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ARTICLE I.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AS RELATED TO THE WORK OF REDEMPTION.

There are two great chains connecting man in his destiny with eternity and with God. One is the chain of God's providence; the other is the chain of Christ's redemption. It might at first appear difficult to decide which of these, considered in itself and apart from its relations to the other, affords matter of more profound and interesting inquiry.

How wonderful, for instance, is the chain of divine providence, as, taking its origin in the depth of the eternal purposes of God, and interweaving itself with all the details of human history, it forges its successive links in the midst of the rise and fall of empires, the growth and decay of civilisations, and the revolutions and dismemberments of states, presenting to us the finger of God in every event of history, from the falling of a sparrow to the overthrow of a kingdom or the extinction of a world.

How wonderful, on the other hand, is the chain of redemption, which takes its rise in the depth of the same unfathomable eternity, which we may trace backward link by link to the same deep counsels of the same unchanging Jehovah; and

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which, as we follow it onward through all coming time, unfolds itself link by link in the calling of those who have been predestinated, in the justification of those who have been called, and in the glorification of those who have been justified; whose last link shall then be formed, when "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads;" when "they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

But while either one of these departments of truth opens to us a field of thought unlimited in its extent, and transcendent in its range, it must be admitted that the profoundest subject of inquiry open to man—that which in his present state involves for him most of mystery; that which, as it shall be unfolded to him in a future state, shall constitute the theme of enraptured and unwearied contemplation—is the connexion between these two great departments of truth: the truth of providence and the truth of redemption; the interlinking of these two chains in the purposes of God, by which all the movements of his providence are related to his purpose of redemption; by which all the events of time stand connected with his methods of *grace*, and all human history becomes more or less directly the history of salvation through the cross of Christ.

This is the great theme which engages the attention of the Apostle Paul in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Having in the preceding chapters sufficiently unfolded the divine method of redemption through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and having sufficiently vindicated this method from all the attacks and aspersions of its enemies, he proceeds in the eleventh chapter to consider the relations of God's providence to this one and only method of salvation. He views the human family as divided by the line of God's covenants into two great classes—the Jew, embracing those originally taken into covenant relation with God; and the Gentile, embracing those originally excluded from this visible covenant relation. He traces the history of God's providence in reference to these two classes through the ages that are past, showing that in it all there was distinct reference to the personal coming of Christ

and the preparation of the world for his coming. Then, taking a still broader range of argument, and sweeping downward along the course of the ages yet to come, he shows that all the dispensations of providence toward the Jew and toward the Gentile, even to the end of time, shall have reference to the great work of salvation through Jesus Christ; for, reasons the apostle, if, as we know, the gross darkness which for ages rested over the heathen world, was a judicial darkness, God having by the methods of his providence "given them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" until such time as the purposes of his covenant with Israel should be accomplished, so also the blindness which is now happened unto Israel is a judicial blindness—God having by the methods of his providence given them over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart until such time as his purposes with the Gentile world shall be accomplished. As the exclusion of the Gentile under the former dispensation was temporary and not final, so the exclusion of the Jew under this dispensation is temporary and not final. As there was a purpose of mercy in the former exclusion, so there is a purpose of mercy in the latter. As when the purpose of mercy in the first instance was accomplished by the coming of the "fulness of the times," the middle wall of partition was broken down and the Gentiles became fellow-heirs of the promise; so when the purpose of mercy in the second instance shall have been accomplished by the fulness of the Gentiles coming in, then the veil shall be taken away from Israel's eyes, and so all Israel shall be saved. There shall then be one fold and one Shepherd, and the ultimate design of all God's providence shall have been realised in the gathering together in one of all things in Christ.

To this view of the providence of God, as related to his purpose of redemption, we ask attention, as involving matters of exceeding interest to all who love the Redeemer's kingdom and pray for the speedy conversion of the world to Christ. Let us take the teachings of the inspired apostle as our guide, and let us step reverently and with caution, not seeking to be wise "above that which is written," but within due limits to trace

out for our edification and comfort the precious lessons of the providence of God.

I. The first thought which claims our attention is the relation of providence to the work of redemption during the ages which preceded the personal coming of Christ. What this relation was the apostle very distinctly tells us, when, in the thirty-second, thirty-third, and thirty-fourth verses of the chapter to which we have already alluded, he says, addressing the Gentiles and speaking to them of the Jews: "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all."

The word "concluded," or, as it is rendered in the margin of our English version, "shut up together," is expressive of the result of a demonstration fully and fairly made, or the solution of a problem, wrought out so as to place it beyond the possibility of peradventure or doubt, and to seal in silence the lips of all who would deny it. In the case before us, the word *concluded* is expressive of the result of a broad induction, wherein by numerous and varied experiments, all tending to the same result, though instituted under widely different circumstances, a certain great fact has been established in the history of the world, as clearly and as fully as its truth has been recorded upon the pages of Revelation.

The fact to be established was the unbelief of the natural heart—*unbelief*, as the exponent of a depraved and sinful nature, being employed to express that deep depravity and sinfulness of which it is at once the fruitful germ and the matured and ripened fruit. The design of God's providential dealings with his own people and with the heathen had been to establish this great fact, that man is totally and helplessly depraved, having in him no latent germ of spiritual life—no element of holiness that might be developed into the true worship and service of God. To establish this fact, God was pleased to institute, so to speak, in Judaism on the one hand, and in heathenism on the

other, two great experiments, or rather two great series of experiments upon human nature, to see whether or not there was in it any power of self-redemption.

Let us look at these two experiments separately; and first let us study that which is connected with the history of paganism. The object of this first experiment was to demonstrate the truth that man, under the light of nature and under the guidance of reason and conscience, can never attain of himself to any true knowledge of God, to any real communion with him, or to any satisfying hope of eternal life; that so deep are the stains of depravity, and so total is the alienation of the soul from God, there can never be, even under the most favorable circumstances, the unfolding of any true spiritual life, or the attainment of a religion suited to man's necessities and wants.

This experiment, which had been in progress for four thousand years when our Saviour appeared upon the earth, was both fairly and fully tried. Man, in the full possession of all his faculties and powers, was placed in the midst of a *cosmos*, reflecting from every part of it the infinite glory of God. In the heavens above him and in the world about him, in air and earth, in sea and sky, in all things material and spiritual, intelligent and unintelligent, he beheld shadowed forth the wondrous perfections of the Maker and Preserver of all. In addition to this light from without, there were vestal lamps kindled from the altar of God, and burning within the soul with unquenchable light. There were innate principles, primary laws of belief, which in their very nature tended to point man to God. There was moreover a conscience, God's own vicegerent in the soul, bearing testimony to the existence of law and a lawgiver, and to the reality of a future state of reward and retribution. Thus, with "the heavens declaring the glory of God, and the firmament showing his handiwork," with "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," with "the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another," the heathen nations entered upon

their probation of forty centuries. Not an element that could promise success was wanting. As we look along the pathway of history, we behold nation after nation raised up by the providence of God. We see empire succeeding upon empire—the Egyptian, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Alexandrian, and the Roman—empires that rose, and flourished, and fell, each having its own peculiar type of civilisation, its own peculiar features of social and ethical development, and its own peculiar system of theology and worship. We see how God, in his providence, lavished upon each one of these nations all that might have seemed necessary to the complete development of its religious life. The prestige of national greatness and renown, the patronage of nobility and rank, the homage of genius and philosophy, the servitude of literature and science, the refinement of art, all were made tributary to the work of religion. Architecture yielded its grandest conceptions for the stately and majestic temples of worship. Sculpture and painting, eloquence and poetry, music and minstrelsy, all combined to present a ritual of worship, that vainly sought to charm the mind away from the love of sin, and lift it upward through the sphere of the beautiful and the sublime to communion with holiness and with God.

Surely if it were possible for man, under the light of nature and under the guidance of reason and conscience, to attain to a true knowledge, a spiritual worship, and a holy love of God, we shall find all these among the religions of the cultivated nations of heathendom. Alas, no! The failure of the experiment is written upon the very history of it. As system after system of religion was tried, it was found utterly defective. "The blossoms of the pagan worship, after exhibiting an unnatural and premature expansion in the conservatory of the religion of nature, were found to be sterile, and fell to the ground from the unproductive tree. Although heathenism had attained to the highest eminence with respect to the culture of the intellect, it could not resist the conviction of its own emptiness, and of its entire inability to satisfy the wants of man's moral nature."*

*Kurtz's Sac. Hist., §120.

To the masters of sculpture and painting, to the votaries of music and poesy, the religions of the heathen world gave themes full of beauty and sublimity; but to the heart asking deliverance from its burden of guilt, to the soul struggling in the conflict with its own lusts and passions, these religions could offer no solid ground of comfort, and gave no real sense of relief. They were utterly powerless in checking the evil propensities of the human heart. They were utterly unable to lift off the burden of human guilt.

To know what was the real issue of the experiment as to man's capacity of self-redemption, we have only to take our stand in the midst of that era in the history of Greece, marked by its greatest enlightenment, its highest civilisation, its most cultivated literature and art, and be the mute witnesses of a scene that is transpiring there. It is at Athens, amidst all the grandeur of her temples erected for religious worship, and all the light reflected from her schools of philosophy and learning. It is a day of public solemnities in honor of the national divinities. Alcibiades, on his way to the temple, meets Socrates, the pure and exalted philosopher, whom all ages and nations have delighted to honor as the very impersonation of all that was purest and best in paganism. Alcibiades expresses his surprise that Socrates does not go to join in the public ceremonies of worship, and the following conversation, touching beyond all expression, takes place:

"To me," says Socrates, in substance, "it seems best neither to worship nor to reason against those who worship, but to be quiet, seeing we know not enough of the nature and will of the Supreme Being to know how to worship aright. It is the part of true wisdom, therefore, to wait until it is revealed to us how we ought to behave towards God and towards men." "And when, O Socrates," says Alcibiades, "shall that time be, and who is he that will instruct me, for gladly would I see this man who he is?" "He is one," replies Socrates, "who cares for you; but as Homer represents Minerva taking away the darkness from the eyes of Diomedes, that he might distinguish a god from a man, so it is necessary that he should first take

away the darkness from your mind, and then bring near those things by which you shall know good and evil." "Let him take away," is the plaintive response of Alcibiades, "the darkness or any other thing that he will, for I am prepared to decline none of those things which are commanded by this man, whosoever he is, if only thereby I shall be made better."

What is this but the confession, wrung from humanity in the very hour of its highest self-development, that it cannot attain to the true knowledge and worship of God? What is it but the testimony of human experience confirming the testimony of God's word, that "in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knows not God?" What is it but the demonstration, upon a grand and imposing scale, of the native depravity and hopeless ruin of human nature? What is it but the providence of God concluding man in unbelief, writing over against him the record: "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good; no, not one."

Here it would seem that the demonstration of man's unbelief might be regarded as complete, and that nothing more would be necessary that "every mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God." But he who knows the end from the beginning foresaw that it might be pleaded on behalf of human nature that it had failed simply for want of sufficient light; that the error was not so much in man's heart as in his head; that if there had only been a revelation of God sufficiently clear and explicit, and accompanied with sufficient evidence to authenticate it as divine, man would not have failed. Human reason might still proudly affirm its sufficiency under a clearer light to attain the highest end of man's being in communion with God. A second demonstration is therefore necessary; and to effect it, we have, under the providence of God, in Judaism a second experiment, or rather, as before, a second series of experiments, the object of which was to determine the question "whether or not righteousness could come by the law" —that is, whether or not a revelation from God, however clear and explicit it might be, and with whatever sanctions it might

be accompanied, however much of light it might irradiate upon the understanding, and with whatever authority it might impinge upon the conscience—whether such a revelation would be sufficient to meet man's wants, and whether by the light which it afforded man would naturally make his way upward to spiritual fellowship and holy communion with God. This is the aspect of Judaism to which the distinguished writer already quoted alludes as "the negative mode by which it prepared the way for Christianity" as the religion of the world—the positive mode consisting in the preservation in its integrity and purity of the great doctrines concerning God and redemption.

Let us, then, occupy ourselves for a little while with the history of this second experiment, wherein man is to be placed under the full sunlight of divine revelation in circumstances the most favorable for the cultivation of holiness, that it may appear that his departure from God is the result of an evil heart of unbelief, and not of the outward circumstances by which he is surrounded.

Of this experiment, as of the other, we must concede that it was both fairly and fully tried. A nation was chosen and separated from all the other nations of the earth, that it might be the depository of the divine revelation. The nation selected was one which, in its ancestral lineage and previous history, gave highest promise of success. It was brought forth from the bondage of Egypt; and, in the midst of a series of splendid miracles and tokens of the divine presence, was led across the desert to the wilderness of Sinai, where it received, both by audible voice from heaven and by written statute, the revealed will of God unto salvation. Thence the nation was conducted in the same supernatural and miraculous manner to the land which had been specially chosen as its inheritance, where, segregated not more by natural barriers of mountain and sea than by strict rules of ceremonial observance, intended to cut off intercourse with neighboring peoples, it stood for centuries, shut out from the degrading superstitions and abominable rites of the heathen world. Thus distinctly separated from other nations, it was taken into special covenant relations with Jehovah.

He himself condescended to be its ruler. It was a theocracy, whose civil and religious institutions were all moulded by the divine hand. The law of God was written on tables of stone, and laid up in the chief city of the nation for perpetual preservation. An inspired history of the creation of the world by the power of God, and of all his wonderful works in the past, even down to the time of the settlement of the people in the land of Canaan, was also given and placed on record. The tabernacle and the temple, both framed according to the pattern shown in the mount, both provided with ordinances of divine appointment and a priesthood of divine ordination, were erected in the midst of the people to perpetuate the knowledge and worship of the true and living God. A line of inspired prophets, commissioned to teach to each successive generation the great principles and truths of religion; miracles repeated through each successive age; divine interpositions manifesting beyond all doubt and cavil the supernatural presence and power of God: all these and a hundred other sources of light beamed upon this chosen nation as century after century passed away. Surely in the midst of this flood of holy light, with tabernacle and temple, with priesthood and prophecy, with law and testimony, with oracle and Shekinah, with new moons and Sabbaths, with sacrifices and ablutions, all divinely appointed, and all pointing to the true God and eternal life, this experiment must succeed! A holy love of God and a holy delight in his salvation must fill the heart of this chosen and honored people!

Shall we go backward and trace the history of its failure in the very history of the experiment itself? The Red Sea is scarcely crossed, and the wail of Egypt's drowning host has scarcely died upon the air, ere the murmuring Israelites, in impious rebellion, are clamoring for a return to the bondage of Egypt. The brow of Sinai is still wrapt in clouds, amidst which, in voice of thunder and in lightning flash, Jehovah is signalling his fearful presence, while this chosen people at the base of the mountain are worshipping a golden calf. The people are not yet fairly settled in the land of Canaan, until they have contracted idolatrous alliances with the heathen nations

around them, and have erected altars of worship to the most licentious and bestial of all the divinities of paganism. As generation follows generation, there is perpetually manifested an aversion to the worship of the true God, and an adulterous lusting of the soul after the degrading and abominable systems of heathen worship that nothing can repress. The magnanimous appeals of Joshua; the earnest expostulations of Samuel; the stern denunciations of Elijah; the plaintive entreaties of Jeremiah; the fires of persecution; the sword of devastation; the chains of captivity; the dreariness of exile—none of these, nor all of them combined, could break the heart of this stiff-necked and rebellious people, and bring them to acknowledge their dependence upon God, and forsake the abominations of the heathen. A few of every generation were found among the number that bowed not the knee to Baal, but the great majority were hopelessly enslaved in idolatry and sin. Nor was the only sin of this people that of rejecting the light which shone upon them from heaven. Over the head of guilty Jerusalem hung the still more fearful charge of stoning her prophets and killing them that were sent unto her, so that her streets ran crimson with the blood of martyr prophets, “from the blood of Abel to that of Zacharias, who perished between the porch and the altar.”

But of man's utter apostasy from God, even under the light of revelation, as exhibited in the history of the Jewish nation, the darkest and most amazing proof remains yet to be adduced. The Lord of glory was once in human form upon the earth. He made his appearance not in the midst of a heathen people, but in the midst of this very nation upon which the light of revelation had for so many ages been shining. He came as the long promised Messiah of Israel, the Immanuel, the God with us, of whom prophets had delighted to sing. The time, the place, the manner and circumstances of his birth, had all been distinctly foretold. He had been typified in altar and tabernacle, in priesthood and sacrifice. His birth had been heralded by John the Baptist, his great forerunner. His birth was divinely announced through the ministry of angels, who sang

their anthems above his cradle; through the ministry of heathen Magi, who saw his star in the east and came to worship him; and through inspired prophets in the temple, who blessed God that their eyes had seen the salvation of the Lord. He came, and for three years as he walked in peerless excellence through the midst of this people, everything conspired to attest his divinity. All nature did him reverence as its Lord. At his word the dead were raised to life; the sick were restored to health; devils were cast out; the waves of the tempest were stilled; the eyes of the blind were opened; the ears of the deaf were unstopped; and the lame man was made to leap as an hart. All power in heaven and upon earth was manifestly his; and yet this glorious Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person, whose divinity was proven by his birth and by his life, by his works and by his words, in the very midst of his sublime teachings, and his ministry of grace and love, was arraigned as a malefactor, ignominiously condemned, and inhumanly executed between two thieves upon the cross! O humanity, where is now thy boasted power of self-redemption? O morality, where is now the "righteousness which is of the law?" Only once was the Son of God upon this earth, and then he was murdered by men under the full light of divine revelation, and in the boasted possession of the purest morality upon earth. "I bless God," as another has truly said, "that this fearful experiment is never to be tried again—this fearful drama never again to be reënacted; for the same principles are still at work in the human heart. Man is as depraved to-day as when the Saviour appeared; and those who now trample in unbelief upon the blood wherewith we are sanctified, would not only reject the Son of God, but would crucify him afresh and put him to an open shame."

One great truth the providence of God has written upon the page of human history: man is totally depraved, helplessly, hopelessly enslaved in sin. Heathenism has failed—Judaism has failed. In yon human victim bleeding upon the altar of paganism, and in yon divine victim bleeding upon the cross of Calvary, we read the same lesson. God hath concluded us all

in unbelief. Let every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.

II. Having thus seen the nature of this providential conclusion in unbelief, we next come to its design. This is sententiously expressed by the apostle when he says God has thus concluded all in unbelief, that he "might have mercy upon all," and still more fully when he says, "For as ye (the Gentiles) in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief, even so have these (the Jews) also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." God's great design both in Judaism and heathenism was to prepare the way for the gospel of Christ. Depravity is the fundamental postulate of redemption. If the world is not depraved, it has no need of a Saviour. If it is not totally depraved, it has no need of a salvation such as that which Christ brings. He comes not to educate, but to regenerate; not to develop a germ of holiness, but to implant one; not simply to repair a disordered nature, but to restore a ruined one; not simply to heal a diseased world, but to recall to life by his almighty power a world that is dead in trespasses and in sins. The work, therefore, which he proposes to do for man is not a partial work, but a complete one. The righteousness which he offers is not supplementary, but substitutionary. The salvation which he brings is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace—free, sovereign, and unmerited grace. The exclusive source of this salvation is the fountain of his infinite and unspeakable love. The exclusive ground of it is his own blood-bought and imputed righteousness. The exclusive power in it is his own divine and eternal spirit; and the exclusive revenue from it is his own personal and perpetual glory.

But there is nothing that a man will with so much reluctance receive from another as that which constitutes the ground of his merit before God. When the question springs, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God?" man instinctively seeks for something of his own. As Cain sought to worship God with the fruits of his own cultivation, as Nadab and Abihu sought to minister before his altars with

fire of their own kindling, so man naturally seeks to propitiate the Most High with gifts of his own; nor will he ever accept at the hands of another that deliverance which he feels to be in any manner or to any extent attainable through his own exertions.

Hence, when the cross of Christ was to be erected, and salvation was to be proclaimed freely as his gift, it was necessary that man's hopeless condition should first be discovered; that every remedy which man could devise should first be applied; that the whole question of man's capacity for self-amelioration should first be definitely and fully settled, that there might be hope in no other than the great Deliverer of Souls. These failures, therefore, in Judaism and heathenism, which betrayed so sadly the vanity of all man's hopes and the emptiness of all his professions, were part of the great providential dispensation which prepared the "fulness of the times" in which the Son of God was to appear. During all these ages God had been digging deep through the shifting sands of human life, that he might reach a solid foundation upon which to erect the cross of Calvary. Archbishop Trench, in some one of his numerous works, calls attention to the significance of the fact that the inscription upon the cross was written in Hebrew and Greek and Latin, and says that while no doubt the immediate design of the threefold inscription was that the writing might appear in the three languages spoken at Jerusalem, there was another and more far-reaching design, inasmuch as these three languages were the representatives of the three great elements of power with which Christianity was to come in conflict, and over which it should ultimately and gloriously triumph. The Greek language—the language of literature and science, of philosophy and learning—stood forth as the representative of the wisdom of this world, in the view of which salvation through the cross was foolishness. The Latin language, the official language of Rome, stood forth as the representative of that thirst for national greatness and military renown, which beheld in the peace-loving spirit of Christianity only inchoate weakness, effeminacy, and inaction. The Hebrew tongue, the language of the Jewish

people, stood forth as the representative of that "righteousness which is of the law," in the view of which the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block. The inscription in these tongues was the prophetic announcement of the triumph of the cross over all these elements of opposition.

Already the triumph signified by the first two has been realised. The Greek, from the height of his intellectual ambition, after a vain and fruitless effort to attain the wisdom that profiteth, has returned to bow in humility beneath the cross and read in the inscription upon it, "Christ the wisdom of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The Roman, after carrying the eagles of his country into every land, and learning the vanity of human ambition, has returned with his blunted spear and battered shield, and laying down his plumed helmet at the foot of the cross, has read, "Christ the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The Jew still wanders on in blindness of mind and hardness of heart. Going about to establish his own righteousness, he will not submit himself to the righteousness of God. The veil is upon his eyes when Moses is read. Given over for a time to blindness of mind and hardness of heart, his feet stained with the blood of his Messiah, and his heart abandoned of the Spirit of God, he wanders through the world without a temple, without a nationality, and without a home, a stranger among strangers, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him. But this wandering is only for a time. God hath not cast off his people whom he foreknew. The day is coming when the eyes of Israel shall be enlightened, when the veil shall be taken away; when the mercy of God that ever follows the Jew shall overtake him and bring him back; when he shall come to the foot of the cross to look upon him whom he has pierced, and mourn, and in that cross shall read, "Christ the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Thus Greek and Roman and Jew shall meet at the foot of the cross, each to find his wants completely met in him who is "the Saviour of all men;" and when this blissful consummation shall have taken place, then shall the great purpose which linked

providence and grace together have been accomplished, as God shall have "concluded all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all."

It thus appears that the cross of Christ is the central figure in the providence of God as well as in redemption. Indeed, it is the great central point of all history. All that went before was a preparation for it. All that comes after derives its significance from it. Around it revolve all the destinies of nations, as well as all the doctrines of grace. All that is bright in the world's history is a reflection from it. All that is mysterious in God's providence finds explanation in it. That mercy of which it is the revelation and the seal is the keynote of all God's dealings with men. It was mercy that in the hour of man's first apostasy stayed the sword of avenging justice, and held the iron gate of death until with a beam from the cross she had illumined the darkness that lay beyond. It was mercy that kept her perpetual watch by the altars of paganism while the fearful experiment of heathenism was being tried. It is mercy that to-day follows the Jew as he tracks his footsteps with the blood of God's broken covenants. It is mercy that shall yet gather together all in one, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; and thus mercy, free, sovereign, and unchanging mercy, shall be written upon every dispensation of the divine economy, upon every page of human history, and upon all the dealings of God with man.

III. It remains that we shall indicate a few practical inferences from a theme of so much importance. 1. The providence of God never moves backward—never returns upon itself. It may sometimes seem to us to do so. Seeing, as we do, but a small part of the scope and range of God's purposes, and unable to comprehend fully even that which we see, it may often appear to us as if great providential movements, looking toward the rapid extension of the Redeemer's kingdom and the speedy conversion of the world to Christ, have been suddenly reversed, as if the great wave of providence had rolled back upon itself. Our own plans are all thwarted; our own hopes baffled; our own expectations disappointed. But let us remember that the

disappointment is with us, not with God. It is only our interpretation of the movement that has failed, not the movement itself. Our short-sighted views have changed like the shifting winds, but with him is "no variableness neither shadow of turning." The mariner coursing through northern seas sometimes meets with vast icebergs, which have been loosed from their moorings in the polar regions, and are being floated by ocean currents downward toward the southern sea. To the unpractised seaman, borne himself upon the wave, subject to all the changes of wind and tide, it might seem as if the motion of this immense mountain of ice were anything but uniform. As the waves ran strongly in one direction, it would appear as though the iceberg were rapidly moving in the other. As the wind changed, the motion of the iceberg would seem to change, and it might appear to be as fickle in its motions as the winds and the waves about it. But such deviations are apparent, not real. The iceberg, with its huge base lying thousands of feet beneath the surface of the sea, borne steadily onward by the deep undercurrent that imparts its motion, feels not the light impression of the shifting wind or the surface wave, but moves onward with resistless course to the accomplishment of the great destiny which God has marked out for it. So is it with the providence of God. Man's purposes change; God's are unchangeable. Man's meet with disappointment; with God there is no oversight, no failure, no reverse. In all the ages and in all the world, his counsels have stood fast, and his purposes of grace have been fulfilled.

2. Let us learn to wait. If four thousand years of discipline were necessary to prepare the world for the personal coming of Christ, let us not expect the conquest of the world in a day. If we are disposed to wonder that after eighteen centuries, so much of the world remains yet to be redeemed, let us remember that with God a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. If the great empires of China and Japan have been so long closed against the missionaries of the cross, it is because for them some great providential problem has remained as yet unsolved. "The fulness of the times" for them

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has as yet, in a certain sense, not come. If the dealings of God with our own stricken and peeled Church seem utterly mysterious and unfathomable, let us remember that it is in his wisdom and love that these calamities have come upon us which have robbed us of the wealth which we had hoped to use for the honor of his great name and the extension of his kingdom in the world. "Be patient, therefore, unto the coming of the Lord."

3. The great duty of the Church is to follow in the wake of the providence of God. Hers is to be the attitude of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Whensoever the pillar of cloud lifts itself above the tabernacle, she is to gird her loins for the march, and whithersoever the divine signal leads the way, she is to follow; whensoever and wheresoever there is opened unto her a great and effectual door, she is to move forward with her missionary enterprises and possess the land.

In whatever direction we turn our thoughts to-day, we behold the pillar of cloud moving. China and Japan, and the great heathen world which they contain, are being opened to receive the gospel. Spain has just thrown off the shackles of a spiritual despotism more degrading than the political despotism of Japan, and now the people are crying out for the word of eternal truth. Among the Jews there is a great feverish movement toward the recognition of Christ as in some sense a prophet of Israel—a rationalistic movement it is true, and yet one which is breaking down the great barriers of prejudice against Jesus of Nazareth, and teaching lips to speak his name with reverence which once uttered it only in blasphemous derision and scorn. Rome, in its Œcumenical Council, has been, under the providence of God, permitted to bring to open consummation the folly which has been secretly developing for centuries. With a blindness that is fatal, she has placed herself before the civilised world in an attitude in which she must either go forward and proclaim, in the face of civilisation and history, the absurd and preposterous dogma of infallibility, or ignominiously recede from claims which, though she has asserted privately, she has not the courage and manliness publicly to defend. To assert the dogma is to render herself ridiculous in the eyes of her most

intelligent and influential adherents; to discard it from the Syllabus is to withdraw with her own hand that which has been her principal prop with the vulgar and uninformed. Let her hug either horn of the dilemma, and the result must be to the weakening of her authority, and to the furtherance of the gospel of Christ.

Under these circumstances, how urgent is the call upon the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ to arise and gird herself afresh for the issues that are freshly springing upon her. The harvest-field was never so wide before. The grain was never more white for the sickle. Will the Church enter in and reap? This is the question of questions to-day.

ARTICLE II.

GIVING, AN ESSENTIAL PART OF TRUE PIETY.

Contributions to the cause of God is a subject on which the views and more especially the practice of the Church are still far below the truth. It is no new theme. It has been a matter of revelation and instruction, plain, full, and explicit, for many ages. Latterly it has been largely and ably discussed in our land. This discussion has done good. It has placed this claim on its true grounds; vindicated it from many wrong notions long and widely cherished; and assigned it its rightful position in religion. We think the conscience of the Church has been enlightened and quickened. A real advance has been made—measured not indeed by the greatly increased amount given, but by the improved tone pervading the appeals from our ministers and church courts, and by the spirit with which many of our people respond. Many, however, seem to be still in the dark, or at least unmoved by this increased light, and we all need to have our convictions strengthened. The practical side of this subject impinges upon a hard mass of covetousness which is al-