

TRANSFIGURATION OR THE HEAVENLY VISION.

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THERE is a close connection between the two things. It was a "heavenly vision" which changed the life of the prophet Isaiah. It was a heavenly vision which changed the life of the Apostle St. Paul. It was in the light of such an experience that each went out to proclaim the truth which had been forced upon his notice. And in each case the object in view was the same, namely, to hold up a high ideal for the contemplation of mankind, and to stimulate in mankind the desire to reach out after it. The effect upon each of them, St. Paul and Isaiah, of the heavenly vision had been the transfiguration of life, both of their own personal life and of life in general. Having seen "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," and having heard the song of the seraphim crying one to another "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts," Isaiah could not fail to recognise the truth of what followed, "the whole earth is full of His glory." Yet, at the same time, he was possessed with the sad consciousness of the vast amount of evil there is in the world. "The hidden things of darkness" are revealed by the light. The most brilliant sunshine also throws the deepest shadows, and shows up the myriads of motes floating in what we thought was a pure atmosphere. "The heavenly vision," the vision of Christ in glory, put life in quite a different light for St. Paul. But he more particularly points to the transforming or transfiguring power of the Vision upon personal character. He is fond of this idea. Thus he exhorted the Romans, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. xii. 2), but expressed himself more fully to the Corinthians (ii. Cor. 5 [sic], 18), "But we all with unveiled face reflecting

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the glory of the Lord, are transformed (or transfigured) into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord." St. Paul here points out what is possible for all under the New Dispensation, but a thing which was possible only for the few under the Old. By way of illustration he gives with a certain amount of detail the circumstances in which Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai and how he declared it to the children of Israel. Moses during his Communion with God upon the mountain, where "he spoke with God face to face as a man speaketh with his friend," caught the radiance of the Divine glory; the glory which [sic] was still reflected in his face when he came down from the mountain to speak on behalf of God to the people assembled on the plain below. "The children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the glory" in the face of Moses, therefore "Moses put a veil upon his head." Yet the glory was fading away even as he spoke with them. We can understand why. We may listen to a great orator speaking for a great cause which he has at heart. His face is lit up with the great enthusiasm with which he is on fire within. But only here and there is a kindred soul among his audience kindled into flame. The light dies from his eyes as the glow in his heart [sic] is damped by the lack of response from his hearers. Again and again was Moses chilled in his own heart because he failed to enflame with his own passion for God the stronghearted, stiff-necked people whom he had been called by God to lead. Yet still in his own mind was the memory of those glorious moments spent by him upon the mountain in close communion with God: still in the minds of some of his hearers must have lingered the memory of his shining face, flushed with the glory of God. Life, thereafter, was not quite the same for them, even though "The

vision splendid did fade into the light of common day." Their memory of it was a support to them in the present, and an inspiration for the future. We may reasonably suppose that this was the effect upon some of the witnesses who looked upon the face of Moses when he came down from the mountain after holding high communion with God. They saw with wonder and awe the change produced in him, and revealed to them in his face.

Even greater was the effect produced by the Transfiguration of our Lord upon those chosen three who witnessed it. St. John was thrilled by it and there is a ring of triumph about the words which he wrote so long after the event, "We beheld His glory." The very memory stirred his soul to ecstasy. The

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whole gospel of St. John is aglow with the glory of the Transfiguration. The evangelist suggests the stern repression which our Lord put upon Himself [sic] during His ministry on earth, a repression in spite of which the heavenly glory breaks out and manifests itself, as, for example, at the marriage at Cana in Galilee. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus ... and manifested forth His glory." But we see this better, perhaps, in the Gospel of St. Luke. St. Luke traces for us better, from stage to stage, the growth of the heavenly Child. He shows us that "the Child is father of the Man." The Child who astonished the doctors in the Temple by His "understanding and answers" and even at the age of twelve felt the necessity of being about His Father's business must have shown some gleam of the radiance which broke through the veil of His Flesh and showed Him in glory upon the Mount of Transfiguration. In the Gospel of St. John we may read His prayer that He might be glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. We may be allowed to think that the glory of the Father was the Vision ever present before His eyes "in the days of His Flesh." And a glimpse of this was afforded on rare occasions to those who were closely associated with Him in His ministry. In some slight degree they reflected it. Something of this kind is hinted at by the words of St. Luke about St. Peter and St. John when they stood before the council at Jerusalem: "they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." They had certainly caught His spirit. We may well believe that the spirit had transfigured them. In a greater degree we see the same effect produced upon St. Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." In a few pregnant words St. Luke draws the martyr's character and the influence which formed it. We are hardly surprised by the words which follow at the close of the chapter, "And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly [sic] on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." From what St. Paul himself must have seen on that occasion we can understand how it was possible to write words which I have already quoted: "We all with unveiled face reflecting the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord." The transfiguration is the consequence of the Vision. The glory passes into us and is reflected from us. The idea has been made familiar to us by Wordsworth. He has depicted for us the effect upon character of intimate communion with nature.

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"The floating Clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm

Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.
"The Stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where Rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

Sympathy gives us the key to the position. Sympathy is the point of contact. By sympathy is drawn out what is latent, waiting to be revealed. But in the Ode on Intimations of Immortality Wordsworth wails:

"The things which I have seen I now can see no more."
"I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth."
"Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

He marks the gradual fading of the glory which attended on birth.

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, Who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day."
But why should "the vision splendid" be allowed thus "to die away
And fade into the light of common day?"

is a question which educationists must ask themselves, and ask themselves seriously. If education is the calling out of latent

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powers, the helping to develop what is already there; why should not "the vision splendid" "shine more and more unto the perfect day?" Are we helping to "quench the spirit" which certainly burns brightly in the child? By what means can we keep it alive? Is it that our own visions have faded? or that we are impatient for the vision which tarrieth, "The vision of God

which is the life of Man?" There is a wholly unnecessary conflict of ideals in the educational world, Humanists and Scientists have again been crossing swords. "A plague on both their houses!" In the child we have a spiritual being to deal with. We must not forget that fact. He will be, not less, but more valuable a member of society, if he has his "vision splendid" to "apparel in celestial light" the hard realities of life. What are we doing to create such a vision? What are our own visions? We need to be up on the mountain top, not to get away from the world, but to have a wider view over "the land of far distances." "Though the vision tarry we must wait for it." We may get "a glimpse of the King in His beauty" and catch some faint reflection of His glory for ourselves. Anyhow, we shall be the better able, by the wider view we have gained of things, to deal in the spirit of our glorified Master with the particular case of madness which is to be found at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration.