

Our Contributors.

For DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

A New Explanation of the Fall of Jericho.

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It is a trite thing to say, but the fact is none the less to be recognized, that the trend of this age is towards doubt or disbelief in the supernatural. Hence the attempts to explain on natural grounds, or to explain away entirely, the recorded miracles of Scripture.

And this is claimed to be advanced thought. I believe, on the contrary, that this rationalistic tendency is due mainly to ignorance; or perhaps I should say, ignorance allied with conceit. I believe it is largely our ignorance of the laws that obtain in the higher realm of nature that makes the Scripture accounts of miracles in any degree difficult to receive. Just as a fish might well think it impossible for any animal to live out of water, so we might think some of the recorded events of Scripture to be impossible, because we are ignorant of the laws that govern higher states of being than our own.

But we are getting occasional glimpses of these higher laws; and the more of such glimpses we obtain I believe the more reasonable and credible will the miracles of Scripture appear. And if we can adduce such considerations as will render even one miracle reasonably credible, we may well believe that with a larger induction of facts pertaining to the higher realm, other miracles would become credible as well. Yet I believe there will still be room for faith, where induction fails. Not in this life probably, but almost certainly in the next, I believe that the events which are deemed and designated miraculous now, will be seen to be ordinary events in higher modes of being.

A few years ago there flashed on my mind a possible explanation of the fall of Jericho which, so far as I know, had not occurred to others. I gave no publicity to the idea at the time, except a casual reference to it in a sermon. My interest in the matter has just now been revived, because of the Sunday School lesson which lately dealt with this event; and I have thought it may be an aid to faith in the simple written word if I present the matter here in the way it has occurred to myself.

The obvious difficulty is, to account for the walls of Jericho falling down flat, just as the record states. It will not do simply to dismiss the matter as a miracle, on the assumption that all miracles are possible, but to not be explained. That would be a poor argument to address to a sceptic. Miracle or no miracle, we look for an adequate cause to produce a given object. There must have been a cause for this effect. What was it that caused the walls of the city to fall down at a special, given moment? If we cannot answer that question, the account is not necessarily discredited. The event may be one of many which with our present limitations cannot be accounted for. But if we can specify a reasonable, though a supernatural cause for the strange event, then our faith in Scripture records is confirmed.

Two theories have been advanced, to account for the falling of the walls of Jericho.

It may be well to examine these theories, for if either of them is reasonable we need go no further.

One theory is, that the strange effect was produced by an earthquake. Now an earthquake in itself is not a miracle; but it certainly would become a miracle if it were timed exactly to a special occasion, as this theory supposes. To time the earthquake exactly in this way would certainly imply supernatural agency. We are not concerned, however, with the question as to whether the agency was natural or supernatural; these are merely our local, human distinctions. The question is—Is the earthquake theory credible?

Consider what a curious earthquake this would have to be. It would need to be an earthquake extending exactly round the city; coinciding exactly with the city walls; not passing at all beyond the walls to destroy any of the Israelites massed close by the walls; and not overwhelming the city itself, for the Israelites entered the city, put the people to the sword, and carried away the treasures. Now it is likely that an earthquake of such a peculiar pattern would occur? We do not say it would be impossible; but common sense would surely discard such a theory as exceedingly far fetched and improbable.

The other theory is, that the impact of the shout of the army, and the blare of the trumpets, caused the walls to fall down. After compassing the city seven times on the seventh day, the supreme moment came when a big blast was to be blown on the trumpets, and the people were to give a mighty shout; and the theory is, that this impact of sound levelled the walls of the city. And it is strange indeed to note how many circumstances have been collated to support this fantastic theory. The case of a bridge is cited, where the tramp, tramp of an army caused the bridge to collapse. Another bridge, according to the account, was simply fiddled down. The fiddler "played until he struck the keynote of the bridge, and it swayed so violently that the astonished workmen commanded him to stop"! And Professor Tyndall is quoted as saying: "While away up amid the Alpine solitudes of Switzerland a few years ago, I noticed that the muleteers tied up the bells of their mules, and I was told that the protracted, combined twinkling would start an avalanche"! Truly those muleteers must be a more scientific class of men than we had supposed. But I suspect Tyndall must himself have been giving them some free lectures on sound, and so frightened them that they tied up their bells for fear of an avalanche. So true it is that scientific facts unduly strained become the veriest nonsense. But such cases as we have cited, and many more of the same order, have actually been advanced to sustain the theory that the walls of Jericho collapsed by the impact of sound. And a late explorer of the ruins of Jericho has found the remains of a mud wall which he thinks was the very wall that collapsed; and the fact that it is a mud wall is worked for all it is worth in support of this famous theory. Surely I need say no more to show that the theory in question is the wildest dream.

Is there any other reasonable view, then, that meets the case? I think there is. I

shall state it, and try to support it by a few considerations partly derived from reason, and partly from revelation.

My view is, that these walls of Jericho collapsed by direct angelic agency. I believe the angels of God were there, co-operating with the Israelites; that they were waiting for the critical, appointed moment; and that when the moment came they simply pushed down the walls. Does that theory look fantastic? Possibly it may in some degree, at first sight. But wait and see what may be said in support of it.

We have first the general fact that the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation?

Along with that we have the more definite statement that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." This is no mere rhetoric. We have a glimpse of these angels in that scene where they surrounded Elisha. The prophet was self-possessed and calm because his eyes were opened to see these angelic hosts. The young man who was with him saw only the hosts of Syria, and was in a panic of fear. But when his eyes were opened in response to Elisha's prayer, he saw that "the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Now it is a marvellous thing that these fleshly eyes were even once opened to see the invisible. But that one sight of those angelic warriors ought to reassure our faith in their presence for all time. And if they were even needed for defence, surely they were needed here at the taking of Jericho. The Israelites, having just emerged from their desert wanderings, had no appliances for the taking of a fortified city like this. But the angels of the Lord were there, acting in concert with the Israelites, and when the appointed moment came, they simply threw down the walls. It is true that "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Yes, the faith of the Israelites was the procuring cause of the victory; but the physical act of the angels was the ultimate cause. And the "angels that excel in strength" were well able to do this, as will appear later. Whether the walls were built of clay or of granite, God's angels could easily push them down.

Then besides this general angelic interference, both promised and vouchsafed as we have seen, there was a special promise of angelic help given to Israel for the express purpose of driving out their foes.

"Behold," said God, "I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared." Then more specifically: "I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite." We discern the fulfilment of this promise in the mysterious collapse of Jericho. The promised angel was there, doubtless in command of legions more, and at the appointed time invisible hands pushed down the walls. That not one angel only, but many, were concerned in this operation, is illustrated by the case of Elisha who was surrounded by hosts of them, as well as by the case of our Lord, for whose defence twelve legions of them were close at hand.

Then this probability becomes almost a certainty when we remember that just before the investment of Jericho, Joshua had a vision of an angelic warrior who proclaimed himself to be the captain of the Lord's hosts.

We read that "it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him, with his