glory was before me;—a burning diagram of the heavens traced in lines of living light on the blackness of unlimited space.—Here the broad ring of splendor described by the nearer bodies;—there the tiny line of an orbit far, immeasurably far, in the distance; the eccentric path of the comet; the regular circle of the planets; the dazzling white, the pale blue, the glaring red, each varied tint of the rainbow, all these were around, beneath me, and on every side, interlaced in innumerable mystic mazes, yet presenting to my exalted comprehension a magnificently simple whole.

I now became distinctly conscious of a melody which had been gradually stealing over my spirit. As I listened, it grew deeper and louder, till it filled heaven. All that is solemn, tender, thrilling, elevating, was blended in that rich harmony. There were in it sounds unknown to earthly music, because mortal sense could not comprehend them: some infinitely below the voice of thunder, others as far above the shrillest bird note, yet all exquisitely melodious, forming harmonies hitherto unconceived of, and touching chords in my soul which had never been made to vibrate in its mortal residence. Though so loud and various, it was yet so sweet and simple, that far from confusing me, it gently breathed into me a self-conscious joy.

I attempted to express my gratitude to the Author of these glories. I exclaimed, FATHER!—Each single star in that countless host rung back with a different but all-accordant voice, FATHER!—The music swelled and deepened a thousand times fuller and richer than before, and on that tide of harmony was borne, the Author of the Universe, that name of love, FATHER!

HOPEFUL SIGNS.

There are evidences on every hand, of the decay of those unscriptural notions against which it has been the sacred destiny of Unitarianism to contend. The Trinity is a dogma which every student of ecclesiastical history must know has seen its best days centuries ago, and which may be considered to have been dying out ever since the Reformation. No sect breaks the fetters of creed, without straightway abandoning it. From a popular, open, eagerly paraded article of faith, it has become now a reserved, troublesome, and tolerated relic of belief, which the Church knows not how to give up, nor how to retain. How many orthodox Christians deeply regret, with Professor Stuart, the invention of the term Trinity! And yet who does not see that the term is now pretty much all that is left of the thing, and that had it not become itself, through prayer books and creeds, identified with the language of Scripture, it must needs long ago have fallen out of the faith of the Church! At present, we confess we are more puzzled to see how the cumbrous corpse of this old error is to be disposed of, than fearful of its reanimation. Let this serve as an example. Could the authority of defunct creeds, the charmed influence of formulas out of which all meaning has exhaled, be thoroughly broken, then we should see a hopeful scattering among the dry bones of a middle age theology. At present the trouble and the injury is, that the Church is compelled to maintain a creed which it no longer believes in its original import—to galvanize, with artificial life, a dead body of divinity! This subtracts just so much energy, faith, and interest, from Christianity itself. The consequence is the languid state of real faith.—Thus, the Christian world is seeking relief from its faithlessness in the real revelations of Christianity—in short, in all that we receive on faith—in a devotion to that practical part of Christianity which it requires no faith to receive—the precepts and spirit of the Gospel. This is the secret cause of the earnest philanthropic projects of our times. False theology, a theology not in accordance with the general intelligence of the world, has brought Christianity, as a divine system, into secret discredit. The great body of the clergy themselves are infected with doubt, and can no longer preach their own creeds with a convincing earnestness. They therefore seek relief in what is real to them; and the world and the Church are united in practical reforms. Doubtless, it is the door of

escape opened by Providence, through which the Church is to find faith. The mingling of Christians in practical labors is to prepare the downfall of denominational walls. The leadership of learned priests and fettered clergy is to find a busy rivalry in the practical enthusiasm of earnest laymen. The world is to school the Church into a more business-like reality of thought and speech. And after a due time, when denominational tactics are disconcerted, and ecclesiastical and priestly authority and proscription have fallen into suspicion, then the learning, and wisdom, and purity of Christendom will be called on to furnish a new theology. For it will be found, sooner or later, that Christian faith has higher objects than the reform of society; even the re-creation of the human soul, and its preparation for a higher life in other worlds. The world cannot live and thrive long upon the bare precepts of Christianity or the spirit of Christianity. It must have the faith of Christianity. It must feel the saving power of Christian doctrines, and hopes, and promises, and come into right relations with God and Christ. Then its precepts and spirit will stand some chance of being kept.—New York Unitarian Inquirer.

HINTS TO PARISHIONERS.—No one can know the trials of the ministry, except those who undertake the arduous employment, or those who reside in their families. When we consider how much clergymen's time is occupied by unavoidable company at home, how many special meetings, if they are faithful to their Master, they must attend, what a large portion of their time is occupied in visiting the sick, how much in necessary preparations for the pulpit, and then in addition to all this, what numbers of parochial visits they are required to make, and censured if they do not; it must appear obvious that their task is arduous, their trials peculiarly great. It is a great trial to be obliged to attempt study, when the mind is distracted with the burden of a whole society. It is a trial to be, as it were, compelled to spend that time in visiting, which ought to be devoted to writing and meditation! and then to be censured for negligent and ill-digested sermons; or, if time and pains are taken to write good sermons, to be complained of, for visiting so little. Surely, if Societies of Churches knew the trials of their Ministers, in addition to those personal troubles which are common to all; they would be more tender of them, more fervent in prayer for them. I do not wonder that so many of the labourers in the Lord's vineyard faint before mid-day. They ought, in every way, to be strengthened, and comforted, and encouraged by their people.—Mrs. Huntington.

THINK.—Thought engenders thought.—Place one idea upon paper—another, will follow, still another, till you have written a page. You cannot fathom your mind. There is a well of thought there which has no bottom.—The more you draw from it, the more clear and fruitful it will be. If you neglect yourself, and use other people's thoughts, giving them utterance, you will never know what you are capable of. At first, your ideas may come out in lumps—homely and shapeless—but no matter; time and perseverance will polish and arrange them. Learn to think, and you will soon learn to write; and the more you think, the better you will express your ideas.

CURE FOR A HEAVY HEART.—The following method of "driving dull care away," was recommended by Howard, the celebrated philanthropist: Set about doing good to somebody. Put on your hat, and go visit the sick and the poor; inquire into their wants, and minister to them. Seek out the desolate and oppressed, and tell them of the consolations of religion. I have often tried this medicine, and always find it the best-antidote for a heavy heart.

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS.

We have received another and somewhat lengthened communication from "J. M.," New Glasgow. It is not of a character likely to be interesting to our readers; nor do we conceive it suitable for our columns. We are compelled, therefore, to decline its publication.

To our friends in Carlton Place and Perth, who have mentioned Mr. C.'s name in their letters, we can only say that we have confidence in his integrity. We have not seen Mr. C. for some time; but we have lately been speaking with a friend who has, and who heard from himself that he was placed in an unpleasant position with regard to some parties by the want of punctuality on the part of the person for whom he acted as agent, and to whom he forwarded whatever money he received. We hope for the sake of all parties that proper amends will soon be made.