

"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee
up out of the land of Egypt."

- Exodus xxxii,4

Exodus xxxii,1-14

Luke xii,13-36

Psalm 52

New Book of Worship, Psalm 57, p.59

While Moses was in the mount receiving the commandments from the Lord, the people took their golden earrings and made of them a molten calf, and they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

This is a story of folly that sounds little less than insanity. The Lord, through Moses, by mighty miracles had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and brought them to Sinai. Yet because Moses was some time in the mountain the people turned against him. They could not have been more foolish.

Yet many today repeat this insanity in another form. Moses stands for the Divine Law which came through him. There is the Divine Law. It is given in the Word. Yet there are many who are too ready to put it out of mind. "As for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." It is because minds and hearts are absorbed in things of self and the world and closed against heaven. When men are absorbed in things of the body and self, and in getting on in the world, closing the interior planes of the soul which otherwise would be opened to heaven, they turn from heaven and the Lord to the world and to themselves, loving self with all the heart and life. This is what is represented by the absence of Moses and by their contemptuous cry, "As for this Moses... we wot not what is become of him."

When men close their minds against the Divine and eternal law, they make laws of their own. When they will not have the Lord, they make their own golden calf. Then there must be nothing in life that is not pleasing to the self-love of man, enabling those who will to have the power and the gain, putting aside all irksome laws of truth and justice. Let us recognize only what the self-love of man delights to hear: "prophecy unto us smooth things." Let his own earrings be the things he will love and serve with all his heart. These are golden only in a showy way, not with the real good of love, but with external, natural, sensual loves, the things the man of the world likes to hear. If he can twist the Scriptures to his own favor, so much the better, and if he cannot, he will reject them. The earrings here signify the delights of self-love, and from these flattering and pleasing things he forms his own laws of life, as Aaron graven the calf. Let man be his own god, let him raise himself to what he himself desires. Why be concerned about any future world or any other god?

The calf is an emblem of natural love. It may be a good natural, as when the Israelites were told to offer to the Lord calves of a year old. But in this case of deliberate turning from Divine things it means an evil natural - the love of sensuous delights and pleasures. This is the state of those who are in externals without an internal, and this is what they worship; for what a man loves above all things that he worships. The making of the golden calf represents turning materialism and sensualism into a religion. Instead of the Divine law and order, the man sets up his own system of falsities, which are pleasing to his own ears. Thus his own ideals and purposes become his religion, which he serves and worships with all his power.

This is what is causing distress in our world in these times - men setting up systems of self-interest without taking the Lord into account. It found an expression in a materialistic interpretation of history. This appeals to the natural man, who sees no wants other than material ones and thinks that when there is an equitable distribution of goods, all his problems will be solved. But in such a system there is no Divine truth to guide and restrain man. He can seize what he likes if only he has the power, for self-love is never fully satisfied. This is the result of worship of the golden calf. In it the Divine has no place. "As for this Moses... we wot not what is become of him." As for this idea of Divine truth and power and eternal unchangeable law flowing into the heart and mind, it is all delusion.

Such a man acknowledges nothing internal, declaring that only such things as he sees with his eyes or touches with his hands exist. So he is impatient when he hears anything about the Lord, about heaven, about a life after death. He knows nothing, nor does he want to know anything about the Divine truth of the Word that raises a man from natural to spiritual, that leads him from Egypt to Canaan. So Moses is rejected with the words, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

These words about bringing or leading up from Egypt have a very different meaning when used concerning the golden calf from that which they have when used concerning the Lord. In fact they denote the two opposites: one implies being led by self, the other being led by the Lord. When used with recognition of the Lord's guidance they tell of being raised up by Him from the natural to the spiritual, or from the world to heaven, consequently from bondage to liberty. When used in the opposite sense, with man's own goals in mind, they signify the delight of being led by self, which is not to be raised up to heaven but to be cast down from liberty into servitude. For spiritual slavery consists in being led by

self, and spiritual liberty in being led by the Lord.

"These be thy gods, O Israel." That is as though men said, "This is the life for us. This is the thing to live for. Get all that you can for yourself in this world. All else is mere nonsense." This is spiritual insanity.

We may wonder why, after their wonderful deliverance, Israel turned to the worship of the golden calf. Yet the reason is the same as the reason why people today think that their essential good and happiness depend upon worldly wealth and power instead of upon a life of righteousness, duty, and use under the leading of the Lord. Actually wealth and power are a curse to those who love themselves and the world more than anything else, for the more they become exalted in honor the more the love of self grows until it takes possession of all their thoughts and acts, and the things of the world become to them the only means to happiness. "Yet," the writings tell us, "all these things end with the end of life in this world, whereas the good, the satisfaction and happiness given and provided for man by the Lord are eternal. Consequently these are the true blessings. What is temporary can bear no comparison with the eternal. What endures to eternity is, and what comes to an end is not. That which is the Divine provides, but not that which is not except so far as it conduces to that which is, for the Lord who is the Divine Itself is, and that which is from Him also is. It is therefore evident what is the quality of what man provides for himself."

This may sound somewhat abstract and difficult, but it makes clear what men are doing when they make their own philosophies of life without taking the Lord into account, rejecting religion, revelation, and the Word. They are substituting that which respectively is not for that which is, the earthly vanishing delights of the world for the heavenly and eternal joys of righteousness and truth - the golden calf for the Lord.

All of us are on the journey from Egypt to Canaan, by which is pictured the way from earth to heaven. On this journey are we following the lead of the Lord or that of self? Are we being raised up from the low level of the earth-born man to the high level of the regenerated man, from worldly love to love to the Lord and the neighbor, from slavery to self to freedom in the Lord?

This is the question put to us in the act of Moses when he came down from the mount and found the people worshiping the golden calf. In wrath he cast down the tables of stone on which the commandments were written by the finger of God, and standing at the gate of the camp cried out: "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me."

Amen