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## AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PRAYER

### I

AS WEARISOME reading *The Book of the Dead* vies with the Christian Science text book *Science and Health* or an English translation of the *Koran*. Its innumerable repetitions make it indescribably tedious. It is the same with the companion work *The Book of the Opening of the Mouth*. Yet to keen eyes the desert offers loveliness and yields treasures, and likewise do these ancient writings repay sympathetic meditation until they disclose the hidden meanings of seemingly senseless formulas.

Chapter XIV of *The Book of the Dead* is a refreshing oasis in the far-stretching wilderness of words. In Wallis Budge's translation (p. 32) it reads as follows:

THE CHAPTER OF PUTTING AN END TO ANY SHAME THAT MAY BE IN THE HEART OF THE GOD for the chief deputy of Amen, [the scribe] Mes-em-ner, victorious, [who saith:]

"Hymns of praise to thee, O thou God, who makest the moment to advance, thou dweller among mysteries of every kind, thou guardian of the word which I speak. Behold, the God hath shame of me, but let my faults be washed away, and let them fall upon both hands of the God of Right and Truth. Do away utterly with the transgression which is in me, together with [my] wickedness and sinfulness, O God of Right and Truth. May this God be at peace with me! Do away utterly with the obstacles which are between thee and me. O thou to whom offerings are made in the divine [city] of Kenur, grant thou that I may bring to thee the offerings which will make peace [between thee and me] whereon thou livest, and that I also may live thereon. Be thou at peace with me and do away utterly with all the shame of me which thou hast in thy heart because of me."

Whether Mes-em-ner himself composed this prayer or whether it was composed for him is not known, but thus prayed a man perhaps 2,500 years before Christ and not so long after the Flood. He lived in a land of gross polytheism and deep moral degradation, and his ideas on religion shine like stars against this black night. Religion was to him intensely individual and his relation to his God of profound and urgent importance. Observe:

#### *i. The Conception of God.*

(1) What a man thinks of God will determine what he will himself be, as said the psalmist of the worshippers of the heathen gods: "They that make them shall be like unto them; yea, every one that trusteth in them" (Ps. cxv. 8). This Egyptian

prayed to “ the God of *Right* and *Truth* ”. To do right and to speak truth are attributes essential to the true God but universally lacking in the gods of heathendom. Yet this man knew that there is such a God, and perhaps the definite article intimates that he knew of only one such, “ *the* God of right and truth ”, and he owned that He is to be adored in “ hymns of praise ”. This is quite conceivable; for Moses lived in that land and period and he too knew of this God. Celebrating His praise in song he said (Deut. xxxii. 3 f.):

I will proclaim the name of JEHOVAH:  
Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.  
The Rock, His work is perfect;  
For all His ways are judgment:  
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,  
*Just* and *right* is He.

But when Moses so sang he had been given a fuller knowledge of the true God than Mes-em-ner, or than he himself had had in his days in Egypt. For in his eightieth year, at the burning bush, God granted his request that He would declare His name (Exod. iii. 13-15). Up till then, therefore, Moses, like Mes-em-ner, had not known the name of God. The latter gave no name to his God of right and truth. This is observable; for the Egyptians had names for their deities—Rā, Osiris, Horus, Isis, and many more, and for the welfare of the deceased in the next world it was held indispensable that he should know their names. But this holy God is unnamed.

This may throw light upon the state of mind of Moses at the time when he first espoused the cause of the Israelites. He knew that in theory they had a different God to the Egyptians, and “ he supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not ” (Acts vii. 25). Of course they did not, for in the period of their enslavement they had sunk to the level of their degraded oppressors and worshipped their idols (Lev. xvii. 7; Joshua xxiv. 14; Ezek. xx. 7, 8). Thus that generation did not know even the name of the God of their fathers; nor, it would seem, did Moses until, in answer to his inquiry upon the point, God declared His name and by it identified Himself with that God of right and truth. The shadowy memory of the true God had survived from earliest times in a few minds, and He was even then seeking some to worship Him in spirit and truth, according to His own nature.

It is easy to believe that the composer of this prayer, like Moses, and others ever since, though found in spheres dark with ignorance and sin, was enlightened and attracted by that divine Searcher and drawn into the orbit of the Sun of righteousness, in whose rays is healing, the One whom the Egyptians in their ignorance termed *Rā* and symbolised by the disk of the sun with outstretched wings.

Moses, the erstwhile prince of Egypt, instructed in all its wisdom (Acts vii. 22), and therefore in its religion (for that was a dominant element in that wisdom), was driven into exile. May we not picture him, when a solitary shepherd in the deserts, pondering still upon this God of right and truth, whose name he did not know, and whose ways seemed unaccountable, since one who had espoused His cause and people was seemingly abandoned and forgotten? Was it any wonder that, when this God suddenly appeared to him, and would place upon him a heavy burden and dangerous task, he hesitated and excused himself? He did not yet *know* God.

(2) Mes-em-ner not only had some just sense of God's moral rectitude but also the philosophical conception that God *controls time*, and therefore the events that occur in time: "thou makest the moment to advance." Each moment as it approaches, bringing its fresh experiences, is under the ordering of God. Nothing is haphazard or by chance: it is *made* to advance—"My times are in Thy hands" (Ps. xxxi. 15). From this it is but a short step to infer the eternity of God and His almightiness: for He who controls time must be above time, eternal; and He who orders all events must be almighty. It enforces Paul's statement concerning mankind that they perceive through the testimony of creation God's "everlasting power and divinity" (Rom. i. 20).

(3) But, then, He who is so great, so omnipotent, cannot be less than infinite in knowledge, for were any moment or event outside of His knowledge He could not control it. Yet such philosophical conception of God, though true, were without personal value to Mes-em-ner unless he make personal application of it. This he did by remembering and owning that the God of right and truth is "*guardian of the word which I speak*". A truly weighty reflection, which led a somewhat later writer to say: "there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Jehovah, thou knowest it altogether" (David, c. 1000 B.C.,

Ps. cxxxix. 4). Later again that very God of right and truth who, though known to the Egyptian but dimly, was very real to his faith, said solemnly: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 36, 37). Therefore the words of men are not only known by Him but recorded by Him, and the Egyptian said rightly that God was "*the guardian of the word that I speak*".

It is not to be supposed that this ancient scribe thought of himself as the only being with whom this great God was concerned. What was true of himself must have been equally true of other men. But a Being who is present with all men, listening to the words of each, must be conceived as omnipresent.

Thus, expressed or latent, the prayer regards God as righteous, true, eternal, almighty, omnipresent, and, as we shall see shortly, ready, upon right conditions, to be merciful and bountiful, and to extend life and fellowship to the humble.

It is surely matter for deep inquiry as to how, in that early period of human history, shortly after the Flood, a heathen living in heathendom, had such exalted and comprehensive conceptions of God.

(4) Yet something more results from the foregoing. While knowing all and everything God Himself surpasses knowledge; He is the "dweller among mysteries of every kind". The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. Deity must needs be inscrutable to humanity. This feature of God baffled and tormented other thinkers of those far off days. Job in Arabia in his distress exclaimed: "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him" (Job xxiii. 8, 9). Asaph described God's doings thus: "Thy way was in the sea, And Thy paths in the great waters, And Thy footsteps [footprints] were not known" (Ps. lxxvii. 19). As Job had before said: "He giveth not account of any of His matters" (Job xxxiii. 13). "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job xi. 7). Nay, for "there is no searching of His understanding" (Isa. xl. 26). He dwelleth "among mysteries of every kind".

*ii. Obstacles to Fellowship.* Mes-em-ner had a deep desire to be at peace with this God of right and truth, but he frankly recog-

nised "obstacles" to this. These hindrances were on his side, they were "my faults". These faults included *inward* transgressions, "the transgression which is *in me*". He was conscious that his heart had transgressed. He had *willingly* acted against the light he had of right and truth. His conscience had reproved this, but he had disregarded the monitor. As a result he was consciously guilty of "wickedness and sinfulness". This he did not cloke but frankly confessed it, and prayed to be cleansed from it. Conscience every man has, but whence came this conscience *toward God*, this discrimination between heart and ways, this tracing of the outward wickedness back to the inward waywardness, this sense that sin is defiling and requires cleansing? One recalls David's exclamation, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the *inward* parts, And in the *hidden* part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (Ps. li. 6).

*iii. God Ashamed of the Sinner.* It was this which weighed the heaviest upon the heart of the scribe. He was ashamed of himself, but it was far worse that God was ashamed of him: "Behold, the God hath shame of me." That this should be done away utterly was his urgent need and his earnest prayer. The most deplorable feature of the modern western world is that the vast majority have not the slightest concern as to the thoughts of God concerning them. Not so this heathen of the ancient time, nor the heathen, nor even the savages, of any time. These all own the importance of taking into account the attitude toward them of whatever god, demon, or spirit they acknowledge.

Concerning the earliest period, that before the Flood, the record says that God, seeing the continual and unceasing wickedness of our race, was "grieved at His heart" and felt sorry that He had created man (Gen. vi. 6). And Christ has said concerning the final period that "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in His own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels" (Luke x. 26; cf. xii. 9 and Matt. x. 32, 33). This shall be the ultimate display of the shame concerning the sinner that is already in the heart of God. Truly it is urgent that this shame shall be done away before it shall be revealed in wrath in the day of Christ. To this end Mesem-eter prayed earnestly: "May this God be at peace with me! . . . Be Thou at peace with me."

*iv. Peace Offerings.*

(1) He knew, too, that to make this peace possible suitable offerings must be presented to God, and he uttered the request that he might be allowed to bring such: "grant Thou that I may bring to Thee the offerings which shall make peace [between Thee and me]". By his sins he had infringed the rights of his God, and means must be found to repair the wrong done, to make amends to the laws broken, to appease the just wrath of the God and so to avert the deserved retribution.

This particular prayer does not detail these necessary offerings, but this is done in many other sections of *The Book of the Dead*. The offerings were of two classes: of slain animals, and of other products of the earth such as bread, fruits, wine. It is into these same classes that the offerings under the laws of Moses naturally divide themselves: the death of a victim to redeem the life of the sinner; and freewill gifts to express to God gratitude, dependence, and fellowship.

(2) The primary and profound principle of all offerings is that *God* must be righteously satisfied, that the shame that is in His heart must be done away and done away "utterly". But that this may be accomplished it is indispensable that the offerings shall be so efficacious as to "do away *utterly* with the transgression which is in me, together with my wickedness and sinfulness". Mes-em-ner recognised the sinlessness of this God of right and truth, and therefore recognised that he must himself be cleansed completely. No half-measures would suffice. Concerning the city of his God, he seems to have discerned the feature stated by John concerning the heavenly city, that "there shall in nowise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie" (Rev. xxi. 27). His emphasis upon the need of being "utterly" cleansed reminds us of David's urgent cry: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. li. 2).

By the gospel of God we know what Mes-em-ner longed to know, even that the God of right and truth has responded to all such sincere prayers as his, and has removed all obstacles to peace and fellowship, for the Son of God "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. ix. 26).

(3) Nor was it only a question of atonement by blood assuring pardon of guilt. The cleansing was to be outward and practical, as well as judicial and of the conscience. It was

to be a *washing*. The Egyptians, as most other ancient peoples, had various washings with water [*not* with blood] which symbolised outward and practical cleanness of life. This is fully acknowledged and enforced in the Mosaic ordinances. When a leper had been pardoned and healed he had to be made clean before he could resume life among the people of God and resume the worship of God. *Blood was sprinkled* upon him to show that his *guilt* had been expiated by death; but he had then to *wash* himself and his clothing in *water*, that the *defilement* of the disease might be cleansed away. Only thereafter could he enter the camp and his tent, or approach the tabernacle and its public worship (Lev. xiv). Similarly, the priest had to be bathed at his consecration (Lev. viii), and to wash repeatedly during his priestly activities (Exod. xxx. 17-21). Justification through atoning blood must be followed by sanctification through the living water; pardon must be accompanied by cleansing; Calvary leads to Pentecost; the Son of God died to redeem that He may impart the Spirit of life, holiness, and power.

(4) That Mes-em-ner understood these heavenly and real experiences to which offerings and washings pointed is not probable, but he did know the need of both in approach to the God of right and truth. And he knew also that he had neither power nor right of himself to approach God. He acknowledged that he could do this only by the permission and enabling of God. Therefore did he twice entreat God Himself to "do away utterly" with his transgression, wickedness, and sinfulness and the obstacles between them. It is no common state when a sinner realises that he has no right to approach God, no claim upon Him, no warrant even to present aught to Him, but that the work of reconciliation must both begin from God Himself and be perfected by His power, the sinner being without desert or capacity, save to consent, trust, obey. The shame that is in the heart of God because of the sinner can be done away only by the clemency and energy of God, and only thus can complacency with the sinner take its place. This required the intervention of the Son of God, meeting the just claims of God by the offering of His life as an atoning sacrifice, and meeting the need of the dead sinner by the gift of the Spirit of life, who is the water of life that washes and refreshes.

(5) The figure of speech by which our scribe described the situation before God is remarkable, perhaps unique. He



asked that his faults might "fall upon both hands of the God of right and truth". It suggests that he pictured his sins as accusers and barriers standing on either side of God and so barring his approach from every direction; and he desired that these "obstacles" might fall down and his approach be thereupon possible, and acceptable to God.

Such complete removal of hindrance to the suppliant drawing near to God was set forth by the prophets under various figures. Thus Micah (vii. 18, 19) cried exultantly of Jehovah: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity? . . . He will tread our iniquities under foot: and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Thus shall moral enemies be destroyed even as Israel's physical enemies, Pharaoh and his hosts, were cast into the Red Sea. Or again Hezekiah rejoiced that "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back" (Isa. xxxviii. 17). And David could declare that "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. ciii. 12).

In New Testament times Paul emphasised the same immediate and complete deliverance of the sinner from the law of God, that had a just hold upon him by reason of transgression. He compared it to a bond which the sinner was bound to fulfil yet could not fulfil, and was therefore liable to the penalties therein written. But the writing on this bond had been "blotted out", made illegible, and therefore unenforceable, and the very parchment had been nullified when Christ, as it were, "nailed it to His cross" (Col. ii. 14).

(6) The complete reconciliation with the God of right and truth which Mes-em-nerer craved and sought would amount in its full development to nothing less than what Paul describes as Christian privilege by the well-known words: "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access into this state of favour wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 1, 2). For the scribe knew that offerings are presented to God in the "divine city", which sphere it was his hope to reach.

In the same period Abraham received knowledge of that divine city and pressed toward it as a pilgrim on earth. In this he was followed by Isaac and Jacob. They desired that better and heavenly country, "wherefore God is *not ashamed* of them,

to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city " (Heb. xi. 16). Yet Abraham had been an idolater, as was Mes-em-ner; but we may trust that the mercy and faithfulness of God will one day give the scribe to know that his dim searching and indistinct longing has been answered, so that his prayer was heard, and the shame that was in the heart of God is done away utterly through Jesus Christ.

*v. Fellowship with God.* Mes-em-ner longed not only for peace with God but also for fellowship with God. And this fellowship was to be one of a life in common. He speaks of " the offerings whereon thou livest; and that I also may live thereon ". This was a prevalent conception and custom in heathendom. A portion of the offering was placed on the altar for the god to enjoy, a portion belonged to the officiating priest, the third part was eaten by the worshipper.

This symbolic ritual was incorporated by God into the sacrifice of the peace offerings in Israel. The blood was sprinkled and the fat was burned on the altar of God, some parts of the victim were given as food to the acting priest, and some parts were eaten by the offerer (Lev. vii. 11-38); and similarly at the consecration of priests (Lev. viii.-x.). The portion presented on the altar was called " the bread [food] of God " (Lev. xxi. 6; xxii. 25), and the worshipper thus partook jointly with God and His anointed priest.

Thus in 1 Cor. x. 18-22 we read: " have not they who eat the sacrifices communion with the altar ? " (that is, communion with God whose altar it is), which truth is equally set forth by partaking now of the table of the Lord. God finds His delight in His Son and His redeeming death; the Son of God, the heavenly Priest, finds His satisfaction in the results of that death (Isa. liii. 11); the believer feeds his soul upon Christ as the Lamb of God and the bread of life, and so lives upon the bread of God come down out of heaven (John vi. 33).

These rich realities the Egyptian scribe did not reach, and could not reach; yet there was some presentiment of them in thoughtful minds and exhibited in confused ceremonies. *How* were these ideas known in that ancient, pre-Christian, yea, pre-Mosaic age? How came it that they were present in minds so dark and could gleam forth in such an essentially evangelical prayer as this of Mes-em-ner?

## II

*i. Evolution of Religion Denied.* The theory that the human species began in a low state, and has evolved and developed by stages of an ever-ascending process, required of necessity that his religious ideas should have correspondingly developed. If man was at first an anthropoid savage, developing from a fierce baboon into a human barbarian, then at first he must have had base ideas of a low and savage deity, which would only ascend to nobler conceptions as he himself became a nobler being.

The facts are wholly against both parts of this purely imaginary career. Neither man nor his religion took this course. Dr. S. H. Langdon, Professor of Assyriology at Oxford, "spent twelve years in excavation, and deciphering of written evidence from the pits of Kish, near Babylon, and published the results in his great book entitled *Semitic Mythology*. He wrote in *The Scotsman* in 1936:

'The inscriptions and literary remains of the oldest Semitic peoples indicate a primitive Monotheism, and the totemistic origin of Hebrew and other Semitic religions is now entirely discredited.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus do the findings of archæology agree with the history of mankind given in the Bible. Man started his career with the knowledge of one true God, which knowledge he deliberately ignored and gradually forgot, yet could not prevent traces of it surviving in his debased religious conceptions and customs. There is rational explanation of a Melchizedek in Palestine, a Mes-em-ner in Egypt, a Balaam in Mesopotamia, men who more or less intelligently knew of God Most High, the God of right and truth. Their appearance in those early centuries after the Flood shows that the very noblest conceptions of God were already present, not slowly evolving from debased ideas.

When by the fifteenth century B.C. this knowledge was fading and there was danger of it becoming eclipsed under the pall of Satan-induced ignorance, then God revealed Himself to Moses, and the revelation of Himself as the Eternal God then given rises to a height and fulness not afterward surpassed. For:

JEHOVAH passed by before him, and proclaimed, JEHOVAH, JEHOVAH, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting

<sup>1</sup> J. A. D. J. Macdonald, *Give Me the Little Book*, p. 49. [See also Langdon's article, "Monotheism as the Predecessor of Polytheism in Sumerian Religion", in *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY*, ix (1937), pp. 136 ff.]

the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.

Thus at the outset of the second great period after the Flood (1400 B.C.) God declared His love, justice, and majesty, that He is the God of right and truth, yet ready to forgive; and he to-day whose heart hears God thus proclaim His name will, like Moses on that occasion, make haste, bow his head to the earth, and worship (Exod. xxxiv. 6-8).

In order to maintain the fiction that Israel, like other races, began with a low conception of a brutal tribal deity, its inventors were driven to assert that the documents which contained these sublime declarations of God were not ancient and genuine records, but late forgeries written when Israel had evolved religiously and risen to this noble conception, and that their writers had fraudulently attributed the documents to the great hero Moses. Which implies this gross moral absurdity, that men who had reached this moral height so to conceive of God, at the same time descended to the moral depth of popularising their views by fraud.

*ii. The Bible Account of Early Religious History* is consistent and intelligent. It declares that man was created by God in His own image and had knowledge of God and fellowship with Him; but that by rebelling against God man darkened his understanding and forfeited that fellowship, which forfeiture became more extensive in the case of his descendants. Yet there remained knowledge about God and about the creation of man. According to the Masoretic chronology, Adam lived during more than half the period from his creation to the Flood; Methuselah was contemporary with Adam for two hundred and forty-three years and he lived to the year of the Flood; Noah was contemporary with Methuselah for six hundred years and lived three hundred and fifty years after the Flood; his son, Shem, also was contemporary with Methuselah for one hundred years and lived after the Flood for five hundred and two years.

If the Septuagint chronology is followed the practical result is the same, for Mahalalel was contemporary with Adam for one hundred and thirty-five years and Noah with Mahalalel for twenty-eight years.

In either case Noah could have learned the original facts from one who had learned from Adam, and thus the knowledge would come over after the Flood and be easily perpetuated for

many centuries. It was as accurate and effective a transmission of facts as when a man learns from his father about his grandfather and repeats the facts to his children. It is to be remembered that during that period before the Flood the whole race was still one family and lived in one region, so that the original facts about Adam would be general property.

Then came the Flood, which could not but impress upon the survivors and succeeding generations the truth that the God of heaven was concerned with the doings of men and was a God of right and truth, holy in nature, just in wrath, yet ready to save. And we know from the legends of that ancient world that this awful judgment did in fact fix itself in the memories of all races.

When after perhaps five centuries the race had again multiplied and again degenerated, then God reminded them sternly of His existence, power, and justice by burning up two cities at one of the world centres, midway between Assyria and Egypt. Yet here also discrimination and mercy appeared in the sparing of righteous Lot.

This intervention being soon forgotten, after five more centuries, He taught a further lesson to all the world by His summary dealings with the mightiest monarch of the age, Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Exod. ix. 15, 16). And here again mercy rejoiced against judgment by the deliverance of all who chose to shelter themselves under the blood of the lamb.

One generation later Jehovah obtruded Himself again upon that ancient world by destroying several specially vile peoples in the central land of the earth, Canaan, and settling His chosen people there to be a corporate reminder of Himself, the God of all the earth.

The Bible records intimate constant intercourse between the parts of that earlier world (Gen. x.—xiv.). Modern research has abundantly confirmed this by its discoveries of writings and monuments telling of wars and political and commercial intercourse. Thus great events in any part were known and recorded in other parts, and the judgments of God above outlined bore lessons to all races and forbade that they should lose entirely the knowledge of His character and power. Of the survival of this knowledge Melchizedek and Mes-em-ner are independent proofs, the one from Bible history, the other from secular history, each incidentally confirming the truthfulness of the other.

*iii. The Divine Judgment on Men Justified.* The gravamen of the charge which Daniel laid against Belshazzar was that the king had sinned against light. The Most High God had most effectively displayed Himself in His dealings with the king's mighty grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuchadnezzar had made this known by a royal proclamation to his whole empire, in which he said: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven: for all His works are truth and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan. iv. 37). Nebuchadnezzar had been dealt with by the God of right and truth. Belshazzar had not humbled his heart though he knew all this (Dan. v. 22, 24), but had defied and outraged the supreme God. Therefore was he sentenced to death and executed.

This is one example of the general sin and condemnation of that ancient world. Concerning the whole of mankind after the Flood the sentence runs that they are without excuse; "because that, knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. i. 21-3).

Idolatry was not a state or sign of degraded creatures struggling upward toward monotheism. It was exactly the reverse, even a descent from monotheism into the depths of degradation, intellectual and moral. Apart from his inspiration by the Spirit of truth, the writer of the above sketch of history lived nearly two thousand years nearer than we do to the beginning of idolatry and not very far from its original centre, Mesopotamia.

The fearful descent followed a definite course:

First; knowledge of God possessed.

Second; denying to Him the glory known to be due.

Third; accepting His bounties but without gratitude.

Fourth; perverted and proud use of the intellect; vain reasoning.

Fifth; a consequent deadening and darkening of the heart.

Sixth; a claim to be wise, though foolish.

Seventh; the folly displaying itself in abandoning the Incorruptible and adoring the corruptible.

The descent was rapid and pitiful—from God to man, from man to birds, from birds to beasts, from beasts to reptiles

—from the highest to the lowest, and of the lowest the most malevolent, the serpent, was exalted to be the chief deity. Satan took the place of God, as had ever been his ambition. And this is the path to the deepest pit of hell for both Satan and his worshippers (Isa. xiv. 12-15; Matt. xxv. 41; Rev. xx. 10, 15).

Idolatry was not an unfortunate stumble into an unseen pit: it was brought about by a vain use of the reason. Philosophy was the parent of idolatry, and Paul justly calls it a robber and warns Christians against it (Col. ii. 8). Let anyone analyse the present condition of the Western world and he can see that it is descending from knowledge of God, diffused through the Reformation and subsequent similar movements of the Spirit of truth, and through the wide distribution of the printed Word of God, and is treading the same downward path that men took after the Flood. And in this descent philosophy, vain reasoning, leads the way now as of old. Those who profess to be wise lead the rest in folly of mind and pride of intellect. Already man is adored instead of God, for such is the essence of pantheism and humanism; it is but a little further down the slope to open idolatry, to worshipping the creature rather than the Creator; and thence to the precipice and the pit is but a step.

The theory of the ascent of man is working frightful havoc on an immense scale. A principal British Cabinet Minister of to-day speaks about the divine spirit which is in every man and claims that general betterment will follow the general cultivation of this spirit. This is the philosophy of pantheism. Of him it has been justly said that he has forgotten the fall of man. Man is not ascending; he is a fallen being, yea, a falling being; and this fall can be arrested and reversed only by the grace of God imparting a new, a heavenly, an upward nature; and this God imparts when the one falling casts himself as helpless upon the mercy of God shown in its redemption effected by Christ Jesus.

*iv. Discriminating Grace.* What is to be the eternal lot of such as Mes-em-ner? Here is a man living in the darkness of heathendom and his own mind dark on many matters. But he has some light about the true God and he acts upon this light, as far as to seek to be at peace with God and to enjoy fellowship with Him. This would surely cause him to try so to live as to please the God whose favour he desired. Must such heathen, ancient or modern, be nevertheless lost for ever?

When Peter, still an orthodox and prejudiced Jew, albeit a disciple of Christ, found himself for the first time in a company of Gentiles, he learned something that startled him. He said: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him" (Acts x. 34, 35). Cornelius was still without Christ, a Gentile in his sins, but he was devout, he feared the true God, he gave to the poor, and he prayed to God (Acts x. 2). On these grounds he was acceptable to God, and was granted more light unto salvation by faith in Christ.

Apart from knowing with certainty that our scribe gave to the poor, the other three features were found in him: he was devout, not impious; he feared the true God; and he prayed to Him. As far as we know, he, in that early and dark period, did not receive the knowledge of the promised Seed of the woman who was to bring deliverance from the Serpent (Gen. iii. 15); he was not, like Abraham, given to see the day of Christ and rejoice. Must this defect of knowledge involve his eternal death, and his prayer to be at peace with God fail of answer? What saith the Word of God?

It was to a company of heathen that Paul said that the God whom they worshipped in ignorance had so arranged human affairs, natural and national, "that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts xvii. 22-8). Does not Mesem-eter answer to this description of seeking and feeling after God? Must he not therefore find God, this being the very purpose of God? And if not in this life, then when?

The apostle to the Gentiles gives the answer in Rom. ii. In chapter i. he has described the course and state of the heathen world, as shown above. It is not till verse 17 of chapter ii. that he explains the distinctions between Jew and Gentile. Previous to this he is still treating man simply as man, whether Jew or Greek; and he shows that by despising God's goodness, by disobeying what truth they know, by obeying unrighteousness and working evil, by disregarding the instinctive sense of right and wrong which is in every man (even though the written law may not have reached him), and by crushing the reproofs of the conscience, men treasure up to themselves the wrath of God. Yet they do not receive that wrath, or not fully so, in this life; but it shall reach them "in the day of wrath and revelation of



the righteous judgment of God . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my good news, by Jesus Christ" (verses 5, 16). Thus the path of the ungodly leads on to and will find its full recompense in the day of judgment.

But the discussion contemplates that among Gentiles as well as Jews there are those who, like Cornelius before the gospel of Christ reached him, "by patience in well-doing" seek for what is glorious, honourable, and incorruptible. It does not say that they find it, but they do seek it, and surely that word shall prove true: "Everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth" (Luke xi. 10). For our passage from Romans declares that to such seekers for glory God will render eternal life (verses 6, 7).

But when? As soon as they hear and believe the offer of eternal life in Christ. If one believes it now he receives eternal life now (John iii. 36, v. 24; 1 John v. 11, 12, etc). In Rom. ii., verses 6-11 connect with the closing words of the paragraph in verse 16. Whether it be eternal life or whether it be wrath and indignation, "God will render to every man according to his works . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ". The impious will receive their due recompense then, and the fearers of God will receive then eternal life in Christ. And thus had the Lord already declared that in that day "all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto resurrection of life, and they that have practised ill unto resurrection of judgment" (John v. 28, 29). The great description of that final judgment says the same: "they were judged every man according to their works" and it was only "if any was not found written in the book of life" that "he was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 18, 20).

Quite apart from the explicit statements quoted, it is inconceivable that the name of any sincere seeker after God shall be blotted out of the book of life. The upright judge deals with the accused, not according to the latter's ignorance of law, but according to his own knowledge of the law, and he may see ground in law for dismissing the case though the accused was guilty of the deed. There may, for instance, be a lack of technical evidence, or another may have met the required penalty. Similarly, God knows that Christ by His death provided redemption for every sinner, and He can impute the benefit of that death to

the repentant and seeking sinner, though as yet he has not heard of Christ and His redemption. Thus did God "pass over" sins done before Christ came because He foreknew what His Son would accomplish to justify the pardoning of the guilty (Rom. iii. 25). It but required that the sinner should repent and confess, whereupon God gave in advance of Calvary the benefit to be there secured (e.g. 2 Sam. xii. 13).

Are such seekers many or few? Only the Searcher of hearts can know. *The Book of the Dead* shows only this one such prayer. Yet servants of God have met such seekers in many dark lands. The Judge of all the earth will do what is right; He is the God of right and truth that Mes-em-ner feared and sought; He delights in mercy; He remitted the temporal judgment of Nineveh when its people repented; He will remit the eternal judgment of every sinner of every age that sought after mercy, for Christ made it right for Him to do so. We may justly hope to hear many a Nebuchadnezzar and many a Mes-em-ner singing the praises of the King of heaven in the eternal kingdom.

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As regards the age in which Mes-em-ner lived, the light that was in him was not that of a morning star heralding the soon-coming day, but that of an evening star fading into the dark night. But he walked in what light he had. Like all of his time and land he believed in resurrection, and he longed for a place in the divine fellowship to which resurrection can be the door. Befogged by the mists of human ideas about eternity, he yet kept his eye on the light that glimmered; and he who walks steadily toward the distant light shall pass through the mists and reach at last the sunshine. The conflicts shall be over, and Mes-em-ner shall indeed be "victorious", as he is designated in the heading to his prayer.

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