

# DANIEL THE DREAMER :

A BIBLICAL BIOGRAPHY.

BY AUSTIN HOLYOAKE.

THE study of biography is at all times a pleasing occupation, and generally an instructive one. Poets afford us glimpses of the ideal life; statesmen of the real and the practical. The warrior teaches the lesson of heroism and daring in danger; the navigator, the pioneer, the explorer, sets examples worthy of imitation of perseverance, of endurance, of courage in secret, which, when known, ennoble the character and strengthen the will, and enable us to look with calmness upon the daily annoyances and trials of life. We learn how men can labour and endure; how friendships, formed in the quiet of social life, will yet survive the strongest shocks. We learn this from the lives of the great and good men of all ages and of all countries. Men in every rank of society, from the highest to the lowest, may be found whose lives will teach some lesson for our instruction—who have set some example worthy of imitation. We turn to Bibles heroes expecting, as we have a right to expect, that in their lives we shall find everything worthy of emulation. These characters have superlative advantages over ordinary men. If not endowed with the attributes of Gods, they have what stands them in as much need—they have the special instruction and guidance of Heaven. In Daniel we shall find one of these highly-favoured mortals—a man of a peculiar calling in life, but one who nevertheless excelled in his profession. He followed no industrial occupation, neither did he cultivate letters or the fine arts. He was a sort of psychological curiosity. At first he dreamt other men's dreams, and found out their interpretation; and afterwards he dreamt dreams for himself. The wise men who some centuries ago determined for us, and for all future generations, if the priests can make it so, what was canonical and what apocryphal or spurious Gospel, agreed that the Book of Daniel had about it the genuine ring—bore upon its face the unmistakable stamp of inspiration. We must therefore accept it as such, and try how much good we can extract from it. Those who worship and defend the Bible as a sacred book, may say it is much easier to make bad jokes about it than to point out its errors—to ridicule, than to refute it. I do not desire to indulge needlessly in ridicule or levity when dealing with a book which so many have been taught as children to regard as something holy; but when I read in it the account of certain men, whose doings appeal forcibly to my sense of the ludicrous, I must be excused if I laugh so loud that people at a distance hear me. Some reviewers have charged me with being “flippant.” Now, I have no desire to earn such a reputation. With things calling for serious consideration, I can be as serious as any man. But it is not always necessary to be dull to be instructive. Has not Voltaire abundantly proved that an argument may be contained in a witticism? Besides, the Bible has different effects upon different minds. Some it has made misanthropical hermits; some gloomy, brooding lunatics; others fanatical persecutors; and others bloodthirsty, ferocious exterminators. I am not

sorry that it only makes me merry. It not unfrequently makes men silly, as witness the following passage from a book published a few years ago, entitled "What is Faith?" by "A. B., a Layman." Thus he expresses himself: "Moreover, the author declares positively that he perfectly understands all the mysteries of revealed religion, and can demonstrate them as he could so many mathematical propositions, and show, and make others also understand, that if God is God (who is eternal and unchangeable, and whose truth is, therefore, eternal and unchangeable), so those things must be which have been revealed to us, and which are as eternally true and self-evident as the axiom that 'a whole is greater than a part.' He declares that there is not one mystery hidden from him, and that he knows many which are not alluded to in the Scriptures, and which, if the Apostles knew, they have not mentioned." This man ought to have lived at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, when he would have found fine scope for his genius. Had he been in Babylon then, we should never have heard of Daniel—there would have been nothing left for him to do. We will at once proceed to our biography, which is made into as connected a narrative as possible, giving dates for all important events; and I assert that I have not knowingly misrepresented a single incident, or wrested a word from its legitimate meaning, so far as I could understand it. I would despise the man who attempted to snatch a triumph at the expense of truth. It would be no gratification to me to receive the approval of others unless I were satisfied in my own conscience that it had been legitimately won.

I do not stop to inquire whether Daniel was a real or a fictitious character, or whether the acts said to have been performed by him were real or metaphorical. The Bible says emphatically that Daniel did dream and interpret dreams; that he was cast into a den of lions and came out again unscathed, and the Christian world believes it, and artists paint the scene as they would any historical occurrence. And if an *infallible* book makes assertions, who shall dare to doubt them? Certainly not the believers in that book. Many so-called sound believers have tried to make sense out of the Book of Daniel, and to find a deep meaning in its obscure jargon, but nothing but confusion and humiliation have ever come of the attempts. If you agree that certain passages are metaphorical, others prophetic, you open the door to individual interpretations, and then where are you to stop? One man's version may be as good as another's, and yet all may totally differ. I shall certainly not attempt to add to the embroglio, but shall treat the book as a true history, knowing that I am sanctioned in so doing by that Protestant Church towards whose support I am compelled to contribute. When I was a child the stories of the three men in the fiery furnace, of Daniel in the lions' den, and the mysterious handwriting on the wall, were taught to me as veritable truths, and they naturally excited my youthful imagination, but I remembered little else; when I became a man, I read the Book of Daniel as a whole, and the following pages convey the impressions of my more mature years. I think if Bible believers, after they have left school, were to take the trouble to read the Scriptures through, a book at a time, and reflect upon each, we should have, if not more sceptics, at least fewer intolerant persecutors of unbelievers. I confess that the feeling of reverence for the "sacred record" is not excited in me by reading the Bible, and in this essay I have not disguised my feelings.

The first intimation we have of the existence of Daniel is in the third year

of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, 607 before Christ. Jehoiakim was then at Jerusalem, but that singular man, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, objecting to his continuing there, besieged him; and the Lord, who, throughout the Bible, is always on the side of the winner, whether he be saint or rascal, gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. And why the Lord made Nebuchadnezzar the victor we are ignorant, seeing that he did not believe in him a bit, but had a God of his own whom he vastly preferred, into whose house in the land of Shinar he carried the vessels which he stole from Jerusalem. After this exploit, he ordered Ashpenaz to bring certain of the children of Israel—children in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in all knowledge, and understanding science, whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. In these days we do not expect to find all these acquirements and accomplishments in children; but this was not at all an unreasonable requirement for so sensible a king, as will presently be seen. These wonderful children having been collected, the king appointed them a daily provision of his meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Why they were not able to stand before him when first found, seeing that they possessed every requisite in the way of knowledge, is not clear, unless it was that he required them to be not only sensible, but fat, showing a very laudable anxiety for their physical well-being, as he probably knew that generally flesh does not accompany great learning. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; but the prince of the eunuchs immediately re-christened them, and gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego. Now these last three play a by no means small part in the life of Daniel, and ultimately immortalise themselves as the three greatest salamanders on record. Daniel appears to have been a lad of spirit, possessing a will of his own, and no doubt smarting under the yoke of the new king, he determined he would not partake of the king's meat and wine, but would be a teetotaler and a vegetarian. He therefore gave notice of his resolve to the prince of the eunuchs, and requested that mighty man to allow him to change his diet. The prince, instead of enforcing obedience by the aid of the bow-string, as eunuchs usually do, argued the point with Daniel, and told him that it was more than his head was worth to disobey the injunctions of the dread Nebuchadnezzar. This condescension had been procured for Daniel by God himself, for he had early brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince. In fact, Daniel had a happy knack of making himself generally agreeable to all persons in authority over him. This faculty enabled him to take office in every succeeding administration, regardless of politics or party bias. Daniel then applied to Melzar, the prince's deputy, and said: "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days: and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants." Daniel seems to have included Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in his request, though it does not appear that they desired to be fed on such meagre fare. However, Melzar, no doubt thinking that a ten days' experiment out of three years was no great risk, granted the request, and lo! at the end of ten days, their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than

all which did eat of the king's meat. This was remarkably rapid training, and were it stated in any other book, one might hesitate to believe it; but after this who can doubt that four persons, so highly favoured even in their beans and water, were destined by heaven to work out some great moral purpose? At the expiration of the three years, all the wise children collected together were brought before the king. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like unto Daniel and his three companions; for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. He gave orders for all the magicians, and astrologers, and sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to be called before him, to show him his dream. So they came and stood before the king, and he said to them: "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." The Chaldeans said: "Tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." This, it must be admitted, was a very natural and reasonable request. Not so Nebuchadnezzar. He exclaimed, with all the fury of a Nabob: "The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts, and rewards, and great honour." They answered, as honest and simple men would, that there was not a man upon the earth that could do it, and that no other king, lord, or ruler ever made such an unreasonable demand of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean; that it was a rare thing that the king required, and that none could do it except the gods, and their dwelling was not with the flesh. The king then became angry and very furious, and sent out Arioch, the captain of the guard, to slay all the wise men of Babylon, as though that would mend the matter. It strikes one as curious that Nebuchadnezzar, who had taken three years' trouble to fatten up Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and when he examined them, found them "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm," should not have thought of sending specially for these four wise ones, to see if they could remind him of that which he had never told them. But, like his dreams, he had forgotten all about them. When Arioch went to Daniel, Daniel asked him why the king was in such hurry, and, being told, he went at once to the king, and assured him, that if he would give him time, *he* would tell him the dream and the interpretation. We must suppose the king acceded to this request, though it does not say he did. Here Daniel's wisdom stood him in good need. He was not so dull as to say that none but the gods could tell the king what he wanted to know. As Nebuchadnezzar had no recollection of what he had dreamt, nothing was easier than to tell him exactly what it was. I could have done it myself in half an hour, without any training at all on beans and water. Daniel went home and consulted his three friends, and they agreed to ask the God of heaven to assist them, as they were naturally anxious to do the thing well, that they might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. And now occurred a most curious thing—what would not

be stated in any book that was not really inspired. Daniel went to bed and dreamt the identical dream that had so bothered poor Nebuchadnezzar. "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision." If we dared to doubt, we should say that this celebrated dream of Nebuchadnezzar's was not his at all, but Daniel's. But that would be a sign of Infidelity, which it is not prudent to manifest! Daniel burst into raptures about the God of his fathers, who had given him wisdom and might, and made known to him the king's matter. He then went to Arioch, the captain of the guard, who had been commissioned to do the cruel deed, and said to him: "Destroy not the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation." Arioch took him at once, and said: "I have found a man of the captives of Judah that will make known unto the king the interpretation." Arioch here seems to introduce Daniel as a stranger whom he had just found, and the king receives him as one, though it was only the day before he had been talking to both of them; and notwithstanding that Arioch says he has found the man who *can* tell the dream, and Daniel had told the king he would do so if he would give him time, the king, when he sees him, asks: "Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?" Nebuchadnezzar's poor head seems to have been so muddled, that he could not recollect from one verse to another. Daniel answered and said: "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king?" Now, he knew very well that they had "given it up," and that in consequence they were all to be cut in pieces. But it served to enhance the importance of his own achievement, so without waiting for a reply he proceeded to inform the king that there was a God in heaven that revealed secrets, and made known to Nebuchadnezzar what should be in the latter days. He is very particular about placing the responsibility on the right shoulders, in case of any discrepancy between the promise and the performance. He also modestly asserts: "But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living." He then proceeds to tell Nebuchadnezzar that the vision which he saw was the great image, of which we have all heard so much, the head of which was of fine gold, the breast and arms of silver, the body of brass, the legs and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay; and how a stone, which was cut without hands, and which afterwards became a great mountain and filled the whole earth, struck the image on its poor feet, and smashed it into pieces "like the chaff of the summer threshing floors." This was the dream, but I confess I do not see my way through this man of metal; and the interpretation thereof only makes the mystery more profound. Whether the kingdoms of brass and iron which Daniel said should arise after Nebuchadnezzar, ever did appear, and whether these are the latter days spoken of, or whether the latter days have been, or are yet to come, we must leave to Dr. Cumming to determine. It makes no earthly difference to people at the present time; they will still go on marrying and giving in marriage the same as they have done since the days of Daniel. I am only concerned with this one point. Daniel commenced his interpretation thus: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of

gold." And a jewel Nebuchadnezzar was! Daniel's audacity is sublime. He does not do things by halves. We will not say it is untrue, because the "God of heaven" revealed it, though there is scarcely a word of truth in it. Nebuchadnezzar had not great glory, except his notable deed performed seven years before entitled him to that appellation, if we are to be guided only by this veracious Book of Daniel. In 2 Chron. xxxvi. we are told that "Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. And when the year was expired, King Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord." Why Nebuchadnezzar, an idolatrous heathen, should set himself up as a champion of the Lord, is not explained. But he never omitted to take with him the vessels of gold by way of reward. This King Jehoiachin, of *eight* years of age, had no doubt led a life of crime, and was therefore deserving of being dethroned. His offences against the Lord must have been serious indeed. Nebuchadnezzar did not hold sway wherever men dwelt; and as for ruling over the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven, why he would have been the greatest poulterer and rearer of stock in all Bible lands—and Bishop Colenso has given us some idea of the myriads of sheep alone possessed by those believers in the Lamb of God. Apologists of the Bible would say it was merely Oriental hyperbole—modern critics are beginning to call it by its proper name. Daniel concluded by saying: "The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof sure." Now Nebuchadnezzar was naturally a great ass, which Daniel must have seen; and instead of his being a ruler over the beasts of the field, he very soon turned out into the fields and ate grass like any other donkey. He never for a moment questioned Daniel as to the truth of the dream and the interpretation, but at once "fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him." "The king answered unto Daniel and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of Gods, and a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret." We might infer from this that Nebuchadnezzar was a convert to the Jewish faith, and that we had thus early to rejoice over a soul saved by the power of the Lord as manifested through his servant Daniel. Not yet. Wait till the next chapter. It must be recorded to the honour of the king, that though he forgot his dreams, he did not forget his promise to Daniel. "Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." We must also state to the credit of Daniel, that at the first stage of his prosperity he did not forget his three friends. "Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king." Now how Daniel could be "ruler over the whole province of Babylon," and yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego "were over the affairs of the province of Babylon," is a Bible mystery, which we must leave till the "latter days" to be solved. It will be remarked that Daniel receives without a murmur all the honours showered upon him for having flattered and fooled to the top of his bent an imbecile tyrant. I fail to perceive the morality of such a proceeding. It is only equalled by our Protes-

tant Bishops, who receive palaces, wealth, and distinction to preach the blessings of poverty and humility.

There is now a jump of twenty-three years in the narrative. During all this time, of course, Nebuchadnezzar had had full opportunity of testing the truth of Daniel's prophecy, and of exercising his power over the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, for which they were no doubt very grateful. But he was an obstinate man, and had not yet come to believe in the God of the Jews, though at one time he confessed that he was a God of Gods and a Lord of Kings. Nebuchadnezzar thought he could make a much better God of his own; so he made an image of gold, whose height was three score cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Dr. Arbuthnot settles the Scriptural cubit at 22 inches. This would make the image just 110 feet high, by 11 feet wide. Its value must have been immense. It would exhaust both California and Australia to produce a nugget of such dimensions. No doubt feeling proud of his great achievement, the king sent for all the notable men in his realm to come to the dedication of the image, and when they arrived, he ordered them all, at the sound of music, to fall down and worship it. There was a slight penalty attaching to disobedience of these orders. All persons who did not fall down and worship the image, that same hour were to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Apparently in anticipation that there would be some dissentients, the king had the furnaces all in readiness. Nor was he disappointed. Now, as *all* the rulers of provinces were gathered together, of course Daniel was there, and as he was not subjected to the melting process, it is but reasonable to infer that he bent to the force of circumstances, and bowed to the image; if he did not, being such a man of mark, he was exceedingly fortunate in escaping detection. His three ancient companions were not so lucky. Certain Chaldeans denounced Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to the king, saying: "These men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." This certainly was an unusual thing for Jews to refuse to do; but they have made amends for it, by never ceasing to worship gold from that day to this. But the three friends kept firmly to their resolve, and the king became furious, and told them that if they would then fall down and worship the image, it would be well; but if not, they should at once go into the furnace, and asked: "And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" They answered, that their God would deliver them out of the furnace, and out of the king's hands too; but even if he did not, they would not serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods, nor worship his image. That was bravely spoken, and shows that even in those days there was a deadly contest being waged as to who worshipped the true God. We are no nearer the solution of the problem now. This audacity was not to be borne; so the king ordered that the furnace should be heated seven times hotter than usual, and the most mighty men in the army bound the three, with all their clothes on, from their hats to their boots, and hurled them into the fire. But the king was in such a hurry to have the thing done, and the fire was so large, that the men who threw Shadrach and his companions into the furnace were burnt to death.

But behold a miracle! The three men for whom this very warm reception had been prepared did not feel it at all. They fell bound to the bottom; but instead of melting away, they dissolved into four.

The king jumped up astonished, and inquired of his counsellors whether there were not *three* cast into the fire? They replied, "True, O king." He answered, "Lo I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Now, how did he know it was like the Son of God? At this period, we are told upon good authority, the dogma of the "Son of God" had not even been propounded to the Jews. Then what knowledge had he of him? He did not believe in him, and was not under his special direction and protection, like Daniel. He here speaks of the Son of God as though he had known him all his life. Without being irreverent, it may be asserted that no one at the present day would know him at the first glance. Why, there are thousands who have preached and talked about him in the most grossly familiar way for years, who would not know him if they saw him. Then Nebuchadnezzar went to the mouth of the furnace and said, "Ye servants of the Most High God come forth and come hither." He all at once talks like a Christian. We have surely made a convert of him *now*. Not yet. Shadrach and his friends, nothing loth, immediately walked out of the hot-bed, and, strange to relate, they were not burnt a bit, nor their clothes even singed. This fact stands unique in history. It could only occur in the Bible. I once saw a man styling himself Buono Core walk through a large fire, but he was enveloped in a carefully-prepared dress, whilst Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were only clothed in the spirit of the Lord. Then Nebuchadnezzar became loud in his praises of the God of Shadrach, who had sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and made a decree couched in his usual mild terms, that all who dared to speak anything amiss of this God should be cut in pieces, and their houses destroyed; and ended by promoting the three men he had just before been trying to roast into obedience. The Son of God disappeared as suddenly as he came, and no notice is taken of his evaporation. But where was Daniel all this time? Did he boldly step forward and stand by his friends in their hour of danger? He, the servant of the most High, who was specially retained for the defence of the faith against the machinations of wicked kings, did he openly avow his belief in the God for whom his friends and countrymen were risking their lives? No. We hear nothing of him during this terrible ordeal. We are told "the spirit of the holy gods" was in him, which spirit no doubt suggested to him the propriety of taking care of himself.

Ten years now elapse, and during that time Nebuchadnezzar was again at his old trick of dreaming. But the prophecy and the fulfilment thereof were not so pleasant as formerly. At last the king is made to confess the power and wonders of the most high God. This time he really remembered his own dream, but he went through precisely the same ceremony of calling together the wise men and astrologers, who, as before, could not interpret it; and, as before, Daniel comes in at the last moment, and, after an hour's cogitation, tells the interpretation. The dream was about a tall tree, that reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth, under which and on which everything was fed. Now, this tall piece of timber had to be met by Daniel with what the Yankees call "tall talk." He said: "This tree is thou, O King, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth." This was not true, but we must not dwell upon that, for as in Daniel was the spirit of the holy gods, he was privileged to say what



he liked. Daniel then indulged in a prophecy, which was not a grateful return to his old master for all the honours he had heaped upon him. It was this, that Nebuchadnezzar should be sent into the country for the benefit of his spiritual health; and in order that the change should be radical and complete, he was to be driven from men, and was to dwell with the beasts of the field, and made to eat grass like oxen. And seven times were to pass over him till he knew that the most High ruled in the kingdom of men. It may be here remarked that *seven* was a favourite number with Bible heroes. I am not aware how long "seven times" means—whether days, weeks, months, or years—but it does not signify, as it was long enough for the king to get into a very dilapidated state. The king murmured at this decree, but there was no help for it, as "there fell a voice from heaven saying" it should be so, and "the same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." "And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me." All this was done to make Nebuchadnezzar believe in Daniel's God. It was a cruel way to serve a heretic, but we must confess his was a stubborn case. All previous efforts had failed, so at last they made a madman and a beast of him, and then he did "bless the most High" and praised and extolled the King of Heaven. We have seen some in later times converted with far less persuasion than this—by the hope of a pecuniary reward, the flattery of aristocratic friends, or the prospect of a Dissenting pulpit; and who show their zeal for their new faith by suddenly turning round and abusing the friends with whom they had been on the most intimate terms only a few days before.

We have now done with Nebuchadnezzar, and come to his hopeful son Belshazzar, whose reign in the Book of Daniel is short indeed. His whole history there is told in one chapter. Notwithstanding the terrible example made of his father, Belshazzar was not influenced by it. He was an idolator. In the year 538 before Christ he gave what is known as the impious feast. This is thirty-two years after the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar. The greatest offence appears to have been the use of the golden vessels which had been stolen from the temple of the house of God. There were more than a thousand persons at this feast, and when the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank out of these sacred vessels, and praised the gods of gold and silver, there came about that early instance of spirit-rapping, or spiritual manifestation, which has not been surpassed by anything done by Mr. Home. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace." Belshazzar was astonished, as well he might be. He then, like his father before him, sent for the astrologers and soothsayers, and told them that if they would interpret what was written on the wall, whoever did it should be clothed in scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and should be the third ruler in the kingdom. But even this tempting offer could not make any one unravel the mystery, for, like most modern spiritual writing, it was totally unintelligible. Apparently, the queen was not present at this banquet; but when she heard of what had happened, she went into the banquet room, and told the king not to be alarmed, as there was a man in his kingdom, one Daniel, who was very clever in interpreting of dreams,

and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, who could show the interpretation. It appears strange that Daniel, who was such a wonderful man during the reign of the father, and chief ruler over the affairs of the kingdom, should not have been at once sent for by the son. But that would have deprived this affair of precisely that characteristic which distinguished all the others. They are so much alike, that they *might* have been all concocted by the same writer; but that of course could not be. Well, after all the wise men had failed to decipher the mysterious calligraphy, Daniel was sent for again, and as a matter of course he succeeded. Daniel gently reminded Belshazzar what a great man his father Nebuchadnezzar had been, and how he had been served when sent into the fields to "ruminate," and told him that he was just as bad as his father. He concluded by saying that the words written on the wall were: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin." "*Mene*: God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. *Tekel*: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. *Peres*. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." This was not a pleasant prophecy, certainly, and a prophet making such an one could scarcely expect many thanks for his pains; but, notwithstanding that, the royal promise given was fulfilled, and Daniel was clothed with scarlet, and a chain of gold was placed upon his neck, and a proclamation was made declaring him third ruler in the kingdom. At first Daniel said, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another. He must have been slightly excited at the time, or he would not have told the king to keep his gifts himself, and yet give them to others; neither did he mean that he would not accept any reward, for immediately after he received all the king had got to give him. And Daniel's prophecy was quickly fulfilled, for "in that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain."

Darius the Median succeeded to the kingdom, and Daniel immediately took office under him as though nothing had happened. He was appointed the first of three presidents over the affairs of Babylon, which excited the jealousy of his two subordinates, so they agreed to get up a conspiracy against him. They consulted all the officers of state, and they resolved to strike at Daniel through his religion. They knew that Daniel was in the habit of praying to his God, so they induced Darius to sign a royal decree, that whoever should ask any petition of God or man for thirty days, save the king, he should be cast into the den of lions. Daniel here was courageous and defiant, for when he learnt that the decree was signed, he went to his house, and, with the windows open, prayed three times a day to his God. Of course he was found out, and when the king was told of it, he was anxious to save Daniel, for he was a favourite of his. The king no doubt owed something to him in the affair of Belshazzar's sudden assassination after the appearance of the writing on the wall, and which so opportunely made the throne vacant. But Darius, being reminded that he could not revoke his decree, as the laws of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable, was reluctantly compelled to order Daniel into the lions' den. Though an idolator, Darius had faith that Daniel's God would deliver him, and he told Daniel so. Very early next morning Darius went to the mouth of the lions' den, and called aloud to Daniel, who immediately answered, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." Then the king was glad, and ordered Daniel to be taken up out of the den, "and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God." This is an instance

of lion-taming worthy of Crockett or Van Hamburg, but still no great feat after all. This event is made great use of by the orthodox to frighten children with in Sunday Schools, and to show the protection from danger to be derived from faith in God. Now I can interpret the whole affair with as much accuracy as ever Daniel did the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar. It was night before Daniel was cast into the lions' den. The animals had all had their supper, and were not to be tempted to gluttony by having a tough old man thrown to them, who was at least eighty years of age. We are apt to say that men when they eat too much make beasts of themselves, but we libel the lower animals. It is well known that no one can induce an animal to eat or drink when it has had enough. The text says that the king was not able to sleep, so he rose "very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions." This of course was before they wanted breakfast, consequently Daniel was not called upon to supply with his own person the morning's repast. Daniel himself does not say that he was ever attacked. He says that his God sent his angel, who shut the lions' mouths, but he must have fallen asleep and dreamt this. Had Daniel remained in the den a few hours longer, there might have been a very different sequel to the story, for the king, determining to be revenged upon those who had compelled him to endanger his favourite, commanded those men who had accused Daniel to be brought, "and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their *children*, and their *wives*; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den." This is another instance of Bible morality, where women and children suffer for the evil deeds of men. The Book of Esther supplies striking examples of the same heavenly "justice." So Darius at one sweep got rid of two obnoxious subordinates, and the lions had a good breakfast, made up of innocent women and children, whom the God of Daniel in his justice and mercy had supplied unto them. Now this is the mystery of the lions' den, and *my* interpretation thereof!

We now suddenly come upon Daniel's own dream. The date of it is placed at seventeen years before the great lion feat; but why it was not introduced earlier I cannot imagine, unless it is to show that the dream was a prophecy; and to prove that it was a true one, it is given after the events have transpired! Who would have suspected that all that time Daniel was quietly dreaming on his own account? He knew well how the thing was done, therefore there was no reason why he should not set up in that line himself. But he was much cleverer than poor grass-eating Nebuchadnezzar: he not only dreamt dreams, but supplied his own interpretation. I confess at once that I am not able to comprehend either the one or the other. There may be something in them, but there is such holy mystery about them that I am afraid to attempt to unravel it. The first is about four beasts rising out of the sea, the second of which was "like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh." I think that is quite enough. When three ribs in a bear's mouth begin to talk, we had better get away from them as quickly as possible, for, however much we may ponder it over, we shall make nothing of it. After this display of oracular power, it is not surprising that the signs and wonders of this book have proved such "bones of contention" for centuries in the Christian world!

Daniel's second vision occurred two years after the first. It was

about a big ram with long horns, that was tugging everything that came near it, till a great he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground. This curious bird of passage had a long horn between his eyes, with which he soon upset the ram. When this horn got broken in the fray, four sprang up in its place, one of which was very long; "and it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them." I hasten to give this up also, lest the same fate overtake me as that which befel Daniel, for he says: "And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." I can well understand *that*. But Daniel, being full of the spirit of the holy gods, received heavenly help in the interpretation of his dreams, and should therefore have made them intelligible, if anything heavenly can be said to be intelligible. He says: "And it came to pass when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face towards the ground: but he touched me and set me upright." This may account for Daniel's dreams being so dull, for he no sooner saw Gabriel, who was to tell him all about them, than he fell on his face and went fast asleep; and I fear if I were to attempt to relate these dreams all through, that I should produce precisely the same effect upon the reader.

Daniel, like dreamers in general, was not an energetic man. He took ample time to consider and ponder over what he was about to do. Fifteen years after the goatish vision, and seventeen after the beastly dream, he fell to praying "unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sack-cloth, and ashes," for the restoration of Jerusalem; and after exhausting all his persuasive eloquence, he makes use of this curious argument, which, when applied to an omnipotent Deity, must have great force. He says: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, *for thine own sake*, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name." This seems to have had the desired effect, for the unchangeable Deity saw at once that it was to his interest to grant Daniel's request, and sent as his messenger the identical Gabriel who had appeared between the banks of Ulai fifteen years before, to say that the supplications were answered, as Daniel was greatly beloved. He also said: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." The Jews had a roundabout way of stating things where numbers were involved. Why could not Gabriel, or Daniel who relates the conversation, have said that the time would have been sixty-nine weeks to the rebuilding of the city, instead of "seven weeks, and three score and two weeks?" Bishop Colenso has called public attention to the woeful state of early Jewish arithmetic in a previous part of the Bible, and I would respectfully direct his notice to Daniel, as a fine field for the exercise of his critical powers. Captious persons may raise many issues on this angelic promise—and that Gabriel was an angel there can be no doubt,

though Daniel speaks of him as "the man Gabriel;" but that must be a mistake, as he says: "Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." Men don't fly—only angels. Well, take this promise as we may, whether the time was seven weeks, or sixty-two weeks, or sixty-nine weeks, it would have been impossible to rebuild a city like Jerusalem in so short a time. I know I may be met with the argument, that the sixty-nine weeks here spoken of do not mean our weeks of seven days each, but periods of time. I answer, that if our week is not meant, neither is it meant that Daniel saw the angel Gabriel at all, and the promise was not made, and the whole thing is a myth—for one statement rests on precisely the same authority as the other. There is just as much truth in Gabriel's promise, as there is in the stories of the fiery furnace, the lions' den, and the handwriting on the wall—and no more.

Four years later than the praying feat, Daniel saw a vision. It was not a dream this time, though it is very much like one. Daniel was mourning three whole weeks, during which time he took neither meat nor wine, till he brought himself into a very weakly state, and there is nothing like hunger to make one light-headed. On the twenty-fourth day he was by the great river Hiddekel, when he saw "a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: his body was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude." This figure bears a strong family likeness to the one seen many years after by St. John the Divine, who has enshrined him in the Revelation. One might be taken to be the father of the other—perhaps they are one and the same, only slightly varied in costume in consequence of the lapse of time. Daniel says: "And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves." These men were clearly frightened at *nothing*. But Daniel was not much better, for either from fear or fasting he could not keep his footing; but "Yet heard I the voice of his words," he says, "and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground." It must have been a dream after all, and not a vision; for how could he have *seen* even such a shining spirit as the one he describes if he had been fast asleep on his face? But it does not signify, as the vision uttered nothing beyond a few common-place compliments to Daniel himself. Why this vision is introduced I cannot make out, as it does not seem to prove anything, beyond the fact that an empty stomach makes a man exceedingly weak, both in the head and the legs.

Afterwards there appeared unto Daniel one like a man, who touched him, and that strengthened him. This figure enters on a long story about the overthrow of Persia by the King of Grecia; the leagues and conflicts between the kings of the south and of the north; and the invasion and tyranny of the Romans. All this may have been excessively interesting to Daniel at that time; but it is hardly of moment to us, as these wars will cause no fluctuations in our money market, or add one penny to the income tax—and that is about all the participation the peoples of any country are allowed in the wars of kings; and the so-called wars of the Lord are no exception to that rule. The

peoples always pay and always suffer, and the kings and privileged classes reap the glory and the rewards.

And, as a conclusion, Daniel is told that Michael, the great prince who standeth for the children of his people, shall appear at a given time to deliver Israel from their troubles. This aroused Daniel's curiosity, and he thought at last he was going to get some definite information. He says: "Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And the one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" The answer is remarkable for its lucidity. The figure clothed in linen, with the lightning face and brass feet, who was floating on the water, after lifting up his hands to heaven, and swearing by him that liveth for ever, replied, "That it shall be for a time, times, and a half." That would be conclusive enough if anybody understood it. Even Daniel, in whom was the spirit of the holy gods, could not comprehend the jargon, and told the figure so. He says: "And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, *what shall be* the end of these things?" The man in linen was evidently annoyed, and retorted rather tartly: "Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

And thus, with this gloriously definite and cheering promise, endeth the Book of Daniel.

I must leave the reader to draw his own moral from this biography. We are here spared the sickening details of concubinage and immorality which accompany so many of the narratives of the Old Testament, and in that the Book of Daniel is not unpleasant reading. The writer has attempted to show the evils of idolatry and the power of faith, but it is done with a disregard of truth or probability. Who with any common sense will believe that Daniel dreamt the same dream as Nebuchadnezzar? Can we believe that the image in the plain of Dura, if it were really gold, was as high as represented? What scientific man in these days would dare to assert that three men could possibly be cast into a furnace heated to intensity without being consumed? It is not probable that a man like Nebuchadnezzar, who had indulged in every luxury, could live for a long time on grass alone, exposed to all the changes of the weather. The handwriting on the wall can hardly gain credence even in these spirit-rapping days, for the candles were alight when the fingers came forth, and the king saw them; and we are not able to obtain such results except in dark rooms, and no one knows how it is done! The story of the lions' den, when all the circumstances are considered, is simply improbable—it might have occurred, only it is not very likely. Daniel's dreams or visions are great failures to us moderns. There is such a hopeless confusion and involvement about them, that any one who should succeed in interpreting them, would deserve more rewards than were ever heaped upon Daniel by Nebuchadnezzar and his successors.

But no critic or commentator, whether layman or divine, has ever yet given an approximate guess at the truth, and never can. To learn how profitless is the attempt, the reader has only to turn to the elaborate writings of Biblical commentators for centuries past. What the author of the Book of Daniel *might* have meant, as I before remarked, cannot possibly matter to us in these days. The writer of the Book.

whoever he was, was but a man, and could not have intended more than a figurative expression of opinion. But notwithstanding so obvious a truth as this, "Of all the prophetic writings," says Rathbone Greg, "the Book of Daniel has been the subject of the fiercest contest. Divines have considered it of paramount importance, both on account of the definiteness and precision of its predictions, and the supposed reference of many of them to Christ. Critics, on the other hand, have considered the genuineness of the Book to be peculiarly questionable; and few now, of any note or name, venture to defend it. In all probability we have no remains of the real prophecies of the actual Daniel—for that such a person, famed for his wisdom and virtue, did exist, appears from Ezek. xiv. and xxxviii. He must have lived about 570 years before Christ, whereas the Book which bears his name was almost certainly written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, 170 years B.C. Some English commentators and divines have endeavoured to escape from the obvious and manifold difficulties of the book, by conceiving part of it to be genuine and part spurious. But De Wette has shown that we have no reason for believing it not to be the work of one hand. It is full of historical inaccuracies and fanciful legends; and the opening statement is an obvious error, showing that the writer was imperfectly acquainted with the chronology or details of the period in which he takes his stand. The first chapter begins by informing us that in the *third* year of King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, besieged and took Jerusalem, and carried the king (and Daniel) away captive. Whereas, we learn from Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar was not King of Babylon till the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, and did not take Jerusalem till *seven* years later. It would be out of place to adduce all the marks which betray the late origin of this book;—they may be seen at length in De Wette. It is here sufficient that we have *no proof whatever of its early date*, and that the most eminent critics have abandoned the opinion of its genuineness as indefensible. We have ample proof that the Jewish writers not only did not scruple to narrate past events as if predicting future ones—to present History in the form of Prophecy—but that they habitually did so."

Dr. Arnold (see Life and Correspondence ii. 188) says: "I have long thought that the greater part of the Book of Daniel is most certainly a very late work, of the time of the Maccabees; and the pretended prophecy about the Kings of Greece and Persia, and of the North and South, is mere history, like the poetical prophecies in Virgil and elsewhere. In fact, you can trace distinctly the date when it was written, because the events up to that date are given with historical minuteness, totally unlike the character of real prophecy; and beyond that date all is imaginary."

It is very melancholy to think that a document so utterly worthless, should be included in a collection of so-called *sacred* writings. Its chronology is inaccurate, its morality is defective, its imagery is poor, and at times grotesque. Unless the results of modern criticism are carefully kept from the theological students in our Universities, it is impossible to imagine that gentlemen of average intelligence can be trained to enter deliberately on a mission to preach as the "Word of God" such outrages upon common sense as are to be found in that collection of Jewish romances called the Bible. They are *proved* to be not history, to contain absurd statements, and to inculcate impracticable and immoral doctrines; then what can they be but crude romances written for the amusement of an unlettered people? But this is another field of

speculation upon which I am not now prepared to enter; but those who are acquainted with the Apocryphal Gospels still extant, will admit that there is some force in the conjecture.

Some writers who were themselves convinced of the worthlessness of the Scriptures, have described Bible criticism as being unprofitable and useless. To such people I admit it is a waste of time—they are perfectly at ease. Their minds are not tortured by doubts, misgivings, and apprehensions arising from the dreadful and bewildering nature of Bible teaching. But there are thousands of young men and women, fresh from the Sunday School, who are not so fortunate; and till priests and teachers cease to warp and cramp the infantile mind with the dogmas of inspiration and infallibility, the Freethinker must never cease in his endeavours to thwart and prevent them by showing how chaotic, how utterly untrustworthy, is the book upon which they rely. If the Bible were allowed to rest simply upon its own merits, there would be no need to trouble about it, as it contains within itself its own refutation as a veracious history, as a reliable moral teacher, as a guide in the affairs of life. There are hundreds of books vastly superior to it in all these respects. But when the Bible is put forward with the enormous pretension to infallibility in every chapter, verse, line, and word, it becomes a demoralising book, which every earnest man and woman freed from its dangerous influence should strive unceasingly to destroy. If there were not thousands of men paid millions a year to preach the doctrine that the Bible is an inspired book; if armies of missionaries were not sent all over the world to force this book upon the unwilling natives of foreign lands, supported for the most part by the pence wrung from poor Sunday School children; if there were not chapels, churches, cathedrals, and temples built and dedicated to its use, and all the influence and power of the State used to uphold the delusion—we might go on with the more genial work of instructing one another in science and all useful knowledge. If it were not for the fictitious halo which is thus thrown around a mere book, and a very imperfect one too, mankind would soon awaken from the dream which has so long deadened their understandings, and see in the Bible a mass of contradictions, absurdities, immoralities, and false teaching, which passed current among a small and barbarous people in a barbarous time, but which is totally unfit for the age in which we live. It is demoralising and deluding to preach the infallibility of a book which contains such doctrines as those laid down in the Pentateuch; which represents the bloody and devastating wars of the Jews as sanctioned by a God of justice and mercy; which holds up such men as Moses, David, Jacob, and Solomon as servants of the most High; which gives the keys of heaven to a false friend like Peter; which sanctions human slavery; which rebukes not acts of the grossest cruelty, treachery, and deceit; and which is misleading both in physical and natural history.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

---

London: Printed and Published by AUSTIN & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.