

The Visitor's Pulpit.

Divine Interpositions.

From a Sermon suggested by the Lord's Day "Princess Alice," delivered on the morning of September 8, 1878, by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."—Psalm xviii. 16.

We are not as those who believe in two co-existent forces, each supreme, one of whom shall create disasters, and the other shall distribute blessings. The prince of evil is, according to our faith, subordinate to the great Lord of all. Thus saith Jehovah, by the mouth of his servant Isaiah, "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." He reigneth in the calm summer's day, and gives the precious fruits of harvest, but He is equally present and regnant in the hurricane which destroys the vessel which desolates. His providence speeds the ship to its desired haven, but it is equally His providence which sinks the barque and its mariners to the bottom of the sea. Everywhere is God, and in all things His hand is present; in the things which seem to us to be evil as well as in the events which appear to us to be good, God is at work. If not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father, we are sure that no great calamity can befall us apart from Him. He is not far from us in our deepest sorrow, and however we may trace a calamity to the carelessness or the mistake of men, these are but the second causes, and we see behind all mere detail, the permit of the Lord. If it were not so, mourners would be deprived of the greatest reason for submission, and the surest source of consolation.

We freely admit that we do not understand this, and therefore we do not attempt to explain it; but we believe and adore. Happily we need not attempt to justify the ways of God to man, for He asks no defence at our hands, and deigns not to give any account of His matters; this only is our resolve, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Now, the question which has very naturally suggested itself to many, is this,—If there be a providence, why does it permit these terrible evils? It is dreadful that human life should be lost on such a scale; God is omnipotent, nobody doubts that; why then does He not interfere to save? That shall suggest to us the first point of our discourse this morning.

First, then, MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITIONS IN THE CALAMITIES OF LIFE ARE NOT TO BE EXPECTED.

I am not standing here as an advocate for God, to defend His character, because He does not thus interpose, for to objectors His sole answer is, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" If you will accuse your Maker He will not care to answer you. You who have forged the accusation may fashion an answer, if it seem good unto you. Yet there is a difficulty which none can deny, and that difficulty lies in a fact. Why is there any evil at all, seeing that the good God is almighty, and sits upon the throne? This is the old puzzle which none can answer. The negro put it in a very natural form when he asked the missionary, if God be so much stronger than the devil, why does He not kill him? Just so; this is the end of his mischief. But who can answer it? A fool may raise in an hour more objections than the wisest man could remove in a century. Now, the cleverest theory will not alter facts. What you and I may think, is a very small matter compared with what really is, and it is quite certain that there is moral evil in the world, and that there is also a God; that there is physical evil in the world, and yet love is supreme; and that the Almighty permits fire and water to destroy His creatures, and does not interpose to rescue them, and yet He is full of tenderness and pity. There are some of course, who will dare to condemn their Maker, and call Him by I know not what horrible names. I have even heard such a word as "monster" hissed from between proud lips. Again I say it is not worth our while to answer such objectors, because such persons are not pervious to explanation, nor willing to receive it; and then, again, it is a small matter to the Most High what such persons may think of Him. He does as He pleases and asks no leave from His creatures.

But now just for a minute let us consider the question which we trust is modestly proposed. Suppose that every time a great danger threatened we might expect a miraculous interposition from heaven, what then? The supposition is not absurd, for there might be such an interposition; we must admit the possibility, since God is almighty. The train is thundering along the iron way, it will dash into another, and many lives will be destroyed, but if the Lord willed it He could put His hand upon the engine and stay it in its full career. The vessel freighted with eight hundred lives is about to sink; but if the Lord willed it He could buoy it up in the hollow of His hand; yet he does not move; the iron road is strewn with the dead and the river is gorged with corpses. We do not know all the reasons for this non-interference, yet we think we can see a little, which little we will think upon. For, first, such interpositions would change the whole arrangement of the world; it would not be the same place at all. The Lord has made this world and he governs it by certain fixed laws. If those laws were variable and continually being changed, it would be another form of creation altogether

and man had need to be another creature. His physical, moral, and even spiritual condition would be changed from top to bottom. It was the Lord's arrangement that He should put forth His power in certain ways which we call the laws of nature, and by that arrangement He abides. There is no such independent force as "nature," as some are always dreaming; nor is there any energy in mere laws of nature, apart from God's own power. You may write all the laws you like, but there is no power in the laws, there must be a power in the king to carry out the laws. All power emanates from God, be it what it may; He is the source and fountain of all the forces that operate throughout creation; but he has been pleased from the beginning to determine that His power shall usually go forth in certain ways and under fixed laws and regulations. He can suspend these laws when He pleases; He can quench the violence of fire, stop the mouths of lions, make water stand upright as a heap; but He has not often done so, and in these days He never does so. I think we can in a measure see why; for if such were the case continually, the whole plan and purpose with which He made the present world would have been abandoned, and another mode of power would have taken its place.

Recollect, too, that whatever the plan of God is, it is now being carried out under the shadow of the Fall. There had been, I suppose, neither pain nor sickness, nor sighing, nor death, had there been no sin. If it had been possible for a race to have multiplied from the glades of Eden, and to have gone forth into a wider Paradise as pure and holy as Adam first came from his Maker's hands, I can believe that there would have been no famine nor war, no catastrophe of shipwreck by sea, nor of accident by land; but however multitudinous the human race might have become, its records would have been all unstained with agonizing details, such as those which blacken the broadsheets of to-day. But, alas, man has fallen, and to a race in such a condition, it would not be consistent that everything should be of sunlight and summer; there must now be heard the roar of the storm and the cry of death, as the fruit of sin. Render catastrophe impossible and what mark would there be of divine displeasure for man's revolt? Wherein indeed would sin differ, as to its consequences, from obedience and holiness? Think for a little and you will see reasons for God's staying His hand from rescue.

Furthermore if interpositions were given to save the lives of godly men alone, as some would have it, then this world would become the place of judgment, which it is not intended to be. It still remains among persons as a superstition, that if there is an accident and people suffer, there must have been some special sin in the victims of the disaster; and yet the Lord has told us that the men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were not sinners above others, and the Galileans who were slain by Pilate were not sinners above other Galileans. I pray you dismiss from your minds the idea that a sudden death is necessarily a judgment. Never draw any inference from the destruction of a building, or the wreck of a ship, or an explosion, or aught of that nature, as to the character of the persons who perished, for if you do you will be guilty of cruel injustice. What if some gracious man be spared, ascribe the deliverance to Providence, but do not suppose that those who perished were less gracious than he. You shall find that men of bad character sometimes escape, where saints are left to die. When Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and sit upon His great white throne,—then will He separate the tares from the wheat, but now they are to grow together. Then He will put the goats on the left and the sheep on the right, but for the time present they feed in the same pastures. One event happeneth to them all; as it happeneth to the fool so happeneth it also to the wise. This is not the land of judgment, but of long-suffering; not the place wherein God gives sentence, but waiteth patiently while. There is a judgment of nations in the world but that of individuals, with rare exceptions, is reserved for the final account.

Beloved, note once again, if God were to interpose in the case of all calamities, it would involve many evils. For, observe, if next year the mass of farmers should refuse to sow the fields, if over whole nations the land should be left to produce only weeds, there would be great scarcity of corn. Suppose that in such cases God should interpose and cause harvest to suddenly grow by miracle, that our teeming millions might escape starvation, what would be the consequence? Why, it would encourage idleness everywhere; men would say, "The Lord is too good to let us starve, and therefore we may allow the plough to rust, and dance away the hours." Would that be well? Suppose again that when a contagious disease comes into a district the Lord miraculously prevented it from being fatal, although the carelessness of many may have left fever-lairs in rotting, overcrowded houses, enough to pollute the very air. Suppose, I say, that we all neglected sanitary laws, and then knew that the merciful God would not let the people die of fever or of cholera, then the filthiness of our cities would increase till they became huge dunghills, and man, who is great enough now at polluting rivers and defiling God's earth in every imaginable way, would go on to turn the earth into one monstrous globe of rotteness. But now even pests, and plagues, and fevers, have their good side; they are watchmen to sound an alarm, prophets to give us warning. They arouse man to discover the laws of his being, and thus they benefit the race. Suppose again

that whenever there is a likelihood of there being an accident, God were to send an angel at once to interpose and avert the collision or the wreck, what would happen? Why then, of course, every railway and steamboat company might go in for accidents in any quantity, seeing they would be harmless, and might even become attractive. There would no longer be reason for keeping a watch at the ship's bow, and no necessity for brakes and signals. There would no longer be any need to be careful about human life, but we might be each one as reckless as he pleased, and gratify himself with experiments which could not end fatally. Such a state of things would destroy many of the virtues, and render many vices harmless. I cannot suppose a world regulated upon such a system; I can imagine God divinely interposing and suspending His own laws now and then, as He pleases, for some great purpose of instruction; but it appears wise and good for all concerned that, having made man what he is, the Creator should rather leave him to take the consequences of violating the fixed laws of matter, than make those laws variable and uncertain.

Again, dear friends, divine interposition of a miraculous sort would not be attended with the advantage to the ungodly which we might suppose, because if there were miracles of mercy on behalf of God's people, to snatch them from a watery grave, or from the devouring element of fire, or from the deadly consequences of a collision then we might expect to have, and naturally should have miracles of judgment, too. If you get into the wilderness, and manna falls from heaven, and water leaps from the rocks, remember you have also entered a land where the earth opens to swallow up Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and where the very sand breeds fiery serpents to sting to death the rebels against God. You cannot have the mercy-wonder interposing without having the judgment-wonder side by side with it, and on the whole it is a more benignant mode of dealing on God's part to let sinners alone, and let one event happen to all men for a while, because the long-suffering of God leadeth sinners to repentance, and the sorrow that falleth upon the child of God is blessed to him.

Neither would it be so great a gain to the godly, as some imagine, to have their lives spared in time of danger. We have to die some day, brothers and sisters, and we have nothing here below which might make us anxious to postpone the hour of departure. It is as well to die one way as another; at least there is small choice in the modes of death. If one was asked by what death he should glorify God, he might be long in choosing, and probably would then choose that which would be most painful. Some are afraid to go to sea lest they should be drowned, and yet there is little reason for the fear. When a captain was asked whether he was not afraid to go to sea, said "Not at all." "But your father was drowned, captain?" "Yes." "Your grandfather was drowned?" "Yes." "Your brothers have been drowned?" "Yes." "Are you not afraid to go to sea?" "No," said he "not at all; for I may ask you the same question. Your father is dead?" "Yes." "Where did he die?" "In his bed." "And his father?" "In his bed." "And your brothers, where have they died?" "In their beds." "Are you not afraid then to go to bed?" Certainly we must die somewhere or other, and we shall not die one single minute before the ordained period. I am a sufficient believer in predestination to feel sure that every bullet has its billet, and that no death can befall the man whom God ordains to live. God hath appointed all things, and His people are safe everywhere, whether they die or live.

PROVIDENTIAL INTERPOSITIONS ARE FREQUENT AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.

They can often say, "He sent from above He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Divine interpositions come in the way of deliverance from floods of troubles. Have you not experienced them? How strikingly has God delivered some of us! What remarkable preservations of life we have enjoyed; not miraculous certainly, but full of wonder for all that. We have as much reason to praise God for our deliverance as if the laws of nature had been suspended, for we have been quite as completely preserved. What helps we have had in the hour of sorrow, when one after another of our beloved have been taken from us, or when they have gone to the very edge of the grave yet have been spared to us. How often have we been helped in business troubles and saved from impending failure or serious loss. In times of slander, when our character has been belied, how graciously has God brought to light our innocence! I say again, not by miracle, but yet very marvellously has our God delivered us. In answer to prayer God worketh in His own way for the good of His people without stopping one single wheel of providence; without violating on single law of nature, God is able to work the same end as we sometimes wish He would work by a miracle. He will not quench the violence of the flame, but yet a precious life shall be snatched from a burning house. He will not prevent the water from drowning, and yet in how many cases in answer to prayer have vessels been saved and the lives of men preserved by unexpected incidents! He will not stop the ordinary run of business, nor alter the way in which the world goes on, and yet He knows how to help the poor, and to bless the struggling tradesman, and to bring up the righteous from deep distress. See how the Lord allows all the forces of nature to drive on in their ordinary course, and yet the outcome of it all is that His servant is delivered and his prayers answered.

God doth this by very varied ways. We have known some who have been brought out of deep waters by having health suddenly restored to them, or by having the health of those upon whom their maintenance depended renewed. This is God's mercy, and let Him be praised for it. Sometimes circumstances have greatly changed; a man has been going down hill for years as to his business, but something quite unexpected has happened, and he has just as gradually risen to a position of comfort. My friends, believe in the unexpected. It was about to utter a paradox, and say expect the unexpected. Believe that God will do for you something which you know nothing about. The Lord always has a plan in reserve. You think he has reached his last, and you will be left to perish; but it is not so. At the right moment He will bring forth some new and surprising stroke of wisdom, which He did but postpone to the particular moment, so that when He performs it, and draws His servant out of deep waters, the praise and the glory will be more fully redound to His name. We have known the Lord save His servants in the hour of trouble by touching the hearts of their enemies; those that were most unkind and cruel have suddenly become the most generous and thoughtful. At other times enemies have died, or have been put to confusion, like the wicked Haman when he plotted the destruction of the Jews. The Lord has hanged up Haman that His chosen might be delivered. Mordecai has gone from the king's gate to the king's house, and Haman has ascended from the king's table to the king's gallows. I cannot instance all the ways in which the Lord makes clear the pathway of His people; but this I know, that often in our lives some of us have had to pause and sing, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."

Some will not see the hand of God; but I warrant you, brethren, those who have been delivered out of the deep waters will see it. Their experience teaches them that God is yet among us. Others may talk about "laws of nature," as if God were gone to sleep and had left the world wound up like a watch to go without Him; but those who have been in sorrow affliction and tribulation, and have been brought out therefrom, will forever bless and extol Him who is a very present help in trouble. Yes, my brethren, the way which we have come hitherto is as full of God as the city is full of men. There are deserts which the foot of man hath never trodden; but there is no wilderness where the foot of God hath not been. What say you, my beloved friends, you are not fanatics, neither has the enthusiasm of devotion carried you out of your minds; but are you not conscious of distinct providential deliverances? "Conscious of them," say you, "indeed if we did not speak of them with joy and thankfulness, the very stones on the street would cry out against us for our wicked silence. Many and many a time hath He sent from above, and rescued us. We are, like Moses, drawn out of the waters; and like him we would be servants of the Lord."

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