

lives of the best of men. when they are not, as we say, their proper selves—some long, latent weakness of the heart crops out and spoils the grace and beauty of an excellent character. We cannot tell how it came to pass on that unhappy day with Moses,—whether his increasing age brought on an irritability he failed to guard against, or whether through stress of public business he had neglected to draw from God by means of private devotion, his daily *quantum* of wisdom and strength,—at all events, he was not on this day, in Kadesh, in the last year of his life, quite so calm, trustful, and acquiescent, as thirty-nine years before, when he stood on a projecting crag under Mount Horeb (Ex. xvii. 6.,) and brought forth water for the murmuring people.

On the present occasion, however, he so far acted in unison with the past, as to leave the crowd of eager complaining men, and go with Aaron, his brother, to the door of the tabernacle, where, in sign of submission to God, he prostrated himself on his face before the symbol of the Divine presence. Whatever may have been the mingled character of his feelings as he lay there, part in silence and part in the oral utterance of his prayer, it is certain that he was not as calm, and restful, and happy as he should have been when he, having received instructions what to do, went forth with the sacred rod to give the rebellious spirits drink from the rock before their eyes.

We are accustomed to say, that a man may “keep a promise to the ear and break it to the heart;” and likewise, we know how possible it was for Moses to obey the command of God in the outward act, and violate its spirit in his heart. Somehow,—and here we see the depths, secret depths or weakness in the noblest hearts!—Somehow, *Moses was not pleased with what he had to do*. No doubt he had been disgusted with the rebellious, discontented spirit of the people. An indignation, righteous in its root, though questionable in its development, sprang up in his heart. Yes, even in old age they give him no rest, no comfort! They seem to be little profited by all the impressive lessons of near forty years’ wonders and mercies! They have contracted the habits of spoiled children! A more rigid treatment would serve them right, and would make them wiser for the future! They do not deserve to have water provided for them so readily in response to their ungrateful complaints! Thus, musing in his heart, and most probably speaking with Aaron, according to the tenour of these feelings, the aged man, all white in hair and beard, wends his tedious way to the rock, followed by the eager, feverish throng. By degrees he rises to a slight eminence, and, with soul vexed and annoyed, he turns his eye, charged with anger, upon them, and then, in excess of his commission, pours forth his contempt and loathing in the bitter reproach:—“Hear now, ye rebels, *must* we fetch you water out of this rock?” The passion that filled these words ran into the outstretched arm, and brought down upon the rock the sacred rod, usually charged only with the mighty Will of God, but now charged with the unwilling acquiescence of Moses, the servant of God. Thereupon, there happened a new thing in the history of Israel. The all-sufficient rod was used in vain! The water refused to flow! There was a pause, and still a pause; but no, the water would not come! The gaping crowd of thirsty men stare in mingled hope and despair. Doubts, swifter than lightning, dart through their minds. Their leader, by this awkward failure, has awakened dark thoughts of the reality of God’s presence. Surely the pool has been a delusion!

Mental revolutions in strong and cultivated natures, swayed by a transitory tension of passion, are rapid when the mad feelings are exhausted. The awful silence of that gaping, half-incredulous crowd; the hard refusal of the rock to send forth its waters; and the swift action of a sense of public humiliation, served to break the wicked spell of unbelief in the wisdom of God’s patience; and so, accompanied with a secret flow of penitential feeling, and recovered use of a sobered reason, the arm of the true Moses is now stretched forth to smite the unyielding rock. Faith, blended with full, unquestioning acquiescence in God’s purposes, triumphs—the water flows.