

This writing shall be an attempt to throw light on this vital question.

The course of the average Christian is not unlike that same wilderness-wandering of the Hebrews, and in both cases the "zig-zagging" is certainly not on the Divine plan, and therefore not unavoidable.

Israel came up out of the Red Sea with a shout of triumph, but the *Te Deum* echoes had hardly died away among the hills when the people began to murmur. Three days' march brought them to a place of brackish waters, which the Lord made sweet for them. Then "He made them a statute and ordinance" which they accepted, and immediately afterward "they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water, and three-score and ten palm trees." The next move was into the wilderness of Sin, where their faith failed again because there was lack of bread. After murmurings, reproof and penitence, food was miraculously supplied, and they went on joyfully awhile. Many a believer wanders through the wilderness quite after that fashion.

This vacillating life not only prevents the development of strong character, but it does infinite harm to others. Reading our lives instead of the Book, the world doubts God's promise and power to save. We are Christ's workmanship, and the natural question is, "Can He not do better than that?" We judge an architect by the houses he has built. Cracked walls show weak foundations. Blackened ceilings advertise defective flues. What must the world think of Christ, judging His work from our poor lives?

God could not have meant to keep the Hebrews winding about for forty years on a journey that might have been made in a few weeks. Code and ritual were given them in the awful solitudes of Sinai; and they were ready for Canaan: then on the borders of the land they doubted whether they could gain or keep possession of it, forgetting utterly that it was not to be theirs by personal conquest, but by Divine conveyance, for the Lord their God would give it to them. In like manner the average Christian fails to enter into the Canaan of rest through unbelief.

Unbelief seldom denies a fact. It throws the strongest light upon obstacles, and casts the promise into the shade. When the Israelites stopped at Kadesh-barnea, it was true that there were before them walled cities against which they could not hope to bring any adequate enginery. A band of encumbered fugitives—they were no match for the Canaanitish armies; yet what had

they to do with those facts when Jehovah Himself had promised to drive out before them the inhabitants of the land? Christians are apt to speak of unbelief as if it were an unfortunate mental peculiarity, something that they cannot quite help. The vicious element in it was illustrated in that Jewish camp, when "all the congregation bade stone Caleb and Joshua with stones," simply because they insisted that God was able to give them the land.

Unbelief unbars the gate to a most unholy brood, because the Christian makes up his mind that there is no use in trying to keep them out. There is no better way for him to live while he abides in the flesh. It is difficult to say just when or how he expects to be made ready for Heaven, since he does not believe either in purgatory or *post-mortem* probation. It is certain that such notions of Christian living carried a little further, would make conversion an unnecessary stringency, and the atonement a tragical blunder.

After that fatal mistake at Kadesh-barnea, the Israelites rallied and attempted to take possession of the land, but the Lord was not with them and they made a disastrous failure. Sometimes God's children set themselves to subdue the evil within, asking God's help, instead of trusting the work of salvation entirely to His power.

By this wilderness life God's children rob themselves of great blessings, their neighbors of the right example, and the Lord of their whole heart's service.

A Japanese tourist, lecturing on America, said of its people: "Their sacred books are the best in the world, yet in no other land is there such a wide difference between precept and practice."

We must believe that God has made better things possible, because He paid an infinite price for our redemption; He has spared no pains to get us ready to live with Him in the abode of the holy.

What man has done men can do. "Enoch walked with God" more than three centuries, "and before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he hath been well pleasing unto God."

"Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Stanley says: "Powerful as is the effect of these words when we read them in their first untarnished freshness, they gain immensely in their original language, to which neither Greek nor German, much less Latin or English, can furnish any full equivalent. 'He was supported, he was built up, he reposed as a child in its mother's arms' (such seems