

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US.

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Various are the ways in which, in times past, God has spoken to His people, revealing to them a knowledge of His will and character for their guidance and safety. Sometimes He has spoken to them by visions, sometimes by dreams, sometimes by audible voices, at other times by suggesting to their minds the thoughts which He desired them to think, or the particular course of action which He would have them pursue. God still speaks to His people, and we purpose pointing out some of the ways in which He still reveals Himself and His will to us.

1st. God speaks to us through nature. Nature, in fact, is the oldest revelation which God has made of Himself to man. Older than the revelation which He is represented as making to man in the gray dawn of creation, when He spake to him as friend to friend, is that which He has made in the starry heavens above and the rock-built earth beneath. God has written His name in indelible characters on the face of nature. The works of His hands teem with evidences of His power, His wisdom and beneficence. In the succession of day and night, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, in the bountiful provision made for the sustenance of the myriad forms of life which throng our earth, from the animalcule which swarm the water-drop up to man, the "head and crown of things," in the wonderful adaptations and correlations which pervade nature to whatever department we direct our observation, the wisdom and goodness of an all-wise Creator are revealed.

2. God speaks to us by conscience. In every human heart the still, small voice of conscience bears testimony to the existence of a God, and of a right and a wrong, uttering forth its word of approval or condemnation. In every human breast there is a tribunal where conscience sits as judge, pronouncing decision on every thought we think and every deed we do. It is true that conscience has, to some extent, shared in the disorder and ruin which sin has introduced into our world. It is not an infallible guide, and no longer points with unerring precision to the pole of duty. Even in the case of the believer, whose heart has been more or less purified by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and who, we will suppose, has made larger attainments in the divine life, the remaining indwelling corruption of heart, will, to some extent, dim the light of conscience, and cause her sometimes to point in a wrong direction. The fact remains, however, that conscience, when educated and enlightened, does give us some definite knowledge of God, of our duty toward Him and toward one another, and amid the universal wreck and ruin caused by sin, acts as God's vicegerent upon earth, attests the existence of a law of right and wrong, and foreshadows a judgment to come.

3. But God speaks to us by His Word. That Word is the expression of His will. As the spoken word is the expression of the thought or feeling, so is the divine Word the expression of God's thoughts and feelings towards us. Under the old dispensation the moral law was, to the Jew, an expression of God's mind. In it we see clearly reflected His stainless righteousness and impartial justice, His character as a sin-hating and sin-punishing God. To us that moral law still speaks of God. What is merely civil or ceremonial in it has no practical significance for us, but what is *moral* remains unchanged from age to age, and shall address itself to man, so long as he has a moral nature; and what the moral law was under the Old, the Sermon on the Mount is under the New Dispensation. In the latter more clearly even than in the former, God's mind is expressed, man's duty towards Him and towards his neighbour declared, and the spiritual significance and depth of the law unfolded. And this leads us to observe that the revelation which God has given of Himself in His Word is not speculative or scientific, but *spiritual*. This Word was given to us not so much to teach science as to unfold the facts and laws of our spiritual nature, to reveal to us the will and character of God, our duty towards Him and towards each other, to declare His infinite love in opening up a way by which we may escape the evil consequences of our sin. While, however, its object is not specially to teach science, it

cannot contain any truth antagonistic to true science. Between His word and His works, between the truths of Scripture and those of science, there should be, and is, perfect harmony, for both are of God. Any seeming antagonism must arise either from a faulty interpretation of Scripture or nature. Such being the case, the remedy is apparent. By a more faithful interpretation of Scripture on the one hand, and a deeper study of nature on the other, would reconciliation be effected. If this were done, the antagonism between Scripture and science, of which we sometimes hear so much, would, we feel convinced, disappear. A beautiful harmony would be established between them, both would appear to be but parts of a complete and symmetrical whole; science would then bring her richest spoils and lay them upon the altar of religion, while religion would hallow and consecrate all the discoveries and achievements of science.

4. God again speaks to us by science. Science, to the devout mind, is a revelation from God, and what are called the laws of nature, which it is her work to unfold, are simply expressions of His ever-present will. A law in itself would be quite powerless to accomplish anything. It is merely a name to denote a uniform sequence among phenomena. It necessarily implies the existence of a divine force underlying it, ere any effect could be produced. The various *discoveries* of science, too, speak of God. The steamships which ply on our rivers, lakes and seas, defiant of wind and wave and tide; the swift-flying trains which gallop over the country, binding its most distant parts together; the electric wires which girdle our globe, along which, with the swiftness of lightning, run the winged words; the numerous time and labour-saving machines which mow down our harvests and gather them in as if by magic; the telephone by which men situated scores of miles from each other are able to hold converse with each other, and all the various discoveries which adorn our age, reveal not only the skill of man, but the infinite goodness of God, in having hidden these truths in nature, and given man the skill whereby he is able to discover and make them subservient to his comfort and well-being.

5. But God speaks to us by Jesus Christ. In Him we have the completest expression of God's will and character ever made to man. "God who in times past spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Through Him, the Highest unveils Himself. He speaks to us by His words—those words, so brimful of love and mercy and sympathy. He speaks by His life—that life of wondrous power and purity, revealing to us His Father's will, and setting before us a perfect copy for us to imitate. He speaks by His death, that tragic death, yet in the darkness of its tragedy so bright with blessing to sin-stained man, so radiant with the light of love and mercy, so instinct with life to the sin-dead soul. He speaks by His resurrection, revealing Him to us as victorious over sin and sorrow and death, and opening up before the eye of our faith a future bright with a glorious immortality. He speaks to us by His ascension, affirming the completeness of His victory, and assuring us that He ever liveth to make intercession for us. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ surpasses all previous revelations, whether given in nature, conscience, or science. True, we may obtain some knowledge of God and of our duty to Him and to each other from these sources. From a study of nature around us and conscience within us, we may, no one will deny, acquire some knowledge, true, so far as it goes, of a Law-giver, and of that law of right and wrong which He has engraven more or less clearly on every heart; but such knowledge is but small and imperfect; the light of nature or conscience is but dim and uncertain. Reason and conscience have both shared in the general wreck and disorder which sin has introduced, and can no longer claim to be faithful, much less infallible, guides to truth. They both need enlightenment ere they can impart that knowledge of God or duty which is necessary to our highest well-being. Such enlightenment is furnished by the revelation given us in Jesus Christ and His Word. The one is the starlight, the other is the sunlight, the one is the mere natural eye, the other is that eye aided by the telescope. Look up, for instance, with the naked eye, at the blue vault of heaven by night, and how erroneous the conclusions you would draw. The stars seem like mere points of light scattered over the wide expanse of space; they seem at no great distance from you, nor do they appear to differ very much from each other

in form or in magnitude; but look through the glass of the telescope, and how changed their appearance! Your previous misconceptions are rectified, your knowledge is enlarged, a new world is opened up to your gaze. They no longer appear mere specks of light, but globes vaster than our own, rolling through the immensity of space, situated at immense distances from us, revolving around suns brighter and more glorious than ours. Now, what the telescope is to the astronomer, the revelation of God in Christ is to the Christian, and by how much superior the telescope is to the unaided human eye, is the light of that revelation to the light of nature or conscience. By means of it our knowledge of God, of our duty towards Him and towards each other, becomes indefinitely enlarged. Not only is our knowledge of present human duties extended, but to the eye of our faith a new world is opened up, "life and immortality" are brought to light and a whole realm of spiritual truth discovered, which the light of nature or conscience would be quite powerless to unfold.

MANSES—A SUGGESTION.

What a beautiful sight it is to see in Scotland the manse almost always associated with the church. There is, perhaps, no country where the Christian ministry are better sustained, the average salary being far in advance of what it is in Canada. Our congregations would do well to imitate the churches in Scotland in either providing manses or paying the house rent as an equivalent. In country districts ministers should receive \$700 or \$800 and a manse, or \$100 as an equivalent; in villages and towns, \$800 to \$1,200, and a manse or \$200; in cities, \$1,600 to \$2,000 and upwards, according to the size and means of the congregation, and also a manse or \$400 as house rent. Efforts should be made to bring up the churches to this standard; and even with this, we would be behind the churches in Scotland, for besides paying higher salaries they almost invariably have manses, while only about one-fourth of our ministers are so provided. While the Levites of old did not receive the usual allotment of land with the other tribes, they received forty-eight cities with their suburbs, and a very liberal provision was made for them besides. And God enjoined that their portion be given them regularly, "that their hearts might be encouraged in the law of the Lord." A very special blessing was promised to the people of Israel when they thus did their duty to the Levites. Now, the spirit which dictated these arrangements is still the spirit of the great Head of the Church, and therefore His people may expect His blessing when thus kindly caring for the comfort of His servants.

MARRIAGE WITH A DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER.

The subject of marriage with a deceased wife's sister is a vexed question that is likely soon to come prominently before the country, and the question arises, What is our duty, as a Church, in the case? Are we to bring such influence as we can as a Church to bear on our legislation or not?

What saith the Word on the matter? If God condemn, let us be bound by "Thus saith the Lord," whatever it may be. Now, I am not aware that anyone maintains that such unions are clearly condemned in the Word. But if the Word of God does not condemn, men with the Bible in their hands will naturally ask, What right has the Church to condemn that which God condemns not? The Church suffers in their estimation by imposing that on them which God does not impose. A large part of the Christian world allow it, and unless its scriptural authority for it be very clear it is not the duty of any one branch of the Church to forbid what God forbids not.

Many good men, it may be, fear the consequences to morals. If there be danger to morals, the danger will not be obviated by trying to coerce men's consciences in ways not sanctioned by the Word. Men do form such unions, and I am not aware of any evil consequences following. Some excellent men and women in this matter are transgressors. Take one case with which I am well acquainted as an illustration. A man whom I know well was left a widower with motherless children. He married their mother's sister, and now the aunt of the children becomes their mother as well. She is not the less kind a step-mother because the children that came under her care are her sister's children. She is now a mother