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Christ and holiness, you must, from the very structure of your nature, be wretched—like one forever dying of famine, but never dead. Here in this world, I grant you, you may keep from utter starvation by feeding on the husks of time and sense ; or in part slake your thirst at the impure fountains of sin, though it will be like drinking from a poisoned cup, which satisfies for the moment, to destroy in the end. But when you pass to eternity, and there find even these streams cut off, and these husks torn from you, will not these desires, ever gathering strength and never, *never* satisfied, be the unquenchable flame and undying worm to you ?

4. *Probation will soon be ended, and retribution soon begun.* Now you have Sabbaths, and sermons, and communion seasons, and all the means of grace, each, by the love of Christ, appealing to you, and waiting like some commissioned angel of mercy to bear you to Christ. Soon will all these means be gone. Then results—*results*—RESULTS will be all that remain to you forever. See to it, through the offered grace of Jesus, that they are such that in them you shall rejoice and not mourn to endless ages.

THE DARKNESS OF PROVIDENCE.

BY B. M. PALMER, D. D., NEW ORLEANS.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter.—JOHN xlii. 7.

I. REASONS FOR THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S DISPENSATIONS.

1. *It is necessary in order to the assertion of God's absolute supremacy.* The mightiest despot that ever sat upon a throne never could gain control of the heart of a single subject. His power was limited to the external, the fortunes and acts of men ; but to constrain the thoughts and affections was beyond his power. But when God claims supremacy, it is a supremacy over the whole nature of man. His wisdom, justice, power, and holiness are infinite, and all that is, exists by virtue of His creative will. This attribute of sovereignty is that which, in the Scriptures, God guards with the greatest jealousy. And the reason lies in the possibility of man's rebelling from that power. When God endowed man

with a free will, He made him the supreme work of the universe ; but at the same time He rendered possible the thwarting of His own will. To secure the interests of His government at large, it is necessary for God to guard His supremacy over all His creatures. It is necessary that we should learn to bow to what God does, not because we perceive that it is best or wisest, but simply *because He does it.*

2. *This darkness rests upon Providence because of its complexity.* Even if God's dealings with us had reference but to ourselves, they would be hard enough to understand. What man can tell the uses to which God means to put him, the glory to which He means to exalt him, even in this world ; how much less that in the world to come ! These threads of the earthly life, how they stretch beyond the chasm of death and are woven into a new web above the stars ! But the problem is rendered vastly more complex for us by the interdependence of all our lives. Each thread is necessary to the integrity of the fabric, and has its relation to all other threads. It is in life as in the diagrams of the mathematician, where the same line may represent the side of many different figures. Our personal history touches that of many another, and our influence ramifies through the society in which we move.

3. *The violence of our emotions renders us incompetent to understand.* How often does the bolt fall upon us from a perfectly clear sky ! And how our afflictions seem to link to each other, or, like our mercies, grow together like a bunch of grapes ! One sorrow is succeeded by another and another, until we are overwhelmed. In such a condition, how can we calmly estimate the influence of this or that affliction upon us ? We can only exclaim with the Psalmist : " Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts ; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." We are as a man wrecked at sea —now borne upon a mountain wave so high that it seems he shall be dashed against the stars, then as suddenly plunged into the depths as if to be swallowed up in the womb of the earth. No, it is not when the instinct of love is going out in its wild cry after that which the grave has seized that we can interpret the meaning of the bereavement.

4. *Our spiritual state is often inadequate to receive the explanation.* " I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," said Christ to His disciples, and so He taught them in

parables containing the seeds of truth which should spring up in the fulness of Christian knowledge. It is the great art of the human educator to know how to proportion the knowledge conveyed, to the ability of the one receiving, lest by overcommunication the very faculties it is desired to strengthen be overloaded and stunted. Now God, in His infinite wisdom, is adjusting His providences to our spiritual condition. And thus it happens that we are often able, partially at least, to understand what was, in a less mature state of our spiritual nature, altogether inexplicable.

5. *The great law of faith renders this mystery indispensable.* Faith is the law of this probationary dispensation, just as knowledge is the law of the dispensation of reward. If a man says that the doctrines of God's word are incomprehensible, the answer is twofold. God is infinite, and cannot be perfectly apprehended by finite minds. His truths, like the mountains, lift their gray heads and hide themselves in the clouds of heaven ; and though we pass around the base, and partly take their measure, we must ourselves enter the world in which these mysteries are lost to sight, before we can take their altitude. Then another answer may be returned, that this intellect of ours must, along with the affections and the will, be put upon probation. It is *the whole man* that God is now proving, educating, training. Does not God in this world put the intellect of the creature upon its trial before Him, so that he shall see the reasonableness of accepting all the high mysteries of grace, simply by the testimony upon which they rest? This law of faith extends no less to the conscience, inasmuch as the divine law is made the sole standard of rectitude to man, and he is not permitted to guide himself by his natural conscience except as that conscience is enlightened by God's infallible rule of right.

This law of faith extends to the affections, since we are to yield a cordial and loving trust, though God himself is wrapped in clouds. This law extends to the will, since we must defer to the naked authority of God's commands. Now, if God explains this sickness or that bankruptcy, this bereavement or that sorrow, there could be no exercise of faith, and the law of the whole economy under which we are placed would be completely reversed.

II. THIS MYSTERY OF GOD'S PROVIDENCES WILL BE TEMPORARY.

This is declared in our text. In Peter's case the promise was soon, in part at least, fulfilled by Christ's explanation ; yet how far

short did his understanding fall even then, to that he gained on the day of Pentecost ! So with us : many a dispensation is dark until God takes us by the hand and brings us into higher views of Himself and of His grace.

1. *There is a strong presumption that this revelation will be made, in the known connection between the two worlds.* The two worlds are united in man. He has "a true body and a reasonable soul." As "fire ascending seeks the sun," as the balloon strains at the cords that impede its flight, so the unconquerable instincts of man's spiritual nature leap upward. The very principle of ambition is but the finger upon the dial-plate of his spiritual nature, pointing to hopes and rewards which can be realized only in the spiritual world. And when the soul is renewed from sin, the spiritual apprehension is clearer, the spiritual longing stronger. I need not speak of this to those familiar with the privileges of prayer. And at the border line of death, what strange overlappings we sometimes see ! How shall the two worlds thus touch each other in us, all through our earthly career, and their relations not be disclosed at last ? I have no idea that at death we are to lose all individuality, like drops in the sea. Our career there will be distinctly personal, colored by our history here. At every moment we touch wires that vibrate in eternity.

2. *All limitations of sense will be removed.* We shall possess the spiritual body, with spiritual organs which, as our senses now apprehend material things, shall apprehend spiritual things. All truth, whether of nature or grace, we shall be able to read in its unity. The lesson which science is teaching us is the lesson of humility. As she uncovers one mystery, there opens another. We feel in the very height and glory of her revelations, how the spirit is fettered by sense. Ah ! in the world where these limitations are thrown aside, we shall survey God's providence, and the darkness will disappear.

3. *God's plans there will be complete.*

4. *The removal of this obscurity is necessary to God's vindication.* Do we ever reflect that this obscurity is as great a hardship upon God as upon us ; that it exposes Him to constant misconstruction and suspicion on our part ? But God will not always lie under suspicion.

5. *Heaven is the state and place of reward and praise.* In order

that we may apprehend its joys as the rewards bestowed upon us by the Master, we must survey our earthly life in all its connections. And the word *praise* indispensably requires that we embalm in song our whole experience.

THOUGHTS ON IMMORTALITY.

BY THE RIGHT REV. SAMUEL FALLOWS, D. D., CHICAGO.

If a man die, shall he live again?—JOB xiv. 14.

WE are met on the threshold of our theme with the fact, that among all the nations of the earth the idea of Immortality has been held. This is a signal proof that the idea is true. It does not affect the validity of the position taken, that the ideas of these various nations were incorrect as regards the nature of the future state. The clearing up of all doubts, the dispelling of all mists, depends upon revelation. The function of God's revealed truth is not to discover new and fundamental ideas to the universal intelligence of man. It is to clarify them of all error in their application, to bring them out into fulness and prominence; to make them nutritive and determinative in the moral and spiritual life.

While holding to the transmigration of the soul, the ancient Hindoos believed in its essential immortality. It was taught by them, "As a man throweth away his old garment and putteth on new, so the soul, having quitted its old mortal frames, entereth into others which are new. The weapon divideth it not. The water corrupteth it not. The wind drieth it not away. It is indivisible, inconsumable, incorruptible."

Herodotus says of the Egyptians: "They were the first of mankind who had defended the immortality of the soul."

Lord Bolingbroke, freethinker though he was, declares that "the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and a future state of rewards and punishments began to be taught before we have any light into antiquity. And when we begin to have any, we find it established that it was strongly inculcated from time immemorial."

Volney admits that all the earliest nations taught that the soul ~~survived the body~~, and was immortal.