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STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

XI. THE WORKINGS OF PROVIDENCE.

Text.—"This is the Finger of God." Exodus viii. 19.

[Book of the Month: "From the Garden of Eden to the Crossing of Jordan," by Sir William Willcocks.¹=W. Other reff. Hastings' Dict. Bible.=HDB. Naville's "Archaeology and the Bible."=B. "Flinders Petrie's Egypt and Israel."=P. Brugsch's "Egypt under the Pharaohs."=E.]

God's voice is often not listened to, because men regard it as simply the echo of the sounds of nature. Men expect the "Finger of God" to be as plain as the hand that wrote upon the plaster in Belshazzar's palace (Dan. v. 5). Christ Himself called the Holy Spirit the Finger of God (cp. St. Luke xi. 20. St. Matt. xii. 28). Once before in these notes we studied Professor Naville's interpretation of the "finger of God" in Exodus xxxii. 16, xxxi. 18, as the "sacred script." This month Sir William Willcocks' book offers some hints on Providence and Miracle. We trace the Exodus on its human side to four causes, and suggest the way in which the hand of God, nevertheless, was at work unseen. Miracle is not always merely the marvel of an occurrence, but the timing of it.

1. THE SPIRITUAL UPLIFTING OF THE HEART OF MOSES.—This came from the unfolding of the name and character of the God he had already learned something of from his mother. The name Jehovah and its meaning came to him in the desert, at the burning bush, in contrast with "the worship of Egypt's bleating gods" (W. 55). "To Moses the discovery of this name, known to Abraham, as we can see in Genesis, was a revelation indeed; in its strength he hurried from Horeb to the court of Pharaoh. A weak and diffident man had been changed into a real hero" (W. 56). This is God's finger.

2. THE DETERMINATION CREATED BY HARDSHIP IN THE ISRAELITES.—"Israel was chafing and restive under its long bondage. The taskmasters were severe but not absolutely unreasonable

¹ Published by E. & F. N. Spon, 57 Haymarket, 5s. A series of connected notes by the distinguished engineer. Interesting, suggestive, sensible: will not satisfy all, but worth studying.

in their so-called demand for bricks without straw, as the records have represented. I have picked out of old ruins in the Delta scores of bricks which contained nothing but straw daubed round with mud. These had undoubtedly been made by captives who were contemplating revolt. The taskmasters had furnished a sufficiency of straw for a certain tale of bricks. The captives had hurriedly wasted the straw and delivered a totally inadequate number of bricks. They were beaten and forced to collect stubble and complete their tasks. Captives who acted in this way had begun to feel that they were not utterly helpless" (W. 56). Naville bears out the same thought. Egypt was exasperating her dangerous settlers. Much lies hidden "in the words 'which knew not Joseph.' In Egyptian 'ignore' (khem) has often a hostile sense" (N. 90). "Evidently the persecution consisted in a complete change in their way of living. Instead of the easy-going life of cattle-drivers, they were to become bricklayers, builders, navvies, condemned to a labour unknown to them, and which clashed with all their traditions and their abilities" (N. 91). "One can understand that kind of life being very distasteful to shepherds. They do not know what real work is" (N. 92). Then also "a shepherd would resent having a taskmaster who is absolutely necessary to workmen" (N. 92). "Straw was mixed with the clay to increase its adhesive quality. Naville says that some of the corners of some of the buildings at Pithom were actually built of *bricks without straw*" (B. 36). "Finely chopped straw is very useful to dip the hand in to prevent mud sticking to it, and to coat each lump of mud before dropping it in the mould, so as to prevent it sticking. Hence without straw the work would be slower and more difficult" (P. 33). So we see a distinctly confident tone in the mutineers. Little touches in the story prove it. "The Israelites went up out of Egypt harnessed or carrying arms. Moses went out with a high hand. They borrowed from the Egyptians and at the same time spoiled them. This has always appeared to me a plundering of the Egyptians grimly described as payment for years of work without remuneration" (W. 56). This popular movement too was God's finger.

3. THE WEAK INTERNAL POWER OF PHARAOH'S THRONE. "The change of king had given the Israelites some hope" (N. 94). "Moses was nearly a match for Pharaoh" (W. 56). "The very long reign of Rameses II (Ex. i. 8) was the beginning of decay for the Egyptian

empire" (N. 94). "There were enemies in the immediate neighbourhood, sufficiently strong to be able to invade some day the Valley of the Nile" (N. 96). "Also the cities Pithom and Raamses were at the same time fortresses" (N. 97). "They guarded the southern road from Palestine and were a very effective protection. No wonder that Pharaoh used the native population settled in the valley. It was natural, however, that the Hebrews should resent the treatment" (N. 98). "This king must have had to endure serious disturbances of all kinds during his reign:—in the west the Libyans, in the east the Hebrews, and in the south a spirit of rebellion" (EP. 309). This too was the finger of God.

4. THE OCCURRENCE OF A SERIES OF NATIONAL DISASTERS.—
 "There was no necessity for miracle upon miracle. One very low flood in the field of Zoan, with all that it involved, secured the deliverance of the captives, whose afflictions God had seen. Heaven exercises as much economy in the use of its resources as the best-regulated household in this world" (W. 66). "In some of the series, and possibly in all, it is to be noted that the Divine power used the ordinary seasonal phenomena in a miraculously intensified form as the instrument of judgment" (HDB. 892). "The ten plagues, with the exception of the eighth and the ninth, could only have followed one another on the north-east of Lower Egypt, described as the field of Zoan. The first and second plagues, which the magicians are said to have imitated, were not infrequent, while the others only accompanied extraordinarily low Niles, which might have come once in a century or in a succession of centuries" (W. 57). "I shall not dwell on the ten plagues, which in a weaker degree, can many of them be found in Egypt at the present day" (B. 100). Stagnant Nile (August), Frogs avoiding bad water (August), Sand-Flies (September), Flies (October,) Murrain of Cattle (November), Boils (December), Hail (January), Locusts (February), Darkness (March), Infant Mortality (April). For details see W. pp. 60-66. This is the finger of God.

God meant His people to be released. His Holy Spirit worked through the currents of popular happenings. The personal inspiration of Moses, the culminating discontent of the people, the insecurity of the throne, and a disastrous season, and "God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own." This is Providence. This is really Miracle. This is ground for a faith unshakable.