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A painting of a bearded man in a white robe standing on a stone wall, looking out over a landscape. The man has a long, grey beard and is wearing a white head covering. He is looking towards the right of the frame. The background shows a hazy, golden landscape with a body of water and distant hills. The lighting is warm and dramatic, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

THE WISDOM OF ISRAEL

Edwin Collins

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“Let the waters be gathered together.”

Rabbi Abba bar Cahanah said, in the name of Rabbi Levi:

“Let the waters hope in Me and wait for Me,” said the Holy One, blessed be He, “let them wait in hope for what I am about to do with them.”

For the Spirit of God had brooded over the silent waters, and the voiceless deeps had sung His praise, and done His will in awe. All voiceless Nature had adored Him. The waters had not transgressed the limit placed for them, and the mighty deep, vast and wide, had humbled itself before Him.

This may be likened in a parable to a king who built a palace and put dumb people to dwell in it. And they used to rise early in the morning to greet the king, and to ask, by means of signs and dumb show, after his well-being, uncovering their heads and bowing down to do him honour.

And the king. said: “If this palace were inhabited by rational beings endowed with speech and full intelligence, how much more would they honour me with their works and with their praise.” And he made to dwell in the palace intelligent and speaking people.

But instead of praising him and serving him, they rose up and seized upon the palace of the king, and said: “This palace belongs to no one but to us.”

In that hour the king said: “Let the palace be as it was at first, a home for only the dumb to dwell in.”

Thus from the beginning of His creation of the world the only praise that went up to God was from the waters. . . . Then said the Holy One, blessed be He: “If these that have no mouth and no tongue, no speech and no words to set in logical order, can thus praise and honour Me, how much more will be My praise when I have created mankind?”

And when He had created the sons of man, there arose the generations of Enosh and of the time of the flood, and rebelled against Him. In that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Let the world return to what it was at first,” as it is written (Gen. vii.), “and let the heavy rain be upon the earth.”¹

Bereshith Rabbah, Chap. V.

THE END

¹ Compare also Mid. Aycha Rabathi, Chap. “Zion spreadeth, etc.,” where the same parable is used, but the hope held out to the waters is that one day they shall be raised by the Creator to the honour of being His tears to express eternal grief for the fall of His people into sin and punishment. For, says the midrash, the words, “Oh that my head were water,” etc. (Jeremiah ix.), are the words of God and not of the prophet. Of course none of these interpretations were meant as *peshat*

