sequences of the very premises on which, in order to entrap and hamper Him, they had so unblushingly persisted.

On this point readers must form their own judgment, but it seemed not undesirable to preserve the record of so remarkable a custom. Assuming that it has been correctly reported, it furnishes a new and unexpected illustration of this interesting incident, which the Church of God has long learnt to see in its true light, as one of the brightest proofs of the healing tenderness of the Sinless towards the sinful.

F. W. FARRAR.

THE NINETEENTH PSALM:

READ IN THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT NATURE-WORSHIP.

It is now ascertained that the ancient religions of Nature did not after all differ so widely among themselves as they appear to do. Most of us make our first acquaintance with heathenism under the classical dress which it wore during the later days of Greece and Rome. These gods of Olympus, with the confused and contradictory tales regarding them, are scarcely to be recognized for the same thing with the earlier and simpler mythologies of Syria, Egypt, or Chaldæa. Yet they were as surely a development, or a corruption, of those more primitive beliefs, as Greek art was the offspring of an older Asiatic art. The better we get to know the ancient faiths of the world and their history, the more plainly does it appear that at their root they possessed a common origin, and that similar ruling ideas ran through them all.

Perhaps the chief fact concerning them which modern

research has laid bare is this, that the primary religions of our race had an astronomical basis. In other words, it was the revelation of the Godhead in the heavenly bodies which first and most powerfully affected the religious instincts of our young race. It is not at all surprising that it should have been so. This common and bounded earth we tread is encompassed by a boundless upper world, which, to unsophisticated minds, is the very home of majesty and of mystery. The vastness and splendour of the sky, its purity and its repose, the awful silence in which its mighty lights revolve and advance, the sublime order with which they move, their unchangeable and unfailing sequences, and the influences of heat and light and vital force which are unceasingly rained from above into the cold and sterile womb of earth—these were singularly impressive phenomena to the first observers of them. They could not fail to call forth wonder, admiration, and the sense of dependence and insignificance—feelings all of them akin to worship. The heavens, by day and night, did tell for ever in human ears a marvellous story of the Divine and Everlasting One who fixed their order and guides their influence. Was it at all strange if puzzled and ignorant minds lost the Divinity in the contemplation of his grandest workmanship?

The influence of the heavenly bodies upon primitive religion told in two distinct directions.

In the first place, it was from them that men seem to have derived their earliest conceptions of order and of law. Originally, as we read in Genesis, God had set the lights in the firmament for this very end—"for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." By

regular alternations of light and dark, and by the stately revolution of the four seasons, He has bounded off human life with its activities. Each day is an epitome of man's lifetime itself. Each month, to a race of peasants, brings its characteristic employment. The order of the calendar is that by which all human affairs are ordered. Alike in war and the chase, in field-labour and seafaring, in domestic and in civil arrangements, men from the first found that the powers which prescribed their actions, and defined limits to their enterprises, and determined the degree of their success, were pre-eminently the powers of the sky. Further, these heavenly bodies are of all objects known to us the most exactly and invariably uniform. Events on earth are too complex to be easily calculable. They cannot be foretold with assurance. Not so with celestial movements. These obey exact law, move with mathematical precision, and admit (as early observers soon found) of being predicted with absolute certainty. Among physical changes, therefore, these had the clearest witness to bear to a "reign of law" in the sphere that rules, while it encompasses and includes, our mundane existence. The powers of the heavens are rigorous law-makers. They act with the certitude and the unchangeableness of destiny. Is there any wonder that before an order so majestic, so inviolable, swaying into harmony with itself the erratic movements of men, as well as the whole face of earth and ocean, primitive worshippers felt impelled to prostrate themselves?

But the celestial bodies were more than teachers of law. In this great lesson of inviolable order, the chief place is of course occupied by the sun. Now the sun

is as conspicuously the source of terrestrial life as he is of rule. It might be only matter of conjecture when the early founders of astrology ascribed to moon and planets also some vague influence upon men and beasts and plants. It was, at least no conjecture, but the most patent of facts, that the solar light and heat formed the condition of terrestrial existence. Great lord both of the day and of the year, the sun is the most powerful of all creatures, and seemed to them to dominate this lower earth like a god. Directly, he is the support of all vegetable life; indirectly, of animal life. As he grows feebler or more powerful, so wanes or waxes the stimulus to growth, germination, and vital productiveness upon earth. In his blaze all things kindle, all beauty is born. From his heat is nothing hid. Is he absent? Nature languishes and life expires. With his return, return fertility and gladness.

When these things are weighed, it cannot surprise any thoughtful mind that astronomical facts profoundly determined the primitive religion of men. It is not strange that both in East and West, among Shemites and Hamites, the venerable myths which lie embedded in our very speech, and have passed through every subsequent mythology of the world, should have been drawn from the dawn and the sunset, from the zodiac, the cycle of the seasons, and the mystery of the earth's annual renewal. It is not strange that everywhere the sun and the earth should reappear, symbolizing the active and passive principles in the production of telluric life.

Of the crass symbol-worship (idolatry, that is) to which this led, as men gradually dethroned the Maker

to erect into his room a thing He had made, I need here say nothing. Still less need is there to enlarge on the inexpressible pollution which crept into religion when to the deified powers of Nature men subordinated and prostituted their own purer moral instincts. What I wish to point out is the corrective which it pleased God to provide, in order that man might be delivered from this deification of the sidereal bodies, and from all abject dependence for his religious ideas upon physical phenomena. Such a corrective was supplied in the successive revelations made to Israel. When, from those stupendous systems of Nature-worship stretching from the Tigris to the Ægean, and everywhere crushing men's souls into an immoral, or even bestial, condition, we turn to the tiny strip of sacred soil which lay betwixt the Jordan and the Levant; when, in room of the pagan, we listen to the Hebrew, conception of nature, and catch what the God of revelation had disclosed to the prophets of his chosen people—what is it that we find? I take, for example, the Nineteenth Psalm, admitted to be of King David's own composition, as furnishing us with a trustworthy reply. And I find two things:—First, the truth which underlay these astronomical mythologies is discriminated from the error which had grown up around it; and thus the sidereal and solar heaven is restored to its true place in natural religion. Next, the two great lessons which (as we have seen) man had at first been reduced to learn from a material source, God has now imparted through a moral and spiritual revelation of Himself.

In the first place, the heavenly bodies are restored from a false to their true place as revealers of the Divine Nature.

Revealers of God they unquestionably are. So far the primitive faiths of the pagan East started from a just postulate. God dwells in the midnight sky. God speaks in moon and solemn starlight. God operates through the mighty sun when at dawn he issues fresh as a bridegroom from the curtains of the east, and races westward with the strong tread of a hero to find his goal in the crimson splendours of the west. Neither the poetry nor the devotion which paganism drew from the vast and glorious sky is lost upon the Hebrew prophet. His spirit thrills with as reverent and melodious music to the touch of dawn or the magic of planets as ever the spirit of Chaldæan sage. But in this he had one clear advantage over his heathen contemporaries, that from these most divine of creatures, his faith sprang at one stupendous bound, past creaturedom altogether, to the Immaterial and Spiritual Being whose handiwork they are. Planets and stars—they are the dust of Jehovah's feet. Heaven's awful dome of blue—it is a tent Jehovah has pitched for the sun. That all-ruling sun itself—it is Jehovah's vassal, and goes forth at his bidding. Vaster than the vastest, inconceivably mightier than the mightiest, what else but Jehovah's glory is written across the midnight heaven, and sung in ceaseless hymns by day to day, or night to night? For to the fathers of the Hebrew race God had disclosed Himself as Jehovah—a personal Being—moral, spiritual, and eternal; and this sublimer truth emancipated them at a stroke—emancipated, at least, such as received it—from the fascinations of Nature-worship. To hold firm and clear this truth of the absolute contrast in kind betwixt Personal Maker and impersonal made; contrast of the Creator Spirit,

immaterial, invisible, immortal, to mere matter in its most gorgeous array: to hold that fast (I say), permits us with safety to praise the heavens as we please, and fill our soul with the wonders of astronomical, as of all other, science. For then the creature fulfils its rightful office—to extol or set off as a foil the glory of God. The more divine I find his handiwork to be, the lower do I fall in intelligent adoration before the Deity Himself. Whereas, whatever teaching tends to wipe out that vital interval in kind betwixt God and nature; whatever suppresses the personal in God, or drapes the forces of dead matter in the attributes of divine life, so that it becomes hard to say whether God and his works are any longer two, or are really one—all *that* is teaching which runs perilously near to antique paganism, and which, if we give it scope, may land us again in the exploded idolatry of physical forces.

Nor, *in the next place*, is there any longer an excuse for such confounding of the Personal Ruler with the laws and forces of his own universe. If a Hebrew or a Christian fall into any similar error, he has no such excuse as may be pled for primitive star-gazers in old Chaldæa. Why? Because we are no longer reduced to derive our knowledge of God mainly from the laws and changes of matter. In physical law and physical force God is revealed; but, because the revelation was found to mislead, He has put another and a better by its side. The former was material; this is moral. The former disclosed the stability and permanence of law in the movement of planets; this is the regulation of character. The one revealed the forces that reproduce vegetable and animal life upon the globe; this the

spiritual forces by which is sustained a religious life in man.

It is the praise of this moral and religious revelation of God which the Psalmist sings in the second portion of the Nineteenth Psalm. He calls it "the law of Jehovah"—the "Torah"—or body of instruction for practical direction of life which God has given us. He piles up the alternative names for it on which so many changes are rung in the Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm. It is God's "testimony" to his own character and will; his "statutes," or detailed precepts of duty; his "commandment," or central principle of morals; his "judgments," or the code of jurisprudence for society that is based upon these. By the use of so full a list of synonyms, we gather that what David means is substantially the entire revelation of God as made known to the Hebrew people of his time. That Hebrew revelation had assumed characteristically the shape of legislation, and accordingly the reverential observance paid to it by devout Hebrews was termed "the fear of Jehovah." But there is no reason why we, the heirs of all that David possessed, and of so much more beside, should not render his eulogy into modern Christian speech; since what was true of the Mosaic Law is still more true of the Gospel, the new "law of liberty." God's revelation of Himself in his Son has consummated what Moses began; and the blessings which King David loved to discover in his imperfect Bible are far more richly present for us in the finished testimony of Jesus and his apostles.

What we have to understand, then, is this: That to men who sit under the light of revelation, this new manifestation of the Divine glory in the Law and the

Gospel holds such a place of pre-eminence as was held in the old Nature-faiths of the world by the solar and sidereal heavens. *This* now declares the glory of God; *this* is his word, or "voice," heard through all the earth;[1] *this* now discovers to us that the Eternal rules the world by law, and teaches us by what vital force our higher life is nourished. It gives us moral, where before we had only physical, laws; and spiritual life-forces, where we could find none but natural.

First, as to the new revelation of Divine *Law*, let me say a word; then, of the new revelation of Divine *Life-Force*.

1. The new law is moral, a law not fixing the order in which masses of unconscious matter must move, but prescribing the order in which free will and conscious choice ought to move. It follows that this new law may be transgressed. In physics there is nothing analogous to sin; for the stars in their courses cannot fight against their Maker; they can only fight (if He so choose) against their Maker's enemies. Disobedience, lawlessness, crime, become only possible in the region of moral natures. They are the penalty we must pay for that noblest of all created things, a free obedience to duty. Still it is one and the same Being who guides the heavenly bodies by the law of gravitation, and who also strives to guide our wills on earth by the law of righteousness. Betwixt moral and physical law there holds, accordingly, a certain resemblance. Each is the condition of order within its proper sphere. Order is the condition of well-being, only to be obtained through subjection of the individual to the system; that is, through obedience to rule. This holds

[1] *Cf.* Rom. x. 18.

as rigorously in morals as in physics. No Eastern watcher of the sidereal movements ever saw his calculations defeated by some erratic or unruly star that rose at the wrong hour, invaded the orbit of its fellow, or carried desolation through forbidden regions. From the serene and unvarying harmony of their revolutions he found it possible to tabulate and predict their appearances, and to deduce the law of their existence. Who will predict or tabulate the actions of men? or who, from observing the behaviour of his fellows alone, could deduce the laws by which human life may be reduced to order? We learn the rules of duty as much by their "breach" as by their "observance." Yet one thing we surely know: through disobedience to this law has come into the world disorder, contention, rupture of ordained relationships, breach of the fair system God designed, a marring of all healthful action, and a swift rushing (so God hinder not) of the discordant elements back to chaos again. And this also we may depend on, that there is no road of return to harmony, peace, or happiness, possible to mankind save by reinstating in its rightful authority the moral law which God in his mercy has afresh proclaimed. For this reason the whole of revelation is a re-assertion of the dishonoured law of love and duty. The gospel of Christ, not less than the Mosaic economy, establishes a triumph for that broken law. It vindicates its unchangeableness. It discovers its awful sanctions. It proves how fearfully its breach must be avenged. It magnifies its perfect beauty and godlikeness. It designs its re-establishment over human hearts and wills as a regulator for man's inner life no less inviolable or absolute than the laws of the solar system. Its end

will be attained only when human life, eccentric no longer, shall circle round the throne of God in a steady, measured, and harmonious orbit of duty, yielding itself cheerfully to the moral attraction of the Divine love, and respecting the limitations imposed by Divine justice.

2. It is in the maintenance of this restored spiritual order that we are to realize spiritual life and gladness. In the solar arrangements, order comes first: given that as its condition, beneficence follows—fruit-bearing to the earth. So, in revelation, righteousness comes first: the righteousness of God revealed to faith, restoring the sinful soul to its true and just relation with God, and re-erecting over the rebellious heart the authority of Divine law. Then, and thereby, comes solar warmth to the spirit, and moral energy, and genuine joy. So, I think, the author of this Psalm perceived, who to each term of eulogy hung upon his beloved "law of Jehovah" has appended a note of admiration for the benefits it confers on the soul that observes it (Verses 7, 8). Is the law "perfect"? Then it refreshes or vivifies anew the spirit of man. Is it "sure"—faithful and abiding as the statutes of the sky? Thereby it teaches wisdom to erring and beguiled hearts. Or is it "right," straight, that is, and true to the nature of God—its norm? Then it gives joy, for it satisfies the hunger of the soul after absolute righteousness. Or "pure" and transparent as the sunlight? Then it illumines the inward eye, and fills the man who loves it with cheerfulness and health.

Thus warmly could he praise the benefits of God's revelation to whom revelation was so meagre. With unveiled face Christians behold the glory of God in

Christ, as in a late-risen Sun of Righteousness. We know how the perfect law, magnified as well as vindicated in the Cross, has brought to the Christian world, along with perfect righteousness, pardon, and acquittal, a better daylight to the soul, a spring-tide of devout affection, a quickened love for duty, and a new fruitfulness in the service of humanity. If healthier moral impulses course in the veins of Christian men, if nobler desires fire their blood, if inward disorder has given place to harmony; if, in a word, moral winter be over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds be come—then indeed is God's glory to be seen, not alone, nor best, in the circling year or the heavens that rain sunshine on the soil. The old Nature-revelation has no glory now in comparison with this glory that excelleth. Far above the laws and forces of his own handiwork in material creation must be that God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who to our own moral nature has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as the righteous Father, and who quickeneth the heart of his earthly child into a moral beauty like his own.

J. OSWALD DYKES.

THE BIGOTRY OF ILLUMINATION.

ISAIAH lxvi. 5.

WE have but to place the parable of the "two men who went up to the temple to pray" side by side with this picturesque Verse, to see that it is one and the selfsame Spirit which speaks to us by the pen of Isaiah and the lips of our Lord. The words of Isaiah are simply an antique version of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.