

## LED OF GOD

"And He led them forth by the right way." Psalm 107:7.

It is said that history is constantly repeating herself; that the new is but a transcript of the old; that even new thoughts are nothing more than the resurrection and expansion of thoughts long since buried. Whether this be so or not, he who would understand the present, and who would plan well for the future, must ever be inquiring "of the days that are past." Inspired history especially is full of instruction, casting its radiance down upon our present life. How accurately does the desert-march of Israel fit in with the contour of our lives. How true is it to our spiritual life; for after all that is the only true life. We begin to live when first we hide behind the blood.

### I. It Was A Divinely Appointed Way.

It was a strange sight when God's ransomed people set out for Canaan. Without drawing a sword or lifting a spear, they marched forth from the iron furnace of Egypt, the angel of the Covenant leading them up out of the dungeon and through "the iron gate" of imperial decrees into light and liberty. The way they took was no choice of theirs; it was divinely chosen, and they had nothing to do but to accept it. The cloud gave them the direction of the march, and timed their journeyings. Even the order of the march was included in the divine plan. Judah to the front; Reuben to the right; Ephraim to the left; and Dan to the rear, were commands which must not be disobeyed. It says, "He led them." And so now. It is the Lord who fixes for us the bounds of our habitation, who chooses our inheritance. In the material world we find that to everything there is affixed a purpose, to everything there is given an appointed path. To everything a purpose and a place is the unwritten law of the universe of God. And is human life alone left without rule, without a guide? This can not be. The divine will can easily be made known to us. Paul speaks of life as a "Course," marked out and marked off for us. Let us keep in the path of duty, and heaven's star will always shine over head.

### II. It Was An Unknown Way.

They had "not passed this way heretofore." Every day new experiences met them, and new scenes opened up before them. Nay, sometimes the cloud led them forward in the dark (Numbers 9:21), with no beacons around them save the stars of a midnight wilderness. Fit emblem of our lives! Reason tells us tomorrow will be as today; hope makes the future bright with her gilding; but while we may hope everything, we may know nothing. Like Paul, we go forth "not knowing the things that shall befall" us; or, like Abraham, we leave the familiar landmarks behind and we know not the whither of our journey. "Get thee out .... into a land that I will show thee." Notice a change of tense in these verbs. The command is present, imperative; the promise is future; "I will show thee." But Abraham obeys. He wraps up his fears, where we may wrap up ours, in the "I will" of God. We are still stepping forth into new experiences. Each day has its peculiar shading, its peculiar discipline. We never repeat an experience. And this very uncertainty becomes one of the sweetest ingredients of our trust. How much brightness would be taken from our lives if faith and hope were to give place to glaring light! It is better to walk with veiled eyes. The sight of a future glory might dazzle and unfit us for a present duty; the sight of a coming sorrow would only becloud our hearts before the time. If he knoweth, why should we care to know.

### III. It Was A Circuitous Way.

The cloud did not lead them by the nearest road. The path went winding in and out, now turning back completely upon itself, almost overlapping the same ground; and then it circled round and round as at Mount Seir. True, these windings of the journey were in part the result of their own unbelief and sin; but even if they had not sinned the path would most likely have been "round about." Heaven's forces do not travel in straight lines. Study the structure of a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or a world, and we shall find that nature uses straight lines very sparingly, adopting instead the curve, the circle and the sphere. So is it in the higher plane of God's moral government. Ezekiel's vision represents Providence as a wheel; its cogs traveling out into the unseen; the direction of its motion ever changing, so that what seemed against, becomes for; and what seemed exactly wrong, turns round and becomes exactly right. It is by the zigzag path we conquer the Alps; and by the same path we scale the mount of God. It is now here, now there; but each new turn lifts us up into a serener air, and opens a wider prospect at our feet.

### IV. It Was The Way Of Discipline.

He led them forty years to prove them. He put difficulties in their way. Seas daunted them; thirst parched them; hunger pinched them; enemies opposed them. By these various ways God called into play and put to the test every power of the soul. Our spiritual conquests are born out of conflicts. We develop robust manhood, not amid the feasts and ways of the banqueting house, but out in the hot arena of patient, victorious struggle. The royal way to heaven is the path our Captain took, the way of the cross. The fighting is here, the rest beyond.

### V. It Was The Right Way.

Not a right way, one of the ten, or of a hundred, but the right way. It was right because God chose it; it was right, for it was the way of the promise; it was right, for it brought them to the city of habitation. They doubted, feared and murmured. They called the way hot and rough, and long; but when they passed through the crystal gates of Jordan to the land of plenty and of promise, then they saw all, and understood all. And as they remembered "all the way" the Lord their God had led them, they changed their murmur to a psalm.

This text reveals the goodness of God in everything. Sorrow comes, but, veiled in the sorrow, the blessed angel of comfort comes too. It grows very dark sometimes, but in the darkness the lamps of heavenly promise shine out. Losses are endured, but there is a divine secret which changes loss into gain. Disaster falls, but in the very heart of the disaster goodness is hidden. There are bitter cups, but in the bottom is always a blessing. Death comes to those we love, but Christian faith knows that it but leads out of shadows and sorrows into eternal realities and eternal joys.

So this truth interprets the past, and shows divine goodness in everything. Then it forecasts the future and shows that whatever may come will bring goodness. The path leads on from blessing to blessing, and up at last to the gate of pearl and the glory of heaven.