

October 10

"And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." — Numbers 10:12

If the Jews, as the apostle assures us, were our ensamples, in nothing do they more represent the experience of Christians, than in their progress from Egypt to Canaan.

They had now continued many months in the wilderness of Sinai, where the law was given, and all the ordinances of divine worship were established. There they had committed idolatry, and provoked the Most High to anger; and there he proved himself the just God and the Saviour. He forgave their iniquities, but took vengeance on their inventions. They were now to enter the wilderness of Paran, a vast desert of nine days' journey, and where the greater part of their subsequent stations were fixed. "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." Thus they only marched from one wilderness into another. And is not this the case with all our changes in this world? Let us look at a few of them and we shall see, that whatever they may promise as to satisfaction and happiness, they leave us much the same as they find us.

Is it not so when we pass from one period to another? Every age has been full of complaints; and here it is remarkable, instead of supposed improvement, the inquiry has always been, "what is the cause that the former days were better than these?" We end one year with a kind of gloom, and hail the arrival of another; but the months are found the same with those which had previously passed away. The winter is not without cold, nor the summer without heat. We feel in our early days the confinement of school, and the restraints of a father's house; we long to be at our own disposal, and to enter life for ourselves. But where is the man that has not exclaimed, "O that I was as in the days of my youth!" Much is said of an agreeable and peaceable old age. Who does not desire many days, that he may see good? yet is their strength labour and sorrow. Another girds, and leads us whither we would not. In vain we look around for our early and endeared connexions. Lover and friend is put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. The days are come, in which we say, "I have no pleasure in them." "All that cometh is vanity."

Is it not the same when we pass from one residence to another? There are few but have known local changes; and some, by a train of events, have been led to pitch their tents in situations the most remote from all their former expectations. Sometimes a removal is not at our own option. In other cases it seems very inviting and desirable. It may have preferable claims. But still it is a removal in the wilderness, not out of it. To Abraham, God said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will tell thee of;" and this was the land of promise. Yet even there he shared in the troubles of his nephew Lot, went for years without an heir to his wealth, was tried in offering up his son Isaac, and buried his Sarah out of his sight, in the cave of Machpelah. There, by faith, he sojourned as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles — not at home — but looking for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Is it not the same when we go from one condition to another? Many deem it a fine thing to pass from obscurity to splendour, forgetful that distinction and fame will draw forth envy, and excite evil speaking, and deprive us of the sweets of retirement and leisure. David rose from a shepherd's cottage, to the grandeur of a palace, and then sighed, "O that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away, and be at rest." How wise was the Shunamite! When Elisha offered to speak for her to the king, "I dwell," said she, "among mine own people." Some deem it a great thing to rise from indigence to wealth. By their eagerness to acquire it, all seem to think, if they could have affluence they should want nothing. But does a man's life consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth? His desires increase with his means, and in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits.

The same may be said in passing from activity to leisure. "Oh" says one, "when I have acquired so much, and can withdraw from the world where I have been so tried, I shall be happy." But to withdraw from the world is not so easy. Habits form a second nature. Few are qualified either to improve, or to enjoy solitude. No kind or degree of exertion is so much at variance with happiness, as having nothing to do. Ennui is an insect that preys upon all bodies at rest. Satan found David alone, and Eve alone. It is the will of nature and providence that we should pass from individual into social life; and Solomon says, "He that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." And the conjugal condition, wisely and piously entered, in a general way, admits of more happiness than any other. But it may produce the keenest anguish. At best, it cannot yield pure and unalloyed felicity; our affections become sources of anxiety and fear; we share the pains, as well as the pleasures, of those who are one with us, and every delightful tie is mortal. How impatient are some to enter the parental relation. Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. But the proverb truly calls them; certain cares, and uncertain comforts. How often do the father and mother mourn over undutifulness, depravity, an early grave. "Childhood and youth are vanity."

"This is a very gloomy view of things." But is it not a presumption and vain confidence? Should it not inspire earthly scene, in those who are just entering life, and in

true one, a Scriptural one? And if so, should it not check sober and moderate expectation, with regard to every those who are on the verge of any change in it?

Is there, however, nothing to encourage and comfort under such a dispensation? Much every way. Such a state of things is not casual. "The children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." Therefore, though they removed from one desert into another, it was under the Lord's guidance and conduct. He determines the bounds of our habitation, and administers all our comforts and our crosses. Such a state of things we are not unapprized of; and therefore, if we go on, buoyed up with hopes, which must issue in disappointment, the fault is our own. All history, observation, experience, and Scripture, tell us enough to prevent it. Such a state, too, is not peculiar to us; it has been known by all our brethren who were before us in the world, and will be realized by all those who come after us. Nor is it our final state. Another is discovered and promised. There remaineth a rest for the people of God — a better, even a heavenly country. A few more stages, and we shall remove to the glory of all lands. No thorns there — no dangers there. After all our movements in the wilderness, we shall move out of it, and the days of our mourning will be ended. Neither is it an unmixed state. If we are not in Canaan, the desert we are in is not like Egypt, from whence we came out. Like the Jews, we have many advantages and comforts, though the place itself yields us nothing. We have the fiery cloudy pillar, and water from the rock, and the manna and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and the grapes from Eshcol, and God himself, "even our own God," who is nigh unto us in all that we call upon him for. Yea, the very difficulties, mortifications, and distresses of the state are useful. They try us, and humble us, and do us good with regard to our latter end. But for these, how unwilling should we be to go. How vain would the admonition be, "Arise and depart;" unless it were enforced with the conviction, "This is not your rest."

Let this, therefore, keep us from the murmurings of discontent, and the forebodings of despondency. Though serious, let us not be gloomy. And while free from delusive hopes, let us not yield to unbelieving fears, but thank God, and take courage.

Morning Exercises For Everyday In The Year
By Rev. William Jay