

THE POETRY OF THE BIBLE.

BY JOHN READE.

(Concluded.)

I have characterized this description of God's appearance as "awful"; and it just occurs to me how "awfully" feeble that adjective has become by constant and ridiculous use in speaking, of which use my employment of the adverb is an example. Happily the noun has escaped this intercourse with frivolity, and I know of no word so expressive in the highest sense of things divine as the word "awe." The use of the adverb and adjective which I condemn must be comparatively modern. In Tate and Brady's version of the Hundredth Psalm occur the words "awful mirth" as descriptive of the feelings with which the singing of God's praises should be accompanied, and this "awful mirth" (though the former word is not found in the original nor in our English translation)—this highest gladness or happiness, united with highest reverence—this union of love and veneration gives us as correct an idea, perhaps, as we can gain of those sentiments which were felt by Moses as he "hastened and bowed himself and fell upon his face and worshipped."

A still more beautiful account of the manifestation of the Most High, one which seems a plain foreshadowing of His coming whom children worship as "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," is that in which God made His presence known to the weary and despondent Elijah:

"And lo! Jehovah passed before him!
A great and violent tempest,
That rent the mountains and the rocks,
Went forth before Jehovah,
But Jehovah was not in the tempest
And after the tempest came an earthquake:
But Jehovah was not in the earthquake.
And after the earthquake a fire:
But Jehovah was not in the fire.
But after the fire a still, small voice.

And when Elijah heard the voice,
He wrapt his face in his mantle,
And went and stood in the door of the cave,
And lo! there came a voice unto him
And said "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

In the whole range of sublime poetry, ancient or modern, in Homer, Virgil, Dante or Milton, there is nothing to be compared with the grand simplicity of these words. It is inimitable in its awe-inspiring, heart-melting power and beauty.

The vision of God in Ezekiel, heralded by the whirlwind from the north, as also that of Zechariah, are too terrible for thought—it is impossible adequately to speak of them. Of the same nature is the answer of the Most High to Job and his friends—all mistaken in the estimate of their own position and of God's wisdom and power. Of this answer Job himself had an anticipation long before. I can well recollect that when I first ventured to write an essay on the "Poetry of the Bible," I was strangely affected by this earlier vision. Being engaged during the whole day, I had to study and write till a late hour. One night I came, in the course of my work, to a consideration of the Book of Job. I reached the latter part of the fourth chapter, "In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me and trembling which made all my bones to shake." A strange, indescribable feeling came over me, which increased as I continued to read, till at last I felt an awe which rendered me powerless. What could I say of such a phenomenon? I threw aside my pen and tried to think, to analyze, to criticise. Vain attempt! After some time passed in awestruck reverie, I retired to rest; but, till I fell asleep, the words haunted me. About the middle of the night I awoke. A vision passed before my face; the hair of